

# Illustrated guide to grey partridge

**Grey partridges are birds of lowland arable and mixed farmland that were once very common and widespread. They have undergone serious declines throughout most of their range and are now a species of high conservation concern.**

## Identification

Grey partridge are medium-sized, plump gamebirds with a brown back, grey flanks and chest and a distinctive orange face. Males and females have a similar appearance.

Grey partridge should not be confused with red-legged partridge. Red-legged partridges were introduced from continental Europe where they are mainly found in France and Spain.



Red-legged partridge



Grey Partridge

## Grey partridge requirements

To survive and thrive grey partridge need suitable food throughout the year.

In the winter this is mostly in the form of grain and weed seeds. In the summer insects are a crucial food source for chicks, particularly in the first few weeks after hatching. Peak hatching occurs between mid May and mid July.

The other crucial requirement that grey partridge need is safe nesting sites, such as rough, grassy banks and field margins.

### Ideal landscape for grey partridge



Ideal open landscape for grey partridge with opportunities for feeding and nesting

If you can provide the following on your farm grey partridge should be able to find the food and shelter they need:

- Open landscapes;
- Blocks of wild bird seed mixtures;
- In-field food sources such as weedy overwinter stubbles;
- Beetle banks; and
- Suitable field margins.

#### Open landscapes

Grey partridge are birds of open landscapes. Tall trees and hedges provide vantage points for the birds that prey on them. Where the landscape is open you should maintain this and avoid planting new trees or woodlands.

Existing hedges should be kept below 2 m high. The hedges in this illustration are almost too tall and are ready to be trimmed.

#### Blocks of wild bird seed mixtures

Blocks of wild bird seed mixtures provide food, particularly during the critical late winter period, and also shelter from predators. The best wild bird seed mixtures for grey partridge include cereals, millet and quinoa. You should also incorporate a biennial species such as kale or chicory so that the mixture lasts for two years.

Wild bird seed mixtures should be well distributed across the farm. Half the mixtures on the farm should be renewed each year and half left. The half that is left will ensure continuity of seed supply and provide hiding cover in the spring. Under Entry Level Stewardship blocks or strips of wild bird seed mixture should be at least 6 m wide and between 0.4 ha and 2ha in size with no more than 3 ha in total per 100 ha of land.

#### In-field food sources

Weedy cereal stubbles after harvest provide food in autumn and winter. Winter sown oilseed rape can also provide cover and food through the winter months. Cereal crops with non-competitive weed species provide seed and insect food throughout the year. Cultural methods of weed and insect control, such as rotation and variety selection can minimise the need for pesticides.

#### Beetle banks

Beetle banks are tussocky grass banks that run through the middle of fields. They may be used for nesting and are particularly valuable when located next to a bird seed mixture on one side and an unharvested cereal headland on the other.

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### Ideal field margins



Ideal for grey partridge tussocky grass, beside a short sward and an unfertilised cereal headland

Open, tussocky margins on the sunny side of hedges make ideal nesting sites. Sheltered, south facing sites that are sparsely vegetated allow chicks to dry out quickly after rain and the more quickly they dry out, the more likely they are to survive.

Unfertilised cereal headlands and headlands managed organically make good brood-rearing areas and provide insects for chicks. These headlands are best sited next to nesting areas and away from woodland.

### A landscape with few opportunities for grey partridge



Open landscape with few nesting or feeding opportunities for grey partridge

This picture illustrates farmland with few opportunities for grey partridge to feed, shelter or nest safely. If you are not able to actively create opportunities for grey partridge you can still help them by avoiding mowing margins and mechanical crop weeding during the nesting season (generally mid April to mid June) and by leaving any feeding and nesting areas undisturbed between April and early September,

when the birds are nesting and rearing their chicks.

Also try to avoid using broad-spectrum herbicides and insecticides on crops that are below spray thresholds and avoid block cropping large areas of land with a single crop.

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### Further information

Natural England Technical Information Notes are available to download from the Natural England website at [www.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk).

For enquiries please contact the Natural England Helpline on 0845 600 3078 or email [enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk).

### The Grey Partridge Count Scheme

This is a programme run by the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust. It provides feedback on grey partridge conservation to land managers within the scheme who conserve and count partridges.

Further details can be found at: [www.gwct.org.uk/research\\_\\_surveys/wildlife\\_surveys/partridge\\_count\\_scheme/default.asp](http://www.gwct.org.uk/research__surveys/wildlife_surveys/partridge_count_scheme/default.asp).

### Environmental Stewardship Agreements

This guidance has been developed specifically to support Environmental Stewardship agreements. It does not replace your Agreement

and you must continue to follow the prescriptions and specifications.

The outcomes shown may not be appropriate or suitable for all sites. Please consult scheme handbooks or your Natural England adviser for further information.

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