

## 4.1 Red Grouse

If you want to increase red grouse on your moor, this fact sheet helps you understand their habitat and diet requirements. It describes the requirements of red grouse in terms of vegetation composition and structure that occur over and above the vital role of rotational heather burning regimes. Whilst rotational heather burning is the key habitat management for red grouse on heather moors, grazing is critical in the restoration of degraded moors and hence in returning degraded moors to a state where heather burning regimes can be reinstated.

### ***Broad habitat relationships***

Red grouse is the bird species most strongly associated with heather moorlands. Because of its importance as a quarry species, it has been the subject of much detailed research over the years.

Extensive areas of moorland in England and Wales are managed to maintain high densities of red grouse, particularly in the North and South Pennines and in the North York Moors. The principal management regimes involve

- patch burning of heather on rotations (usually) of 12 – 20 years
- the legal control of generalist predators (e.g. corvids, foxes and mustelids)
- other activities such as providing 'grit' and treatments to reduce disease incidence in red grouse

Red grouse are most strongly associated with heather moorland where rotational burning regimes are employed to produce a patchwork of mature heather for cover and nesting and young heather for a more nutritious food source. Heather is the main food plant of adult red grouse.

### ***Biodiversity value & status***

Red grouse are amber listed in the UK's Birds of Conservation Concern, having undergone a population decline over the past few decades, largely because of post-war declines in the extent of land being managed for grouse.

### ***Habitat requirements***

The key associations with vegetation characteristics identified in the current study are detailed below.

#### **Main preferences of red grouse for compositional and structural features of moorland vegetation**

High cover of heather, > 40 %, but with interspersions of grass cover amongst the heather.

High cover of other dwarf shrubs, notably bell heathers and crowberry, particularly where heather cover is low.

Low cover of purple moor grass, deer grass and sedges.

High cover of vegetation > 15 cm tall, but with 30 – 60 % cover of short (< 15 cm) dwarf shrubs.

***Dietary Requirements:***

Red grouse chicks require invertebrate food during the first 1-2 weeks of life. Craneflies, adult beetles and larval sawflies are the most important for the chicks. Adults are largely herbivorous, with heather being the main food plant, but can survive on bilberry as well. They also take various seeds in season eg heath rush.

***Other Options and Information Sources***

An extensive literature exists on the biology and management of red grouse, which deals with a wide range of the factors (e.g. disease) that influence populations of this important gamebird. Further information can be found at [www.gct.org.uk](http://www.gct.org.uk), and in several of the other information sources listed in fact sheet 4.

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