

The Code of Good Shooting Practice 2008





The Code of Good Shooting Practice 2008

In Britain we are rightly proud of our shooting sports. Game management and conservation shape and enhance our landscape. Wildlife thrives where land is managed for shooting. Over a million people are involved in shooting; many more enjoy the end product as consumers of pheasants, partridges and other game. Moreover, shooting makes a substantial contribution to the rural economy - often at times and in places where other income is scarce.

Provided it is carried out following the advice set out in this code the release of reared birds is an entirely valid method of increasing or sustaining a stock of wild game: indeed it is fundamental to British game shooting and its attendant conservation benefits.

We must never be complacent about the future of shooting. Shooting and shoot management practices will be judged by the way participants and providers behave. Our sport is under constant and detailed scrutiny and we must demonstrate that we conduct it to high standards. The Code of Good Shooting Practice brings together those standards and makes them easily available to all who participate. It embodies fundamental respect for the quarry species, and care for the environment.

The Game Shoot Standards Assurance Scheme, a self regulated independent assessment, is based on this Code, and offers those who chose to engage in the scheme a certificate to demonstrate that they have achieved accredited status.

This Code sets out the framework that enables shoot managers, Guns, gamekeepers and their employees to



deliver sustainable shooting, paying attention to management of habitat and avoiding nuisance to others. All who shoot or are involved in shooting in any way should, under this code, abide by and remind others of the provisions set out below. The Code is covered in 10 sections in the following pages.

The Code provides advice at two levels:

- Advice that must be followed in order to deliver sustainable shooting – unless otherwise stated the term ‘must’ only applies to meeting the standards set by this Code of Practice and does not refer to a legal obligation.
- Advice that should be followed in order to achieve Best Practice, any deviation from which would need justification.

This Code is primarily addressed to shooting “game”, which includes all of the traditional gamebirds, namely, pheasants, partridges and grouse, but many of the principles apply equally to other quarry types - ducks, geese and waders – as well as pest species, including pigeons, crows, rabbits, hares and squirrels.

The following Five Golden Rules apply: -

- The safe conduct of shooting must meet the standards described in this code, show respect for the countryside and consideration for others.
- Shoot managers must endeavour to enhance wildlife conservation and the countryside.
- Respect for quarry is paramount. It is fundamental to mark and retrieve all shot birds. Shot game is food and must be treated as such.
- If birds are released, shoots should take steps to comply with the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust’s new guidelines for sustainable releasing.
- Birds must never be released to replenish or replace any birds already released and shot in that season.

1. Shooting behaviour

All those who are involved in shooting should act as good ambassadors for the sport. You can help to protect the future of shooting by complying with this Code and by encouraging others who shoot to do the same. This Code requires:

- Safety, observance of the law and good manners
- Respect for quarry, habitat and the wider countryside
- Seeking to help and support the relevant associations that represent and promote your sport

2. Responsible shooting

- Guns should take account of the size of bags and frequency of shooting.
- Guns must ensure they know and recognise the intended quarry species and comply with relevant lead shot regulations.



- Guns must be competent at estimating range and shoot within the limitations of their equipment to kill cleanly and consistently.
- Guns must satisfy themselves adequate provision is made for retrieval of the game they shoot.
- Inexperienced Guns should improve personal shooting skills through practice on clay targets and must ensure they are accompanied and supervised by a suitably experienced person.
- Guns should avoid depositing lead shot in wetlands important to feeding waterfowl.

Retrieval and handling of game

- Shooting should not be conducted where it will not be possible to retrieve shot game.
- Shoot managers must ensure that adequate provision is made to retrieve all shot game and dogs are an essential part of this process. Wounded game must be retrieved and humanely despatched as quickly as possible.
- On driven days any wounded game should be retrieved during drives whenever it is safe and practicable to do so.
- Guns must mark the fall and assist in the retrieval of their own shot game and, where practical, should help inform pickers up. Guns should also assist in the retrieval of other's shot game.
- Guns and pickers-up must ensure that they despatch any wounded quarry in a swift and humane manner.

Cessation of shooting

- A day's game shooting should finish early enough to allow time for pickers-up to complete their task before birds start to go to roost.
- Shooting should be cancelled if adverse weather conditions mean that birds cannot be presented in a safe and appropriate sporting manner, or shot and retrieved safely.

3. Consideration for others

Shoot managers and Guns must ensure that their activities take account of others' interests: due care and courtesy is a guiding principle.

