



This project is supported by NatureScot, through the Green Recovery Fund.

South Scotland Black Grouse Action Plan

Black grouse have shown a decline in both numbers and range in South Scotland in recent decades and has been identified as an area of high priority for conservation action by the Scottish Black Grouse Biodiversity Action Plan Steering Group. A regional strategic conservation plan for black grouse was prepared to outline a strategy to halt the decline, increase numbers and expand the range of black grouse in Southern Scotland.

This action plan will implement the conservation measures highlighted in the strategic plan with the help of conservation organisations, land managers and volunteers who will play an important role in monitoring black grouse, providing habitat enhancements and advice on how to conserve black grouse.

The work will initially be targeted at three core areas across South Scotland where black grouse are most active and will be divided into priority areas defined as East, Central and West. The priority areas were identified using a 5-year average number for males attending leks between 2011 and 2015 which was presented in the 2016 strategic plan for black grouse in South Scotland.

East: Moorfoot Hills – total males 130, total number of leks 28

Central: Tweedsmuir/Moffat Hills – total males 224, total number of leks 78

West: Galloway Forest Park – total males 92, total number of leks 37

There is also a need to review areas outwith the original assessment e.g. South Lanarkshire which falls outwith the reach of these areas but which is likely to hold a key link between GFP and Moffat hills.

Aims

- To stabilise and halt the decline of black grouse within identified priority areas by improving breeding success and increasing adult survival.
- To recover lost ground and expand the range of black grouse.
- To produce distribution maps through coordinated surveys and data collation which will monitor the status of black grouse in South Scotland.
- To provide advice to landowners and managers on how to manage for black grouse through habitat enhancements.

To achieve this a Black Grouse Officer would need to be employed full time to carry out the actions listed within the plan.

Key stakeholders/interested parties

RSPB, Southern Uplands Partnership, GWCT, FLS, Lamemermuir Moorland Group, SOC, Scottish Forestry, Borders Forest Trust, NatureScot, D&G, S Lanarks and Scottish Borders Council, NGO and private landowners and their agents

Title	Outcome	Description	Actions	Target Date and Resources
Black Grouse Priority Areas	<p>Three black grouse priority areas are identified and mapped for the targeting of the projects action plans. These will be split into West (Moorfoots), Central (Tweedsmuir/Moffat Hills) and East (Galloway Forest Park).</p> <p>Effort also need to consider N. Dumfriesshire and S Lanarks where our knowledge is poor.</p>	<p>Identify, develop and agree with stakeholders a map of black grouse priority areas based on the existing core populations in South Scotland where targeting of conservation work, advice and funding will be focused. This should include areas for potential expansion of BG range.</p>	<p>Designate, define and map three areas in the West, Central and East of the South Scotland region as priority areas for black grouse based on areas where core lek sites are abundant and that have potential for future agri-environment climate schemes to target black grouse payments.</p> <p>For each priority area map black grouse distribution, current known landowners, land-use (current and future), existing agri-environment climate schemes, areas where current predator control is in operation.</p> <p>Map areas for potential expansion of black grouse to increase their range.</p> <p>Identify any areas of connectivity that would form a habitat dispersal corridor between leks and/ or priority areas to allow better targeting of new woodlands, agri-environment schemes and to assess wind farm impacts/opportunities to be suitably evaluated.</p>	<p>2021</p> <p>Mapping software</p>
Annual Black Grouse Lek Counts	<p>Through the appointment of a Black Grouse officer, coordinate annual lek counts to monitor</p>	<p>Building upon the 2021 survey, check known and suspected leks and investigate areas of suitable BG habitat</p>	<p>Work to retain the volunteers from the 2021 survey and use the knowledge they have gained from speaking to land managers and from surveying</p>	<p>Ongoing, until population recovers</p>

	<p>the distribution and population of black grouse within the BG priority areas.</p>	<p>which have not previously been surveyed. From this design a standard, repeatable survey methodology to be repeated annually.</p> <p>Talk with local landowners, managers and gamekeepers to gain insight into their local knowledge of where black grouse are lekking.</p> <p>Recruit a volunteer base and provide training.</p>	<p>lek sites to establish a plan for annual lek counts in the black grouse priority areas.</p> <p>Recruit new volunteers and deliver an annual workshop for training in survey techniques.</p> <p>Hold an annual meeting to coordinate a survey within three BG priority areas.</p> <p>Implement a plan for a coordinated survey for the whole of South Scotland on a 5-year recurrence possibly part of a national survey.</p> <p>Collate the results to produce an annual summary report and a newsletter for volunteers and stakeholders.</p>	<p>Funding for Black Grouse Officer: salary, travel expenses, workspace and laptop/phone</p> <p>Volunteer expenses: travel expenses and annual workshop (venue and refreshments)</p>
<p>South Scotland Black Grouse Dataset</p>	<p>Through the appointment of a Black Grouse Officer, collate all available black grouse data for South Scotland and coordinate the management and maintenance of the dataset.</p>	<p>Map the distribution of black grouse using data collated from annual black grouse surveys within the priority areas and additional data collected by other parties. Include data from casual observations eg gamekeepers, farmers, bird watchers and from development related monitoring such as wind farms.</p>	<p>Keep dataset up to date and coordinate any data requests by liaising with stakeholders.</p> <p>Hold workshops for landowners to show value of black grouse data for agri-environment schemes and encourage to report sightings of black grouse.</p> <p>Build trust with South Scotland wide land managers to encourage sharing of black grouse data into the dataset.</p> <p>Upload the compiled data annually to NBN at the appropriate scale (no less than 2x2km)</p> <p>Use the data to identify core lek sites to inform advisory work, casework related to development, targeted conservation work and habitat management plans.</p> <p>Distribute an annual newsletter with a summary report issued to stakeholders and data providers.</p>	<p>Ongoing, until black grouse recover</p> <p>Funding for Black Grouse Officer: salary, travel expenses, workspace and laptop/phone</p> <p>Biological data recording software</p>

