THE CODE OF GOOD SHOOTING PRACTICE

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In Britain we are rightly proud of our shooting sports. Game management and conservation help 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. Shooting is worth £2 billion to the UK annually.

But shooting has its opponents; the good name of shooting – and the ability of our organisations to defend it – depends on everyone involved following this Code. Whatever your role within shooting, you should always be 'Code-aware' and raise awareness of this Code in others.

Use this Code as your yardstick when deciding if you should accept an invitation or what shooting to buy. Check if shoots you are involved with, whether as a Gun, a beater or a picker-up, are Code compliant. If not, go elsewhere.

Countryside Alliance

The National Gamekeepers' Organisation
Keeping the Balance

Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust

Scottish Land&Estates
Landowners Working for the Countryside

The Scottish Game Keepers Association

The Moorland Association

Game Farmers Association

CLA

BASC
The British Association for Shooting & Conservation

National Game Dealers' Association

This Code applies to all game shooting, walked up, driven, wild bird or reared. 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 increasing and detailed scrutiny and we must demonstrate that we conduct it to high standards. *The Code of Good Shooting Practice* brings those standards together and makes them easily available to all participants. It embodies fundamental respect for the quarry species, and care for the environment.

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 abide by and remind others of the provisions set out within this Code.

The Code is covered in ten 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 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, waders and hares – as well as pest species including; pigeons, crows, rabbits and grey squirrels.

The following Five Golden Rules apply:

1. The safe conduct of shooting must meet the standards described in this Code, show respect for the countryside, due regard to health and safety and consideration for others.

2. Shoot managers must endeavour to enhance wildlife conservation and the countryside.

3. Respect for quarry is paramount. It is fundamental to mark and retrieve all shot game which is food and it must be treated in accordance with the *Guide to Good Game Handling.*

4. If birds are released, shoots must take steps to comply with the relevant sections set out in this Code.

5. 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 should aim to take shooting to match their skills and capabilities.
- 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 be 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.
- 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 shot game.
- Guns and pickers-up must ensure that they despatch any wounded quarry in a swift and humane manner.
- Further information on the correct procedure for handling and storing game can be found in the *Guide to Good Game Handling* produced by *The Code of Good Shooting Practice*.

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 or stopped if adverse weather conditions mean that birds cannot be presented in a safe and appropriate sporting manner, or shot and retrieved safely.
- In prolonged severe weather representative organisations will ask for voluntary restraint in wildfowl and wader shooting and this should be adhered to. In extreme conditions statutory restrictions will apply and these must be adhered to. Further details can be found on the BASC website www.basc.org.uk.

3. Consideration for others

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

- 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 any form of public right of way, e.g. a footpath or bridleway that is in use by walkers or riders may constitute a public nuisance (a criminal offence) or wilful obstruction. There may also be a liability in negligence if it is known that people are on, or likely to be on, such a right of way.

- In particular, care should be taken when siting Guns near carriageways including 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.
- In Northern Ireland, Section 61 of the Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 2004 makes it an offence for a person to discharge any firearm on any public road, or within 18 metres of the centre of any public road, or in any church, churchyard or burial ground.
- 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.
- 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 and of any land to which the public have access by right or by permission, 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 appropriate arrangements in place for the sale or consumption of the anticipated bag in advance of all 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.
- All shot game must be regarded as food and treated in accordance with the *Guide to Good Game Handling*.
- 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 and 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 overall responsibility for ensuring their shoot, their employees and Guns who shoot there, meet accepted standards, as set out in this Code.

- Shoot managers should always brief the Guns at the start of the day. This briefing should cover health and safety, expected quarry and the application of this Code. In particular, it should also encourage Guns not to shoot at excessively high or out-of-range birds. Shoot managers must ensure that Guns are adequately briefed where black grouse (a threatened species) and capercaillie (protected) are present.
- 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 positive environmental benefit results from their activities and avoid excessive frequency of shooting over the same drives.
- 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.
- Shoot managers should be aware of SSSIs and other sensitive habitats on their ground, and should liaise with the landowner and the relevant statutory authorities to ensure they 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 should stop to prevent populations falling below this threshold.
- Shoot managers must aim to ensure that birds are presented within the capability of the Guns.
- Shoot managers must ensure Guns comply with the relevant regulations restricting the use of lead shot.
- Shoot managers must ensure suitable public liability insurance is in place.
- Owners of the sporting rights, 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. Game rearing is covered by statutory Codes of practice for welfare of gamebirds reared for sporting purposes issued by Government.

