

## Grey Partridge

*Perdix perdix*

NBA 1999–2007	SUMMER: ALL/BREEDING	WINTER
TETRAIDS OCCUPIED	602 (41%) / 572 (39%)	514 (35%)
SUMMER/WINTER ONLY	254	166
MEAN PER OCCUPIED TETRAD	3 / 3	8
SUMMED MAX COUNTS	1,578 / 1,546	4,196
POPULATION ESTIMATE	1,500–2,500	8,000–12,000

PREVIOUS ATLASES	SQUARES OCCUPIED	1999–2007	LOSSES	GAINS
1968–72 (10 KM)	62 (all)	62 (all)		
1980–85 (TETRAD)	542 (37%)	572 (39%)	259	289
1980–85 (10 KM)	60 (97%)	62 (all)	0	2
1981–84 WINTER (10 KM)	58 (94%)	62 (all)	0	4
1988–91 (10 KM)	60 (97%)	62 (all)	0	2

THE GREY PARTRIDGE is the most widespread partridge in the western Palaearctic, although the population has been declining throughout its range since the early 1950s (*BWP2*). In England, this has been one of the fastest-declining bird species, with a loss of 75% of breeding numbers during 1982–2007 alone (*Birdtrends*). Game-rearing practices favour the species' introduced competitors, the Pheasant and the Red-legged Partridge, and encourage the predators of ground-nesting birds, such as Carrion Crows. Pesticide use, however, has been the main cause of long-term decline.

Grey Partridges favour areas of grassland or other vegetation with patches or strips of taller, denser

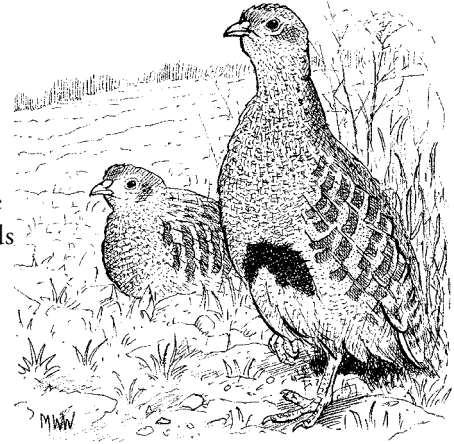
cover. Such conditions are found on fields of cereals and other crops, on grassy meadows and pastures, and on heaths and

commons. The presence of a ready supply of insects is necessary for the survival of chicks during the first two weeks of their life. The use of herbicides has reduced the amount of non-crop vegetation on which the insects can feed, which in turn has adversely affected the survival of Grey Partridge chicks. Careful husbandry of Grey Partridge populations now includes the provision of unsprayed headlands around arable fields and the creation of beetle banks.

The NBA summer map clearly shows that Norfolk's Grey Partridge population is strongest in the northwest of the county, with smaller pockets of higher numbers in other cereal-growing areas. Indeed, the density of Grey Partridges in northwest Norfolk has been amongst the highest in the world due to specific conservation measures that have been put in place on many of the large shooting estates. The 375 pairs on the West Barsham estate in 2003 constituted the highest density of wild Grey Partridges in Britain.

**During the NBA** survey, declines were still being recorded in the Brecks and northwest Norfolk. For instance, at Warham only 91 breeding pairs were present in 2000 compared with 500 in 1994. In contrast, a managed estate in the west of the county noted a doubling of the number of breeding pairs from 30 in 2004 to 64 in 2005, resulting in an autumn count of 323 Grey Partridges. All 25 tetrads with double-figure counts of breeding pairs were in northwest Norfolk, with maximum counts of 36 and 24 pairs south of Fring and 23 pairs near Fritcham.

Winter coveys of Grey Partridges consist largely of family groups, the adults and young remaining together until breaking up in February as territories become established. These coveys usually comprise





DAVID TIPLING

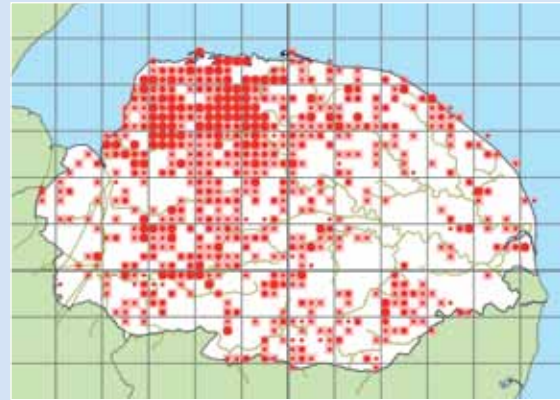
‘Careful husbandry of Grey Partridge populations now includes the provision of unsprayed headlands around arable fields and the creation of beetle banks.’

up to about 15 birds, although a single covey of 30 birds was recorded on Massingham Heath. Grey Partridges are one of the most sedentary birds in Britain, some pairs spending their entire life in the same few fields (*1981–84 Winter Atlas*). Therefore it is not surprising that the NBA winter and summer maps show a very similar pattern of distribution, with the northwestern quarter of Norfolk most favoured. The three tetrads with the highest winter counts were the same as in the summer, holding 134, 98 and 81 birds respectively, and all of the 22 tetrads in which 27 or more Grey Partridges were recorded were situated in northwest Norfolk.

**It is encouraging** that there has been no overall loss of range since previous atlases: in fact a slight increase in occupied squares has been recorded, perhaps partly the result of more thorough coverage for NBA in some parts of the county than in the earlier surveys. Grey Partridges are most easily and most accurately surveyed from a vehicle at dawn or dusk, whereas counts carried out on foot may miss up to three-quarters of the birds present.

**SUMMER**

Small dots 1, medium 2–3, large 4–36 ('pairs')  
Shading – breeding proved or considered likely



**WINTER**

Small dots 1–2, medium 3–7, large 8–134 (birds)



**CHANGE SINCE 1980–85**

+ Gain   ✕ Loss   ■ No change

