

PARTRIDGE project influencing future agri-environment scheme in Scotland

By Fiona Torrance, Farmland Biodiversity Adviser,
Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust in Scotland and
Scottish PARTRIDGE project manager



Photo by Amy Mason

PARTRIDGE mix at Balgonie in 2022

The EU Interreg PARTRIDGE project started in 2016 and one of its objectives was to use the findings from research and monitoring to influence the design of agri-environment schemes in each of the participating countries. This has included beetle banks in Belgium, the PARTRIDGE mix in Germany and the wildlife plot in England. In Scotland this objective has been particularly challenging until the publication of the Scottish Government's draft Agricultural Reform Programme earlier this year.

The PARTRIDGE team in Scotland has worked hard to increase the allowed duration for an established wild bird seed mix which under the current AECS scheme, could only be established for one year before being moved elsewhere. However, many of the species in the specially designed PARTRIDGE mix only appear in year two, and it was therefore unable to deliver all its potential benefits to

wildlife if sown as an annual mix.

But the Wild Bird Cover measure in the draft Agricultural Reform Programme is now listed as providing resources for biodiversity over two to three years, depending on the mix. This means that mixes like Kings Interreg Grey Partridge mix would last for a number of years, ensuring that the habitat is able to provide nesting, brood-rearing and predation cover for grey partridges and many other farmland species, as well as food during the winter months.

This change has been achieved by the Scottish PARTRIDGE team working with NatureScot. As well as being on the steering committee for the project, we also invited NatureScot's agricultural team to visit Balgonie in Fife to discuss the project and speak with the farmer. Going forward, we will continue to work with them on the new PepsiCo Farming

Arable Biodiversity (FAB) project and look forward to testing new tools they are currently developing for the reform programme.

As seen from the work at Balgonie and other PARTRIDGE demonstration sites, this habitat type delivers many different benefits for farmland biodiversity if left in place for the right amount of time so it can provide benefits for farmland birds, pollinators, small mammals and other species. We are excited to see how it can deliver for wildlife, as well as farmers across Scotland.

Although the programme is still in draft form, it is hoped that the work already undertaken, and now continuing at Balgonie definitively demonstrates that this habitat type delivers for biodiversity.

More information about the Interreg North Sea PARTRIDGE project at: <https://northsearegion.eu/partridge/>