



## Interreg North Sea project PARTRIDGE

*New flower mixes have been developed for partridges and other farmland wildlife. © Rollin Verlinde*

### BACKGROUND

Since November 2016, the GWCT has been the lead partner of a pioneering cross-border North Sea Region Interreg programme project called PARTRIDGE that runs until 2020. Together with 10 other partner organisations from the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Scotland and England the project is showcasing how farmland wildlife can be restored by up to 30% at ten 500-hectare demonstration sites (two in each country). In the UK, the four PARTRIDGE demonstration sites (Rotherfield Park and the Allerton Project in England, and Whitburgh and Balgonie in Scotland) are all managed by GWCT staff together with their local partners.

PARTRIDGE is a cross-border Interreg project that demonstrates how to reverse the ongoing European-wide decline of farmland wildlife by using science-based management plans based on a bottom-up approach. The project is led by the GWCT in partnership with 10 partner organisations. These work with more than 100 farmers and hunters and several hundred volunteers in Farmer Clusters, supported by Government agencies, farming unions or collectives and conservation NGOs.

The project's locally adapted management plans are tailored to the grey partridge, an ideal farmland wildlife indicator. Where partridges thrive, farmland biodiversity is generally in a good state. Partridges are resident birds and, as such, need suitable habitat all year round to survive and breed successfully. Based on research and practical experience, the PARTRIDGE project focuses its habitat improvements at all its demonstration sites on wild bird seed mixes. From all the habitat options currently available in Agri-environment Schemes (AES), wild bird seed mixes have one of the highest potentials to achieve maximum benefits for partridges and other farmland wildlife, as they provide suitable habitat all year round when managed in a sympathetic way. PARTRIDGE has therefore developed new flower mixes, suited to each project country, planted ideally in plots of up to one hectare (ha) in size and managed in a rotation. This means that a maximum of half of each plot or strip is renewed each year. This provides suitable nesting cover and protection from raptors during the winter months in the year-old half, and foraging cover and insect food for broods in the



*Farm walks at all 10 demonstration sites allow PARTRIDGE to showcase best management practice to recover farmland biodiversity at first hand. © Kevin Milner*



newly-sown half of each plot every year. In England and Scotland, new PARTRIDGE seed mixes have been developed by Oakbank and Kings Crops. These are already sold widely on the UK and international markets.

Other wildlife habitats that PARTRIDGE promotes across its 10 demonstration sites are beetle banks, arable margins, floristically-enhanced margins, winter stubbles and extended overwinter stubbles. The latter are stubbles that are taken out of production for one season. At Rotherfield, thanks to a derogation from Natural England, we are trialling different cover crops sown into 20ha of extended stubbles to maximise their benefit for soil structure, weed suppression and wildlife. Overall, at least 7% of suitable partridge habitats, together with supplementary winter feeding, have been implemented at all 10 demonstration sites; legal predator management is carried out at six sites.

To highlight the urgency of reversing the continuing loss of farmland wildlife, PARTRIDGE puts a very strong emphasis on communication activities and in-depth advice. We estimate to have already informed between 3-4 million people via our online communications campaign, including radio broadcasts and TV shows.

### Successes of PARTRIDGE so far

Two years into the project, PARTRIDGE has held more than 100 farm walks. In the UK alone, around 800 people have visited our four demonstration sites, ranging from local farmers, hunters, the general public, NFU and Scottish agronomy members, Natural England (NE) and Scottish Natural Heritage staff and UK Government agri-policy advisors. We have also welcomed visitors from Switzerland, the Republic of Ireland and Spain, as well as the Environment Minister of Denmark. Additionally, we held hedgerow management and partridge conservation workshops, gave AES habitat management advice to NE staff and participated in the Big Farmland Bird Count.

The experience of the new PARTRIDGE flower mixes has already been taken on board by Defra in developing the future Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS), that will come out after Brexit. As a result, their future management will become more flexible with increased wildlife benefits. In the Netherlands, beetle banks (developed by the GWCT) have been added as a new option to its new AES scheme, together with PARTRIDGE flower mixes; in Belgium, preparations are on the way to do the same.

In 2018 we undertook 15 in-depth key stakeholder interviews in each partner country (30 in the UK), to help us find answers that might improve the quality and uptake of national AES schemes targeting recovery of farmland wildlife across the North-Sea Region. This is because the current agri-environment schemes have not managed to halt the ongoing decline of farmland biodiversity across the EU, despite UK and EU Biodiversity 2020 targets.

Working across borders with a wide range of experts and stakeholders based on a bottom-up approach is proving to be a very successful strategy to demonstrate how to improve farmland biodiversity. There is no doubt that we are increasingly being heard by those at the highest political levels and numerous projects have already started copying our approach across the UK and the EU.

For more information, please visit [www.northsearegion.eu/partridge](http://www.northsearegion.eu/partridge).



### PROJECT AIMS

- GWCT-led North Sea Region (NSR) cross-border Interreg project involving England, Scotland, the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany.
- Demonstration of how to reverse farmland biodiversity loss at ten 500ha sites by 30% by 2020.
- Use the grey partridge as a flagship species for management plans at demonstration sites.
- Influence agri-environment policy and showcase how to enthuse local stakeholders to conserve farmland wildlife.

**Francis Buner**  
**Paul Stephens**  
**Elouise Mayall**

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project would not be possible without the help of hundreds of supporters. We thank all participating GWCT members of staff (in particular Dave Parish, Julie Ewald, Fiona Torrance, Chris Stoate, John Szczur and Austin Weldon), the PARTRIDGE co-ordinating partner organisations BirdLife NL, the Flemish Land Agency (VLM), INBO and the University of Göttingen, together with their local PARTRIDGE partner organisations, all the participating farmers, hunters, volunteers, NGO's and Government agencies, the Steering Committee members, and last but not least, the NSR Interreg Secretariat in Denmark.

*Partridge-tailored wild bird seed mixes help to recover farmland wildlife generally, such as hares.*  
© PARTRIDGE NL