- All involved in shooting must have regard for others and their safety at all times.
- The frequency of shooting must not give rise to unreasonable nuisance (particularly noise) to neighbours.
- Shoot managers must have obtained permission before entering neighbouring property especially during a shoot.

- Shoot managers should locate provide and manage adequate habitat and feed supplies to avoid boundary problems with neighbours.
- Released birds should be managed to avoid damage to neighbouring crops and gardens.
- Avoid birds and spent shot falling on to public places, roads and neighbouring property.
- Guns should use cartridges with degradable wads where possible and all cartridge cases and other litter should be removed after each shoot.
- Cover crops should enhance the habitat and be sympathetically sited.
- Release pens should where possible be sited out of public view.

The public highway

- Shoot managers and Guns must ensure that shooting does not obstruct, cause danger or alarm to users of the public highway, including roads, bridleways, footpaths and other rights of way.
- Guns should note that to shoot across a footpath or bridleway that is in use by walkers or riders may constitute a public nuisance or wilful obstruction. There may also be a liability in negligence if it is known that people are on, or likely to be on, the path.
- In particular, care should be taken when siting Guns near roads. Section 161 of the Highways Act 1980 (England & Wales) makes it an offence to discharge a firearm within 50 ft of the centre of a highway with vehicular rights without lawful authority or excuse, if as a result a user of the highway is injured, interrupted or endangered.
- The Highways Act does not apply in Scotland but Procurators Fiscal may use common law offences of 'culpable and reckless conduct' and 'reckless endangerment' in situations in which the 1980 Act would be contravened in England and Wales.
- Information signs, if appropriate, should be erected on shoot days on footpaths or bridleways.
- The siting of release pens and feeding of game near highways should be avoided. Game managers should collect and dispose of road casualties where possible.

Horses and walkers

- Shoot managers and Guns must have special regard to the safety of riders and their horses. Noise from gunfire, beaters working in cover adjacent to bridleways or falling shot can alarm horses and endanger riders.
- Where possible shoot organisers should liaise with local riders or yards, informing them when shoots are taking place.
- Shooting or beating should be paused to allow horses or other rights of way users to pass.
- All Guns should be made aware of bridleways and other rights of way as well as any fields in which horses are kept. Drives should be organised with this in mind.

4. Game is food

Shoot managers must ensure they have in place appropriate arrangements for the sale or consumption of the anticipated bag in advance of shoot days.

- Shoot managers should aim to produce fully mature, healthy and marketable game. In particular red legged partridges should be at least 15-16 weeks old before shooting to ensure this.
- Game must be regarded as food and should be treated as such from the moment it is shot until it reaches the table.
- Suitable arrangements should be made for the collection, transport and storage of game.
- Shoot managers must ensure compliance with relevant game meat and food hygiene regulations, in particular:
 - All freshly killed game must be handled and stored in a way that is hygienic
 - Allows body heat to disperse as quickly as possible
 - Where game is sold, shoots that do not have same day collection should install a suitable chiller
- Shoot managers should always offer Guns a brace of birds which Guns should accept. The practice of making oven ready birds available is to be encouraged where practicable.

5. Shoot management

Shoot managers bear immediate responsibility for ensuring their shoot, their employees, and Guns who shoot there, meet accepted standards, as set out in this Code.

- Shoot managers must ensure that they comply with all relevant legal requirements set out in part 9 of this Code.
- Shoot managers should prepare an appropriate whole shoot management plan to ensure a positive environmental benefit results from their activities. The Game Shoot Standards Assurance Scheme provides a helpful model.
- Shoot managers must endeavour to deliver an overall measurable improvement to habitat and wildlife on their shoots and should avoid releasing birds into sensitive habitats or locations.
- No more game must be released than can be sustained without damaging the environment and surrounding habitat, or being detrimental to the health and welfare of the birds themselves.
- Shoot managers should be aware of SSSIs and other sensitive habitats on their ground, and should avoid potentially damaging activities.
- Wild grey partridges should only be shot where they are actively conserved, and autumn stocks are above 20 birds per 100 hectares. Shooting must avoid populations falling below this threshold.
- Shoot managers must ensure that Guns are adequately briefed where black grouse (a threatened species) are present.

