

Protecting the Black Grouse



Edrington
United Kingdom
2008 > Ongoing
#conservation



Objective

To support conservation work for endangered grouse species throughout the UK.
To help restore the natural landscape and promote biodiversity through woodland expansion and peatland restoration projects.

Description

Background: Declining population of black grouse

In 2005, there were fewer than 5,000 black grouse following their rapid decline between 1995 and 2005. The primary cause of this decline is the degradation and fragmentation of their moorland and woodland habitats. The protection of their habitats is central to the black grouse's survival. They require environments which contain heather, cotton grass, the leaves, flowers and seeds of grasses and herbs, and the buds and berries of various broad-leaved trees and shrubs, plus insect rich areas for foraging chicks.

Birth of a partnership

Edrington's Whisky brand the Famous Grouse approached the RSPB in 2007 to share plans about a new whisky with a black grouse on the label of the bottle. Following the RSPB's explanation of the problems that black grouse face in the UK, an opportunity was identified to help raise funds to support the protection of the black grouse habitats.

Launched in 2008 along with the new Black Grouse whisky, the partnership had a planned duration of three years. During this time the Famous Grouse agreed to donate 50p to the RSPB for every bottle of its Black Grouse sold. The RSPB used funds for black grouse conservation across four key reserves: Inversnaid and Corrimony in Scotland; Geltsdale in England; and Lake Vyrnwy in Wales.

Continuing past the original three years

Dedicated to their support of the black grouse, the Famous Grouse extended the three-year partnership for the first time in 2011. This time, the amount was fixed at £50,000 per year to be donated to the RSPB.

In 2016, the Black Grouse whisky was renamed The Famous Grouse Smoky Black and the company extended its partnership to the whole of its portfolio of whiskies. Also, in 2018, the Smoky Black packaging was redesigned to celebrate the 10-year anniversary of the partnership.

In 2021, the Famous Grouse began funding a **three-year project** to restore 300 hectares of Scotland's natural landscape in Abernethy.

In 2024, a limited-edition wrap for Famous Grouse was created to celebrate the 15-year partnership and marks the next step in the company's commitment to supporting the RSPB. The wrap was designed by Edinburgh-based artist and animator Nuria Boj and takes inspiration from the illustration by Phillipa Gloag (daughter of The Famous Grouse founder Matthew Gloag) who drew the very first Grouse, Gilbert, which adorns every bottle. Boj re-imagined the bottle design in her signature vibrant style whilst still incorporating The Famous Grouse logo, the landscape from Abernethy and Gilbert. The back label displays the RSPB logo alongside a message outlining the collaboration. It also features a QR code offering an interactive experience to learn more about the partnership. The wrap is made from 30% post-consumer recycled plastic.

Also in 2024, the Famous Grouse debuted the Famous Grouse Sherry Cask Finish. The packaging takes inspiration from the Spanish female Capercaillie. The bird was chosen for its link to the product's Spanish sherry heritage as well as its distinct orange and red plumage. The Famous Grouse plans to support further habitat protection projects focusing specifically on the Capercaillie.

Actions carried through the partnership

Over time, more reserves have benefited from the partnership support: Abernethy, Crannach, Corrimony, Inversnaid, and Wood of Cree in Scotland; Geltsdale in England and Lake Vyrnwy in Wales.

Conservation work includes planting new woodland, heath and moorland. This includes planting 185,000 trees and restoring 67ha of peatland. Improvements to more than 85,000 acres of land include rush cutting and fencing to facilitate grazing.

In addition, the funding enabled the RSPB to purchase a new nature reserve in 2013. Crannach, adjoining Balmoral Estate, assists in the conservation of both black grouse and capercaillie. Funding also meant that three new black grouse research projects were carried out in 2016. The aim was to understand how new woodland creation benefits black grouse, what has driven population change across the whole of Scotland, and the habitats that are important for chick rearing.

Lastly, the partnership restored 300ha of landscape in Abernethy through woodland expansion, peatland restoration and improving biodiversity on the forest floor. Using a mix of traditional cattle grazing and ultramodern mechanical Robocut machines, the compacted ground layer of forest vegetation was opened to improve tree regeneration and lead to greater vegetation types. This improves the biodiversity of the 5,000 different species that live there, including all of Scotland's resident grouse species (capercaillie, ptarmigan, red grouse and black grouse).

