

# A Practical Conservation Project

## Estimating the Red Grouse Population on the Long Mynd

### Introduction

The Red Grouse population on the Long Mynd was considerably higher than it is now, but it appears to be recovering as a result of the heather management carried out by the National Trust.

The Species was added to the *Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern* in the 2009 review, as the population is dwindling across the Country as a whole. Monitoring the population is therefore important nationally as well as locally.



Pairs are secretive in the breeding season, and stay in the deep heather, so they are difficult to count. The usual method of estimating the population is mapping territorial displaying males on several dawn visits in spring, and analysing the comparative results (the "Territory Mapping Method"). The Long Mynd is a large area to cover, and the Trust also had difficulty in organising volunteers to undertake three counts between December and February each year. The population estimate in 2010 was 32 – 51 pairs. This is not sufficiently accurate for such a scarce species, or to assess the effectiveness of the Trust's heather management.

As well as displaying at dawn, the territorial males also display around sunset. Most territories are within sight and hearing distance of the road along the top, between the Gliding Station and the Shooting Box car park. The display flight is noisy, conspicuous and unmistakable, and can be observed over long distances, so this is a suitable project for anyone interested in birds or conservation. No special knowledge or skills are needed.

We want to recruit as many observers as possible to help with the counts. They will be held every Thursday between mid April and Mid May 2011. Please come to as many as possible.

It will basically involve patrolling a section of the road for an hour before sunset, and marking on a map (provided) the location and activity of all observations of Grouse. If we get sufficient observers on each date, we should be able to produce an accurate population estimate. Methodology is very straightforward, and will be explained at the Briefing Meeting (and on site, for any helpers who can't get to the Briefing).

### Project Briefing & Methodology

7.30pm – 8.30pm Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> April 2011

Carding Mill Valley Tea Room (Refreshments provided)

### Observation Dates (All Thursdays) and times

(Sunset is about 8.00pm on the first date, and gets later by 15 minutes per week)

- 6.45pm, 14<sup>th</sup> April
- 6.55pm, 21<sup>st</sup> April
- 7.00pm, 28<sup>th</sup> April
- 7.10pm, 5<sup>th</sup> May
- 7.15pm, 12<sup>th</sup> May

Meet at Pole Cottage Car Park (OS Grid Reference SO413937)

or meet at Carding Mill Valley Tea Room half an hour earlier for a lift up

**N.B. Lifts must be booked in advance. Arrangements will be announced at the Briefing.**

Sections of road to patrol will be allocated at the Pole Cottage car park, depending on number of participants and previous coverage.

It can get very cold at sunset on the top, so please bring plenty of warm clothing.

If this method produces better results than the current dawn counts, it is hoped to repeat the project each year, to provide on-going monitoring of the Red Grouse population on the Long Mynd.

### **Participants**

This is a suitable project for

- all participants on the National Trust *Introduction to Bird Watching and Conservation* and *More Bird Watching and Conservation* Courses
- members of the local SOS and RSPB members groups
- members of Community Wildlife Groups
- National Trust Volunteers.

We also hope to launch a Strettons Community Wildlife Group in the spring, and make this project part of the Group's work.

The project will be part of the bird monitoring on the Long Mynd carried out for the National Trust as part of their Environmental Stewardship Higher Level Agreement with Natural England, which itself is part of the *Conservation of Threatened Birds in the Shropshire Hills AONB*, co-ordinated by *Leo Smith Ornithological Surveys and Consultancy*

### **Further Information**

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