- Shoot managers must aim to ensure that birds are presented within the capability of the Guns, and encourage them to shoot within their limits.
- Shoot managers must ensure Guns comply with the relevant regulations restricting the use of lead shot.
- Lead shot should not be used for any shooting over wetlands important for feeding waterfowl.
- Shoot managers must ensure suitable public liability insurance is maintained.
- Property owners when letting land for shooting should ensure that the Code forms part of the letting document and is complied with.
- Shoot managers when selling days should ensure that the Code forms part of the contract and is complied with.
- Shoot managers and Guns should be prepared to demonstrate they have complied with this Code.



6. Rearing game

Whatever the species being reared or the methods being used, the overriding principle, which must guide everyone involved, is:

Game husbandry must be conducted with all due consideration for the health and welfare of the birds concerned.

The aim of game rearing is to provide fit, healthy birds, well adapted for release into the wild.

- All those involved with the rearing and releasing of gamebirds should act in accordance with the Code of Practice produced by the Game Farmers' Association.
- Shoot managers should check the provenance and health and welfare of stock in advance of delivery.
- Shoot managers should support UK game farms using traditional grass based systems as the preferred source of stock for release.

7. Releasing game

Under normal circumstances, all birds should be released before the start of their shooting season. Shooting must not commence until the birds are mature and fully adapted to the wild – a minimum of one month from release. Birds must never be released to replenish or replace any birds already released and shot in that season. Partridge release pens should be removed before shooting begins.



Releasing pheasants and partridges

- Shoots should refer to the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust guidelines for sustainable game bird releasing.
 - These provide a rule of thumb, advising that in order to avoid damage to habitat in most situations shoots should avoid releasing more than 1,000 pheasants per hectare of pen, and more than 700 per hectare of pen in ancient, semi-natural woodland and that pheasant release pens should not, in total, take up more than about one third of the woodland area on the shoot.
- Where shoots exceed the recommended densities they should be able to demonstrate that their particular circumstances and management regime (for example, by limiting the period of time birds are in release pens) does not significantly damage woodland flora and fauna.
 - Partridge release pens should be sited in cover crops on arable or improved grassland, rather than on semi-natural or unimproved habitats.

Releasing duck

- Duck must always be released into suitable wetland habitat, and in numbers which are appropriate to its carrying capacity.
- Wetland areas are particularly sensitive, and over stocking with reared birds must not be allowed to deter wild stocks or damage the habitat.
- Duck must be encouraged to become wild and shooting must not be undertaken until they have done so.
- Shoot managers should ensure that ducks have alternative water to which to fly.

Feeding of released game

- At release time most poults are still growing rapidly, and wheat alone is not an adequate diet. Sufficient compounded game rations should be provided until the birds are fully grown.
- Sufficient feed for released birds remaining after the end of the shooting season should be provided until adequate natural food is available, normally to the end of May.

8. Predator and pest control

Those involved in predator and pest control should carry out their lawful activities with due consideration to local residents and other countryside users.

- Traps and snares are widely used in pest and predator control and all legal provisions on inspection and their use must be observed.

- In general, all non lethal traps and snares should be checked at least once a day. Trapped animals (save those used for attracting others) must be removed promptly on inspection and disposed of lawfully.
- In the case of live capture traps and snares, all target animals must be dispatched humanely and as quickly as possible.
- Shoot managers should not display carcasses. It serves no useful purpose and will offend other countryside users.
- Approved chemicals must only be used for their legal purpose. They must be stored in accordance with the COSHH Regulations and only used by qualified persons in accordance with applicable regulations.
- It may be helpful to keep accurate records of pest and predator control carried out.
- It is an offence to intentionally kill, damage or destroy birds of prey, their nests or eggs.
- When shooting foxes suitable rifles, shotguns and ammunition should be used and only at ranges that ensure rapid despatch.

9. Legal requirements

It is a shoot manager's legal responsibility to ensure that the shoot and its employees comply with the law. Guns must also comply with the law insofar as it affects them. Particular regard should be had to the following:-

- Firearms Act: Guns must comply with the relevant firearms law, and, where necessary, be in possession of the relevant certificates.
- Health and safety: shoot managers must ensure shooting is carried out in all respects in a safe manner, including briefing participants on safety matters, and ensuring the safety of equipment used.
- From 1 August 2007 in England and Wales it is no longer necessary to have a game licence or a game dealer's licence. They remain a legal requirement in Scotland and Northern Ireland.
- Processing game meat: This is regulated by various regulations issued under the Food Safety Act 1990. The sale of game meat to other EU countries is controlled by The Wild Game Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1995.
- Lead Shot/Non-Toxic Shot: The use of lead shot over salt marsh or foreshore, designated SSSIs important for waterfowl, or for the shooting of any ducks, geese, coot, or moorhen in England and Wales is prohibited. In Scotland the use of lead shot is prohibited for all shooting over most wetlands. Shoot managers are potentially liable for breaches of the lead shot regulations on their shoots.
- Hazardous substances: The following regulations are of particular significance: The Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986 (as amended) (COPR), The Pesticides (Maximum Levels in Crops, Food and Feedingstuffs) (England and Wales) Regulations 1999 (as amended), and in Scotland by The Pesticides (Maximum Levels in



Crops, Food and Feeding stuffs) (Scotland) Regulations 2000, and the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1999.

