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**Shoot Benchmarking
Survey Results
2009/10 season**

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This benchmarking exercise is based on data from 78 shoots in England, Scotland and Wales. The shoots operate over 219,000 acres, shot over 1,300 days in the 09/10 season, put down over 580,000 birds and employ 110 full time or part time staff.

The shoots have been analysed as a group and by whether the shoots considered themselves commercial or non-commercial / private, a small proportion of which let days to help cover their running costs.

Number of birds put down and area of shoot

There is a large difference in the scale of the shoots – with the commercial shoots being on average four times the size of the non-commercial ones both in terms of the birds put down and area shot over.

Average number of birds put down	
Commercial	Non-Commercial
12,043	3,222

Average area of shoots (acres)	
Commercial	Non-Commercial
4,346	1,524

Days shot and let

The commercial shoots shoot for eleven days more on average than the non-commercial ones. The average hides a great variation in the number of days shot – the ten shoots that shot the most days averaged 48 days last season.

Average number of days shot per season	
Commercial	Non-Commercial
23	12

Average number of days let per season	
Commercial	
18	

Rent paid for land

Just under half of the shoots rent land in and they pay an average of £3.10 per acre of bare land, £166 for game crops and £4.09 for woodland.

Rent paid for land rented in (£ per acre)			
	Average	Top 25 %	Bottom 25 %
Bare land	£3.10	£2.75	£4.00
Game crops	£166.43	£100.00	£207.50
Woodland	£4.09	£2.30	£5.70

Average returns

Returns have averaged 40-42 % for the shoots over the last three years, with returns consistently 2-4 % higher for private / non-commercial shoots than commercial ones. This could be a reflection of the commercial shoots having people shooting on them with a wider range of abilities and the guns on the non-commercial ones knowing their drives better; about a fifth of the non-commercial shoots said they achieved 60 % or better returns but a much lower proportion of commercial ones did.



Returns (% of birds put down)			
	Average	Top 25 %	Bottom 25 %
2009/10	42 %	48 %	34 %
2008/09	40 %	45 %	35 %
2007/08	42 %	48 %	36 %

Selling let days and source of clients

There are large differences in bookings and the amount of repeat business.

Almost 70 % of let days are sold within three months of the end of the previous season; however, the top 25 % of shoots have sold almost all of their days while the bottom 25 % have sold only half. Having this certainty of bookings helps business confidence.

Repeat business is very important with three quarters of let days sold to people who have shot there before.

Selling let days			
	Average	Top 25 %	Bottom 25 %
% of let days sold within three months of end of previous season	69 %	95 %	50 %
% of let days sold before start of the season	88 %	100 %	85 %
% of let days sold to repeat business	77 %	91 %	69 %

Given this, it is not surprising to see that repeat business is the number one ranked source of clients for the shoots, followed by other sources, such as word-of-mouth and recommendations.

Commercial shoots use sporting agents and other sources much more than private / non-commercial ones, who get more clients through websites and journal advertising.

Most important sources of clients		
	Rank	Highest (% of clients from this source)
Repeat business	1	100 %
Other sources	2	50 %
Sporting agents	3	100 %
Internet/website	4	60 %
Journal advertising	5	25 %

Price charged per bird, VAT and overages

The average charge, for commercial and non-commercial shoots, in the 09/10 season was £30 per pheasant and £28 per partridge. This does not include VAT.

Commercial shoots charge 12-16 % more than the few non-commercial ones that sell let days. For pheasants, the charge at a commercial shoot averages £31 compared with £27 on a non-commercial shoot. For partridge, the difference is £29 compared with £26.

The difference in charges is increased by VAT, which is charged by over 70 % of commercial shoots but only one non-commercial shoot.

Price charged per bird (excluding VAT)			
	Average	Top 25 %	Bottom 25 %
Pheasant	£30	£32	£28
Partridge	£28	£31	£25

Looking at the policy on overages for commercial shoots only, most have no charge (29 %) or allow 10 % lee way (54 %) and just over 10 % make a charge per bird.

Price paid for day old chicks and poults

Many fewer shoots buy day old chicks than buy poults. The price paid is quite consistent apart from at the extremes. Interestingly, the non-commercial shoots, despite ordering smaller numbers, pay slightly less than the commercial shoots for both pheasant and partridge poults.

Price paid per poults			
	Average	Top 25 %	Bottom 25 %
Pheasant	£3.40	£3.20	£3.60
Partridge	£3.78	£3.50	£4.10

Staff salaries and packages

The shoots provided the details of salaries, packages and benefits for 99 staff. The average salary for full time Head Keepers is £20,119, but with a range of £11,000 to £42,000.

