



ANIMAL AID BACKGROUND NOTES ON THE SHOOTING INDUSTRY

- Every year in Britain, around 50 million pheasants and partridges are mass-produced like factory-farmed chickens so that they can be shot down by wealthy 'guns', who commonly pay £1,000 per day for the 'privilege'.
- Industry statistics reveal that it costs at least 100 times more to produce a pheasant and to get that bird airborne than the shot bird will ever earn for the shoot when sold to a dealer – clear evidence, if it were needed, that this is an industry dedicated to rearing birds for 'sport' rather than for food (*Shooting Times*, 19 January 2011).
- 'Game bird' production typically involves the use of metal battery cages for breeding birds, as well as industrial hatcheries, sheds and large pens.
- Hundreds of thousands of pheasants and partridges are confined for the whole of their productive lives (around two years) in the kind of battery cages used for egg-laying hens. Incarcerating chickens in such cages has attracted widespread condemnation from the public and politicians across Europe, and moves are afoot to get them banned.
- In 2010, DEFRA Minister, Jim Paice, withdrew a Code of Practice for game bird production that would have outlawed battery cages for breeding pheasants, and replaced it with one that will effectively allow the cages to stay – albeit in their so-called 'enriched' form. This generally means that they have a green plastic 'curtain' set towards the back of the cage for privacy and a piece of dowel suspended on two bricks for perching. In reality, these 'improvements' make little difference to the bleak prisons and the distress of the caged birds.
- One male and between eight and ten female pheasants are imprisoned inside a galvanised steel box fitted with a wire mesh sloping floor (so that the eggs can roll through for easy collection). The roof is usually made from flexible wire netting, though some cages are covered by rigid wire mesh, against which agitated birds repeatedly throw themselves and cause physical injury. The cages are exposed to the elements and the birds have little respite from the wind, rain, frost, snow or sun.
- Partridges are confined in breeding pairs in metal boxes that are correspondingly smaller and just as bleak as the pheasant units.
- Animal Aid's undercover evidence of both the barren and the 'enriched' cage systems demonstrate that the caged birds suffer a high incidence of emaciation, feather-loss and back and head wounds. Many of the pheasants lunge repeatedly at their cage roofs in a forlorn attempt to escape. The resulting damage to their heads is known as 'scalping'.
- In an effort to eliminate the aggression among the birds caused by the crowded conditions in the breeding cages, rearing sheds and release pens, gamekeepers fit the birds with restraining devices over their beaks to prevent them from pecking their cage-mates. Even so, many still suffer injuries and are fitted with protective dressings.
- The eggs are collected, incubated in ovens and, once hatched, the chicks are moved to heated sheds, each typically holding one or two hundred birds. Attached to each shed is a small outdoor covered run, to which the birds have access once they are considered hardy enough.

- At seven or eight weeks they are moved from the sheds to release enclosures – large fenced-in units that can hold thousands of birds.
- As the partridge and pheasant shooting seasons approach (they extend from 1 September to 1 February) the birds are encouraged into fields of cover crops and, come shooting days, are beaten up into the sky to serve as feathered targets.
- Because of the enfeeblement that results from being reared in captivity, around half of the birds die before they can be gunned down. They perish from exposure, starvation, disease, predation or under the wheels of motor vehicles.
- Given that a small group of shooters can kill up to 500 birds a day, many who survive long enough to be shot and recovered are not actually eaten. According to an editorial in *Country Life* magazine (February 1, 2001) some of the 'surplus' is buried in specially dug holes.
- Large numbers of pheasants and partridges inevitably attract – and, in fact, boost the populations of – predator species such as stoats, weasels, foxes and members of the crow family. Gamekeepers deliberately kill them through the use of guns, traps, snares and poison. Species ranging from badgers to cats and dogs – and even protected birds of prey like owls and kestrels – are caught and killed. Millions of animals are slaughtered every year in these 'predator control' programmes. Because some other species, who do not threaten gamebird production (such as ground nesting birds), are not persecuted, the industry promotes its slaughter of wildlife as a vital conservation effort.
- Thousands of tonnes of toxic lead shot are released into the environment every year by shooters.
- The release of scores of millions of gamebirds every autumn presents problems for native wildlife who must compete for food and cover.
- The production and rearing of 'game birds' is not covered by any specific legislation. *The Code of Practice for the Welfare of Gamebirds Reared for Sporting Purposes*, which was heavily influenced by the shooting industry, was adopted under the coalition government as a practical guide under the 2006 Animal Welfare Act (AWA). This Code legitimises the most brutal form of factory farming – including the use of battery cages for breeding game birds – on behalf of an industry dedicated to producing millions of birds every year so that they can be shot down for sport.
- Under Section 4 of the AWA, an offence is committed when an animal is subjected to 'unnecessary suffering' and, under Section 9 of the Act, when a person responsible for an animal fails in his or her duty of care. The suffering experienced by these birds, while they are being fattened for the kill and as they repeatedly run the gauntlet of the guns, cannot plausibly be justified as 'necessary'. Equally, those responsible for the birds are self-evidently failing in their statutory duty of care.
- In Holland, producing birds for 'sport shooting' was first curbed in 1986 and outlawed entirely in 2002. The action was taken because the practice was judged to be morally and environmentally unsupportable. Animal Aid is calling for a similar ban to be introduced into Britain. As a matter of urgency, we are calling for a ban on the use of battery cages.