- Predator and pest control: The welfare of domestic, captive and farmed animals is protected by the Animal Welfare Act 2006 in England and Wales and the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006. In Northern Ireland the welfare of all animals, including fish and birds, is promoted by Welfare of Animals (Northern Ireland) Act 1972. The Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996 makes it an offence to subject wild mammals in England, Wales and Scotland to certain specified forms of abuse. The control of certain pest bird species can only be carried out under the terms and conditions of general licences issued by the appropriate statutory authorities in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- Conservation: The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 sets out most of the requirements for habitat and species conservation. More specific provision is made in the Protection of Badgers Act 1992, the Deer Act 1991 and Deer (Scotland) Act 1996 and the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 BASC. Close seasons are established under both the 1981 Act and the Game Acts.
- Keeping dogs under control: The Dogs (Protection of Livestock) Act 1953 and the Animals Act 1971 are important in assessing liability for harm done by dogs.
- In prolonged severe weather, the shooting of duck, geese, coot, moorhen, woodcock and snipe may be suspended by law.
- Large numbers of empty cartridge cases may need to be disposed at special waste disposal sites as “contaminated waste”.
- Shoots must make sure that they comply with the Health & Safety at work act 1974 and the management of Health & Safety at work Regulations 1999.(For more details and assistance visit: www.hse.gov.uk)

10. Codes of practice and guidance currently available

BASC Codes

www.basc.org.uk/content/settingthestandard/codesof-practice

- Air Rifles
- Shotgun Safety
- Lamping
- Fox Snaring
- Stalking
- Woodpigeon
- Flight Ponds
- Wildfowling
- Sporting Agents and Guides Offering Inland Goose Shooting
- Gundogs
- Picking up (quarry retrieval)
- Respect for Quarry
- Trapping Pest Birds
- Trapping Pest Mammals
- Horses and Shoots
- Transport of Beaters
- Use of Dog below ground in England and Wales
- Disruption of Shoots by Demonstrators
- Guide to Risk Assessment
- Guide to writing a Health and Safety Policy
- Health and Safety Policy pro forma

Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust

- Conserving the grey partridge
 - Conserving the black grouse
 - Conserving the brown hare
 - Guidelines for sustainable gamebird releasing.
- www.gct.org.uk/conservationguides.asp?PagelD=13

- Hints for using Larsen traps
- Snaring foxes. Guidance for the snare user.

www.gct.org.uk/text01.asp?PagelD=26

Game Farmers' Association - GFA Code of Practice

www.gfa.org.uk/gfa-code-of-practice/

Defra Snaring Code

www.defra.gov.uk/wildlifecountryside/vertebrates/snares/pdf/snares-cop.pdf

Game Shoot Assurance

www.gameshootstandards.co.uk/

has a suite of guidance on the site.

The Code of Good Shooting Practice is overseen by a Steering Committee comprising representatives of the following organisations:

British Association for Shooting and Conservation
www.basc.org.uk

Country Land and Business Association
www.cla.org.uk

Countryside Alliance
www.countryside-alliance.org.uk

Game Farmers' Association
www.gfa.org.uk

National Game Dealers' Association

National Gamekeepers' Organisation
www.nationalgamekeepers.org.uk

Scottish Gamekeepers' Association
www.scottishgamekeepers.co.uk

Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust
www.gct.org.uk

Scottish Rural Property and Business Association
www.srpba.com

It is endorsed by leading sporting agents and game farmers.

The Game Shoot Assurance Scheme is owned and managed by the same organisations. Details are available at www.gameshootstandards.co.uk

If you have any valid concerns about how a shoot is organised or require further information then please contact:

The Secretary, Code of Good Shooting Practice
Marford Mill, Rossett, Wrexham LL12 0HL

Tel: 01244 573 019 Fax: 01244 573 013