The average for full time Gamekeepers¹ is £16,158, again with a large range (£8,500 to £22,370).

Average salary for full time staff			
	Average	Top 25 %	Bottom 25 %
Head Keeper	£20,119	£22,000	£16,375
Gamekeeper	£16,158	£18,338	£14,000

¹Gamekeepers includes all full time keepers who were not classified as Head Keepers (e.g. single handed or beat keepers.)

Most Head Keepers get a house, vehicle, clothing allowance and keepers' day as part of their package and around half also get their utility bills paid, a dog allowance, mobile phone and other benefits. A lower proportion of Gamekeepers get similar benefits, reflecting their less senior position.

% of Head Keepers provided with benefit	
House	96 %
Utility bills paid	54 %
Vehicle	100 %
Dog allowance	71 %
Clothing allowance	93 %
Mobile phone	61 %
Keepers day	93 %
Other benefits	64 %

% of Gamekeepers provided with benefit	
House	79 %
Utility bills paid	45 %
Vehicle	84 %
Dog allowance	74 %
Clothing allowance	87 %
Mobile phone	34 %
Keepers day	87 %
Other benefits	42 %

Variable costs per bird put down

The average variable cost per bird was £7.33 with over 80 % of the costs spent on birds, feed and beaters and pickers up pay.

Cost control is important. The costs of the top 25 % of shoots are 20 % lower than the average and those of the bottom performers are 13 % higher.

The key variable costs for shoots to focus on are those that account for a significant amount of total costs, so birds, feed and beaters and pickers up pay. For these costs there is almost 60 % difference between the costs of the top and bottom shoots.

Total variable costs per bird put down		
Average	Top 25 %	Bottom 25 %
£7.33	£5.85	£8.29

% of variable costs		
	Average of total VCs	£ per bird put down (Average)
Birds	46 %	£3.20
Feed	22 %	£1.60
Beaters and pickers up pay	13 %	£1.04
Seeds / fert / sprays for game crops	5 %	£0.39
Any other variable costs	5 %	£0.38
Fuel	3 %	£0.24
Materials for pens	2 %	£0.18
Shoot equipment (pegs, radios etc)	2 %	£0.14
Vet and medical	1 %	£0.07
Professional advice	1 %	£0.05
Ammunition	0 %	£0.04

Fixed costs per bird put down

Staff and vehicle costs account for 60 % of fixed costs.

Many shoots do not put a value on the rent that they could have received from letting out gamekeepers' houses; if they did, the real fixed costs would be higher, and we estimate it could account for around 20 % of total fixed costs.

The average fixed cost of £6.32 per bird put down disguises a significant variation between the top quarter of shoots, which have 47 % lower costs, and the bottom quarter, which have costs over a quarter higher – so a 73 % difference.

Staff salaries, vehicle and trailer costs and rent paid to 3rd parties for land or sporting rights are the key ones to control as they account for most of the costs and there is great variability in them.

Total fixed costs per bird put down		
Average	Top 25 %	Bottom 25 %
£6.32	£3.35	£7.97

% of fixed costs		
	Average of total FCs	£ per bird put down (Average)
Staff salaries	52 %	£3.55
Any other fixed costs	14 %	£0.62
Vehicle and trailer costs	8 %	£0.37
Rent paid to 3rd parties for land or sporting rights	9 %	£0.70
Income foregone as housing not let	7 %	£0.46
Insurance	3 %	£0.15
Housing maintenance	2 %	£0.17
Utility bills paid for staff	1 %	£0.08
Rent paid to 3rd parties for housing	1 %	£0.06
Other staff benefits	1 %	£0.05
Clothing allowances	1 %	£0.05
Dog allowances	1 %	£0.06
Mobile phones	0 %	£0.03

Total costs per bird put down

The total cost for the shoots to put down a bird is £13.33 on average², again with a large variation between the top and bottom quarter of shoots. Costs are obviously affected by the scale and quality of the shoot; the commercial shoots, which generally aim to attract lots of repeat business and so must put on a good experience, have higher costs (average £14.41) than non-commercial ones.

Total costs per bird put down		
Average	Top 25 %	Bottom 25 %
£13.33	£9.69	£14.50

Net income per bird shot - commercial shoots only

17 of the 27 commercial shoots that we had suitable data for made a positive net income per bird shot; it averaged £7.92 per bird and ranged from break even to £22.25 per bird.

However, 10 of the shoots (37 %) made a loss per bird shot.

²This only includes shoots which provided variable and fixed cost data and so is not the sum of total variable costs plus total fixed costs as those calculations included shoots that only provided one set of costs.

If you would like to discuss the results of the survey, take part next year or any aspect of shooting, please contact:



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