

PRINCIPLES OF SUSTAINABLE GAME MANAGEMENT



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Why do we need these principles?

The Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust promotes best practice game management as a force for good for nature conservation and environmental improvement on farmland, woodland, moorland and wetland. By establishing principles, we want to promote best practice and sustainable game management that aim to deliver a net gain for biodiversity.

Biodiversity net gain is a concept that is embedded in Defra's 25 Year Environment Plan and is an approach to land use that leads to an increase in biodiversity. The principles are designed to function and to have relevance across a wide range of interest groups from game managers and participants in game shooting, through to conservation organisations, Government and the general public.



How did we develop on them?

To promote best practice, we produced a set of draft principles in autumn 2019, which were presented and discussed at 19 private shoot briefing meetings held between autumn 2019 and spring 2020, each with an audience of approximately 30 shoots, varying in size but including some large commercial shoot operations. An online consultation, via the GWCT website was live through May and June 2020. Over 340 responses were received, with over 90% support for the principles.

We reviewed internationally agreed guidelines on sustainable use and biodiversity. Many of the principles align closely with the Bern Convention European Charter on Hunting and Biodiversity. This charter has guidelines for game managers but also regulators so that they can help game managers to benefit conservation of biodiversity. The charter is based on two important agreements of the Convention on Biological Diversity. These are the Addis Ababa Principles and Guidelines for Sustainable use of biodiversity and the ecosystem approach to conservation (Malawi Principles). The Charter on Hunting and Biodiversity, and the Malawi and Addis Ababa Principles are supported by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (The IUCN is the global authority on the status of the natural world and the measures needed to safeguard it).

For more about the principles of game management, visit www.gwct.org.uk/principles

The principles of sustainable game management

- 1. Biodiversity.** All shoots, whether based on wild gamebirds, released gamebirds or a combination of both, should strive to achieve a net biodiversity gain on their land.
- 2. Landscape.** Through active management of the rural landscape, effective game management supports the growth of game populations, allowing a sustainable harvest with positive benefits for other species whilst avoiding population levels which could damage other land uses such as farming, forestry and nature conservation.
- 3. Densities.** Gamebirds should only be released and managed at densities appropriate to the local circumstances, so that there is a net environmental gain from undertaking such activity.
- 4. Diversity.** Appropriate habitat creation, management and sometimes restoration is needed for all gamebirds. Maintaining this critical and appropriate diversity of habitats is a feature of our advice and recommendations, based on our scientific research and observation. Habitats created, restored and managed to support gamebirds include woodland, hedgerows, field margins, game cover crops, wild bird seed mixes, moorlands and wetlands.
- 5. Timing.** Releasing gamebirds in the summer increases the number of birds available to shoot in the autumn and winter. Shoot managers should only release gamebirds in habitats that enable them to acclimatise quickly to life in the wild, following the guidelines and recommendations outlined in the Code of Good Shooting Practice and British Game Alliance standards.
- 6. Development.** Following release of gamebirds, habitats should be provided to encompass their year-round needs. All birds should be fully adapted to life in the wild before the first shoot day.
- 7. Responsibility.** Shoots should ensure that all game that is fit for human consumption is eaten.
- 8. Science.** Grouse and wild partridge shoots should assess their proposed bag by calculating the sustainable yield based on annual game counts and follow GWCT recommendations for sustainable harvest of wild game.
- 9. Sustainability.** Game management provides an incentive to privately fund the creation, restoration and management of habitats across large areas of the countryside specifically for wildlife – something which is usually only incidental to other forms of land use such as forestry or farming.
- 10. Wildlife.** Habitats created and managed to support released gamebirds include woodland, hedgerows, field margins, game cover crops, wild bird seed mixes and wetlands. Much other wildlife benefits from this habitat provision. Alongside the habitat provided and managed for gamebirds, predation control and supplementary feeding are often important aspects of game management. These activities can benefit a wide range of other wildlife.
- 11. Balance.** Predation control is undertaken to reduce predation pressure. This is especially important in spring, to reduce levels of predation on nesting birds, nests and chicks and during summer to protect young birds. Many species, including several of conservation concern, benefit from predation control undertaken to conserve gamebirds.
- 12. Legal control.** The predators targeted are common and successful generalists so a temporary reduction in their numbers locally will not jeopardise their population or conservation status. Predation control activities should be undertaken according to best practice guidelines to ensure they are legal, humane and effective. In no circumstances should any protected species ever be illegally killed to protect game, nor should any predation control activity risk negatively affecting the conservation status of a species.



Game & wildlife management

We work with shoots to help deliver net biodiversity gain.

The GWCT's advisory team are the most experienced consultants in their field, able to provide advice and training across all aspects of game management, from wild bird production and farm conservation management to the effective and sustainable management of released game and compliance with the Code of Good Shooting Practice.

We are renowned for our science-based game and wildlife management advice that guarantees the best possible game management and environmental outcomes from your shoot. We will work closely with your farm manager, gamekeeper and existing advisors to identify ways of making your game and shoot management more effective by providing tried and tested advice backed by science.

Call us today to discuss shoot biodiversity assessments, our wide range of best practice game management courses, advisory visits and professional, independent (BASIS) accreditation in game management.

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