- Shoot managers should check the provenance and health and welfare of stock in advance of delivery.
- Shoot managers should support UK game producers 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. 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 in 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 overstocking 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 and wild 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.
- The use of medicated feed and grit must comply with all on-label instructions and veterinary advice. Shooting must not take place until any stated 'withdrawal period' has passed since the birds being shot had access to medicated rations.

8. Predator and pest control

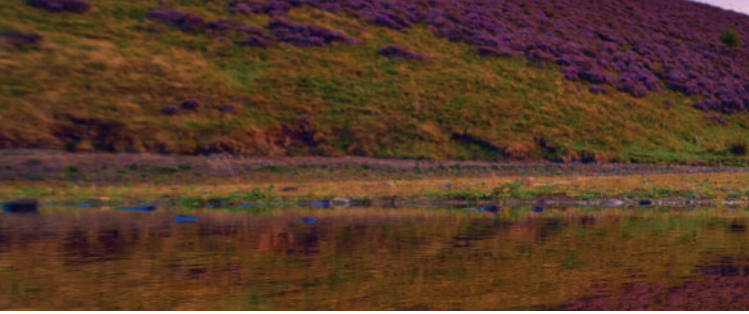
Those involved in predator and pest control should carry out their lawful activities with due consideration to local residents and other countryside users.

- Traps and snares are widely used in pest and predator control and all legal provisions on inspection and their use must be observed. Snares should be set in accordance with the relevant code of practice for their use.
- 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 on inspection, and despatched humanely as quickly as possible and disposed of lawfully.
- Carcasses should not be displayed. It serves no useful purpose and may 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.
- Accurate records should be kept of pest and predator control carried out.
- With certain exceptions, e.g. control under the authority of a general licence, it is an offence to intentionally kill, damage or destroy birds, their active nests or eggs.
- When shooting foxes or other predators 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 1968 (as amended), Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 2004: Guns must comply with the relevant firearms law, and, where necessary, must hold the relevant certificates.
- Health and safety: shoot managers must ensure all shooting is always carried out in all respects in a safe manner, including briefing participants on safety matters, and using risk assessment to ensure the safety of shoot practice and the equipment used.
- Processing and sale of game meat: This is controlled by various regulations issued under the Food Safety Act 1990 and the Food Safety (Northern Ireland) Order 1991, and also by Regulations (EC) Nos.178/2002, 852/2004 and 853/2004.
- Lead shot in England and Wales: 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 and Northern Ireland, 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 Residue Levels) (England and Wales) Regulations 2008, and in Scotland by The Pesticides (Maximum Levels in Crops, Food and Feedingstuffs) (Scotland) Regulations 2000, and the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1999. In Northern Ireland, the Control of Pesticides (N.I.) Regulations 1987, the Pesticides (maximum residue levels in crops, food and feeding stuff) (N.I.) Regulations 2008 and the COSHH (N.I.) regulations 2003 apply.
- Predator and pest control: The welfare of domestic, captive and farmed animals is covered 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 covered by Welfare of Animals (Northern Ireland) Act 1972 and the Wildlife and Natural Environment (N.I.) Act 2010.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 (in Scotland as amended by the Wildlife and Natural Environment Act 2011) 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, the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 and in Northern Ireland, the Wildlife and Natural Environment (N.I) Act 2010. Close seasons are established under both the 1981 Act and the Game Acts.
- Keeping dogs under control: The Dogs (Protection of Livestock) Act 1953, the Animals Act 1971 and the Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1983 are important in assessing liability for harm done by dogs.
- Large numbers of empty cartridge cases may need to be disposed of 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 (Northern Ireland, the Health & Safety at Work (N.I.) Order 1978 and the Management of Health & Safety at Work (N.I.) Regulations 2000). For more details and assistance visit www.hse.gov.uk.
- Shoot managers should be aware that the relevant landowner may apply to exclude or restrict public access to open access land in England and Wales, under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 in certain circumstances and for certain purposes: e.g. land management; nature conservation; restricting access of dogs for management of grouse moors.