Partners

RSPB (The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds), a registered UK charity.

Results

As of 2021, the partnership has:

- Helped improve grouse habitats across 85,000 acres of nature reserve land.
- Supported the planting of 185,000 native trees.
- Supported the mowing of 30 hectares of heather.
- Supported the undertaking of lek and brood counts.

As of 2020, £680,000 had been given to the RSPB for its black grouse conservation projects. Previous milestones reached are: 2018: £650,000; 2016: £600,000; 2014: £500,000; 2013: £380,000; 2012: £300,000; 2010: £100,000 and 2009: £30,000.

Measurement & evaluation

Recovering grouse numbers

Whilst causality cannot be demonstrated, correlations between conservation effort and population rises have been observed.

- In 2012, for the first time since 2008 there was evidence of an upturn in numbers of black grouse in the UK: The number of black grouse had more than doubled from 18 to 45 at Geltsdale. This included 27 lekking males.
- In 2015, Geltsdale reserve staff counted 59 lekking males (up from 18 in 2009). The largest single lek at the reserve was made up 28 males and is one of the largest to be reported across the UK that year.
- In 2018, Corrimony reserve had 58 lekking males.
- In 2018, there was an overall 30% increase in the population of black grouse across reserves.

Awards

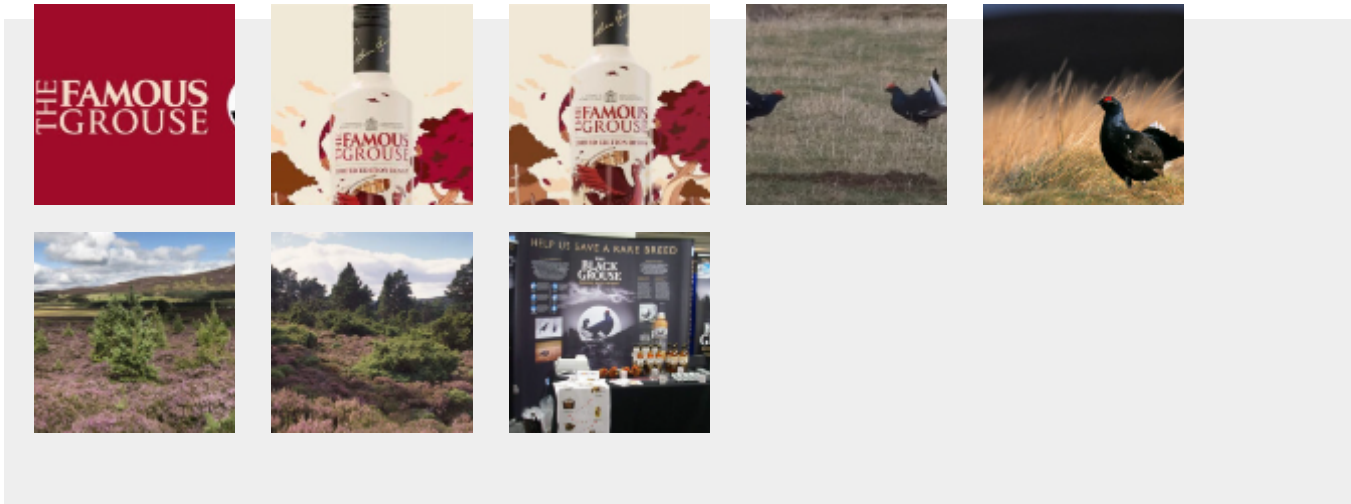
- Marketing Society Star Awards 2012: Bronze award – Cause Related and Charity.
- Institute of Fundraising Awards 2010: Best Charity Corporate Partnership – Highly commended.
- SCVO Scottish Charity Awards 2009: Best Partnership Award - Winner.

Website

<https://www.thefamousgrouse.com/>

Downloads

Photo gallery



Documents

RSPB Celebrating 10 years of partnership (pdf - 5.78 Mo)