<p>Black Grouse advisory work</p>	<p>Through appointment of a Black Grouse Officer, provide landowners and managers within the three priority areas with land use advice for improving black grouse habitat.</p>	<p>Black grouse may occur on land where landowners lack advice or are unaware of funding opportunities to provision management for black grouse. The delivery of workshops aimed at providing advice on practical measures and applying for SRDP schemes would give landowners access to these opportunities.</p>	<p>Develop and hold workshops within each BG priority area for landowners and managers to provide advice and guidance on how to manage for black grouse and how to apply to SRDP schemes.</p> <p>Provide opportunities to hold individual meetings with landowners and managers to look at specific landholdings with a view to assess eligibility for SRDP schemes and offer site specific management advice.</p>	<p>2026</p> <p>Funding for Black Grouse Officer: salary, travel expenses, workspace and laptop/phone</p>
<p>Habitat management plans</p>	<p>Through the appointment of a black grouse officer, develop black grouse habitat management plans that can be used to promote habitat enhancement for black grouse at key lek sites where black grouse are active within the priority areas.</p>	<p>Implement habitat enhancements through developing habitat management plans for core lek sites and dispersal corridors between core sites within each BG priority area, which provides a mosaic of habitats for breeding, cover and food source.</p>	<p>Where habitat management plans exist for sites within the BG priority areas, promote and implement actions from these plans. Where plans were drawn up for existing lek sites in the past, re-visit these for updating and visit landowners to assess success or failures of previous plans.</p> <p>Within each black grouse priority area, identify and target habitat work at core lek sites (using data from the 2021 survey and data collated into single South Scotland dataset) where black grouse are active and develop habitat management plans on a site-by-site basis with land managers.</p> <p>Link up the estates which hold core leks by forming black grouse management groups within priority areas to promote working together and communication to encourage landscape scale conservation. East: moorland estates, tenant farmers and Glentress Forest Central: moorland estates and Borders Forest Trust. West – largely FLS but Galloway Biosphere could have a support role in this linking public to private estate.</p>	<p>2026</p> <p>Funding for Black Grouse Officer: salary, travel expenses, workspace and laptop/phone</p>

			<p>Maintain connectivity between core lek sites within the priority areas through identifying habitat corridors and implementing habitat enhancements of corridors to allow for dispersal between groups GGLP is already taking this approach).</p> <p>Maintain connectivity between sites at Tweedsmuir/Moffatt hills and Langholm through a habitat corridor through Craik Forest where habitat enhancements are targeted to keep the corridor open.</p> <p>Create habitat corridors to connect and encourage dispersal between the three priority areas to retain genetic diversity in the South Scotland population, particularly between Galloway Forest Park (East) and Tweedsmuir/Moffat Hills (Central). N Dumfriesshire and S Lanrakshire may be important here.</p> <p>Map the habitat within each of the three BG priority areas and conduct assessments of the vegetation.</p> <p>Monitor changes in habitat in response to management and in turn any changes in black grouse distribution, if resources allow.</p>	
<p>South Scotland Black Grouse Study Group</p>	<p>Through the appointment of a black grouse officer, coordinate a black grouse study group.</p> <p>It is felt such a group is needed anyway, but it will be hard to establish without support.</p>	<p>Forming a South Scotland black grouse study group would create a long term, more permanent effort dedicated to black grouse in South Scotland. Made up of stakeholders and coordinated by a black grouse officer, it would allow the pooling of resources and advice for black grouse work</p>	<p>Form a black grouse study group resourced by key black grouse stakeholders.</p> <p>Facilitation of annual lek counts and collection/management of black grouse data.</p> <p>Annual group meeting.</p> <p>Annual newsletter and report</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Funding for Black Grouse Officer: salary, travel expenses, workspace and laptop/phone</p>

		across the region and would facilitate annual led counts.		
Community engagement and education	Through the employment of a Black Grouse Officer, promote the importance of black grouse conservation in South Scotland through community engagement and education programmes to leave a legacy for black grouse through the people of South Scotland.	Champion black grouse conservation through community engagement and education programmes with local schools.	<p>Present talks to local groups throughout South Scotland and communicate opportunities for volunteering with lek counts.</p> <p>Develop education programme to be delivered to school groups.</p> <p>Promote a code of conduct to bird watchers and photographers when observing black grouse to minimise disturbance.</p>	<p>2026</p> <p>Funding for Black Grouse Officer: salary, travel expenses, workspace and laptop/phone</p>