10. Codes of practice and guidance currently available

Codes of Practice for Game Birds Reared for Sporting Purposes

England

www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/69379/pb13356-game-birds-100720.pdf

Wales

http://gov.wales/docs/legislation/inforcenonsi/animalwelfare/110106gamebirden.pdf

Scotland
http://www.gov.scot/Resource/Doc/343496/0114276.pdf

Fox snaring

England
www.basc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2016/10/Snaring-Best-Practice-Booklet-LOW-RES.pdf

Wales
http://gov.wales/topics/environmentcountryside/consmanagement/conservationbiodiversity/wildlife-management/foxes/?lang=en

Scotland
www.gov.scot/Resource/0041/00412984.pdf

The Campaign for Responsible Rodenticide Use (CRRU) Rodenticide Stewardship

www.thinkwildlife.org/about-crru/

BASC Codes/Guidance

www.basc.org.uk/cop/

- Air Rifles
- Deer Stalking
- Disruption of shoots by demonstrators
- Flight ponds
- Guide to risk assessment
- Guide to writing a health and safety policy
- Gundogs
- Health and safety pro forma
- Horses and shoots
- Loading for other people
- Night shooting
- Picking up (quarry retrieval)
- Shotgun safety
- Sporting agents and guides offering inland goose shooting
- Transport of beaters
- Trapping pest birds
- Trapping pest mammals
- Use of a dog below ground in England and Wales
- Wildfowling
- Woodpigeon
- Brown hares (jointly produced)

Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust Guidance

- Conserving black grouse
- Conserving brown hares
- Conserving the grey partridge
- Fox snares; guidance for the user
- Guidance on sustainable gamebird releasing.
- Hints for using Larsen traps

***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)
CLA (www.cla.org.uk)
Countryside Alliance (www.countryside-alliance.org.uk)
Game Farmers' Association (www.gfa.org.uk)
Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust (www.gwct.org.uk)
Moorland Association (www.moorlandassociation.org)
National Game Dealers' Association
National Gamekeepers' Organisation (www.nationalgamekeepers.org.uk)
Scottish Gamekeepers' Association (www.scottishgamekeepers.co.uk)
Scottish Land and Estates (scottishlandandestates.co.uk)

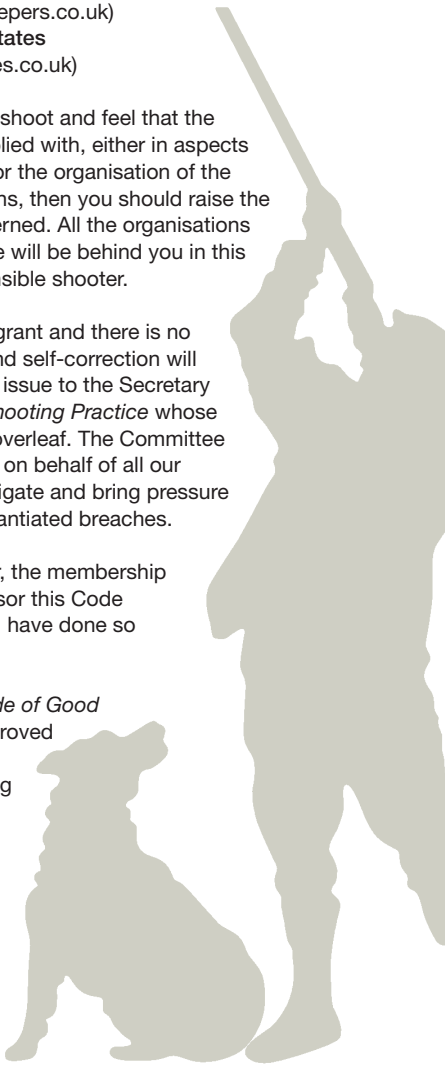
If you find yourself on a shoot and feel that the Code is not being complied with, either in aspects of game management, or the organisation of the day, or by individual Guns, then you should raise the matter with those concerned. All the organisations which endorse the Code will be behind you in this and so will every responsible shooter.

If non-compliance is flagrant and there is no indication that reform and self-correction will occur, please report the issue to the Secretary of *The Code of Good Shooting Practice* whose contact details appear overleaf. The Committee that oversees this Code on behalf of all our organisations will investigate and bring pressure to bear to correct substantiated breaches.

If reform does not occur, the membership organisations that sponsor this Code can expel offenders and have done so in the past.

Over the years, *The Code of Good Shooting Practice* has proved successful in raising standards and promoting best practice.

Please play your part in ensuring that all shoots come up to the mark. Thank you for your support.



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
Email: secretary@codeofgoodshootingpractice.org.uk

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