

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 till 2023. Comprising 12 partner organisations from the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Denmark, Scotland and England, PARTRIDGE showcases how the abundance of farmland wildlife can be increased by 30% at ten 500-ha demonstration sites (two in each country, except in Denmark). In the UK, the four PARTRIDGE demonstration sites (Rotherfield and the Allerton Project in England, and Whitburgh and Balgonie in Scotland) all have GWCT involvement in partnership with the estate owners and staff.



Interreg North Sea project PARTRIDGE

The PARTRIDGE mix has been developed to benefit biodiversity overall. © Molly Crookshank/GWCT

PROJECT AIMS

- GWCT-led North Sea Region (NSR) cross-border Interreg project involving England, Scotland, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and Denmark.
- Demonstrate how to reverse farmland biodiversity loss at ten 500ha sites by 2023.
- Use the grey partridge as a flagship species for management plans at the demonstration sites.
- Influence agri-environment policy and showcase how to enthuse local stakeholders to conserve farmland wildlife.

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PARTRIDGE is a cross-border North Sea Interreg project that demonstrates how to reverse the ongoing Europe-wide decline of farmland wildlife using science-based management plans based on a bottom-up approach. The project is led by the GWCT in partnership with 11 other organisations from six countries. These work with more than 70 farmers organised in Farmer Clusters at 10 demonstration sites, assisted by around 40 hunters and several hundred volunteers.

The project's locally adapted management plans are tailored to the grey partridge, because existing evidence shows that partridge-friendly measures, in particular wild bird seed mixes and wild-flower blocks, benefit farmland biodiversity in general. In 2020 we published a booklet that summarises the evidence upon which our project approach is based: *Farming with Nature – promoting biodiversity across Europe through partridge conservation*. The beautifully illustrated publication includes a foreword by NFU President Minette Batters (English version), and by Fergus Ewing (Scottish Government's Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Tourism (Scottish version)), followed by a brief overview of the current challenges facing farmland biodiversity across Europe. The publication then briefly describes the life cycle of the grey partridge, before delving into the habitat requirements that are key for grey partridge conservation. We then cover supplementary winter feeding and predation management, considering both lethal and non-lethal methods. Each chapter ends with an overview of which other types of farmland wildlife benefit from the partridge-tailored measures implemented. The booklet concludes by highlighting the importance of all stakeholders working together for a common goal. *Farming with Nature* is available from the GWCT online shop and is a must-read for anyone interested in how to make their farm more partridge- and wildlife-friendly. We also produced a beautiful flying partridge pin in this reporting period, with a limited few still available from the GWCT shop.

In the UK, we continued to trial our new PARTRIDGE wild bird seed mixes, developed by Oakbank and Kings Crops in collaboration with the GWCT, at Balgonie,



the Allerton Project and Rotherfield, whereas at Whitburgh the farm started to revert to the more conventional cover mixes. At Rotherfield, even more species-rich spring- and autumn-sown mixes were planted, containing more perennial flowering plants than the currently available wild bird seed mixes in the UK. The aim is to provide multi-annual cover containing varied vegetational structure, which will benefit wild game, a wide range of farmland birds and other wildlife all year round for up to 10 years. This new mix has already been put forward as one of the options potentially available in the future Agri-environment Scheme (ELM) for England.

Despite the nationwide Covid-19 restrictions that were in place in all project countries for most of 2020, we successfully continued to promote the PARTRIDGE approach more widely across the North Sea Region and Europe, notably by taking part in the EU Green Week with a virtual stand, by increasing social media and printed press output, and by holding demonstration-site farm walks, although the latter at a much-reduced number than in previous years. Our official PARTRIDGE webpage (www.northsearegion.eu/partridge/) has had 50,000 unique page views since the project began, more than any other Interreg North Sea Region project. Through our strategic communication activities including social media, TV and radio, conferences and symposia, we have reached an estimated five million people to date.

The Farming with Nature booklet summarises the most relevant scientific evidence regarding grey partridge management and the biodiversity benefits associated with it. © Francis Buner/GWCT



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Farm walks across our UK and European demonstration sites continued to help us promote our bottom-up approach to a wide range of stakeholders, including two special advisors to the English Minister of State. © Francis Buner/GWCT