





Appendix 1: Review of League Against Cruel Sports (LACS) campaign statements on pheasant shooting on University of Reading land.

The League Against Cruel Sports (LACS) website carries a briefing page in relation to pheasant shooting on University of Reading land at Hall Farm. This paper assesses the reliability of the statements made in that briefing. It would be usual to assess the scientific evidence supporting such claims, but no supporting evidence is cited by LACS in their briefing. Where appropriate, evidence contrary to claims made by LACS is presented.

Each claim was assessed as follows:

-  No evidence is used to support the claim or is very weak or misrepresented
-  The evidence used to support the claim is partial or other sources dispute it
-  The claim is well supported by the evidence.

“Large numbers of factory-farmed pheasants have been released on the University of Reading’s land purely to be shot for ‘sport’.”

	Claim: This statement is deliberately misleading and not supported by available evidence.
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The term ‘factory-farmed’ is an emotive term and suggests mass production and poor welfare for the animals produced. Communication with the shoot tenant reveals that birds are sourced from a registered game hatchery within five miles of Hall Farm. Suppliers registered with the Game Farmers Association must adhere to the standards set-out in the Code of practice for the welfare of gamebirds reared for sporting purposes (2009)¹. This guidance ensures the welfare of gamebirds from hatching to release in accordance with Schedule 9 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006.

The term ‘large-numbers’ is subjective, and it is not clear what comparator is used by LACS. It is therefore worth considering whether the number of birds released is likely to have a detrimental impact on the environment.

The shoot tenant confirms that their practices adhere to the Code of Good Shooting Practice (2012)². The Code, based on research conducted by the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT), provides recommendations on numbers of birds released in comparison with pen sizes. It recommends that shoots should avoid releasing more than 1,000 pheasants per hectare of pen, and more than 700 per hectare of pen in ancient seminatural woodland.


The shoot tenant suggests that release densities are 1/3 of the recommended maximum. In regards release of pheasants, a study by Mustin *et al* (2011)³ suggests “*in areas where good habitat management is combined with low release densities, or areas that work to promote breeding populations of gamebirds, impacts may be largely positive*”. Further, a large-scale survey of 159 broad-leaved woodlands in England concluded that the impacts of pheasant releasing on vegetation structure and bird communities was positive or benign, rather than negative (Draycott *et al*. 2007)⁴.

The final part of the statement to examine is LACS assertion that birds are shot ‘*purely for sport*’. This statement is deliberately misleading and without evidence base. The statement fails to consider the wide range of motivations for individuals to partake in game shooting, or the benefits which are delivered by the activity. The benefits delivered through game shooting are well documented in the The Value of Shooting: The economic, environmental and social benefits of shooting sports to the UK (PACEC 2014)⁵.

Personal motivation for game shooting includes the important contribution it makes to participants’ physical, personal and social well-being. The Personal Value of Shooting⁶ summarises results from a survey in 2015, which investigated the well-being benefits people receive from taking part in shooting, beating, picking up, and habitat management.


Finally, use of the phrase ‘purely for sport’ suggests that shot game has no food value. The shoot tenants confirm that all game shot is consumed, with it being shared amongst the team of guns, beaters, pickers-up and others involved in the shoot operations. Wider evidence suggest a strong growth in the sale and consumption of game meat (Poultry and Game Meat - UK - October 2015⁷).

“Students and alumni will be shocked to hear this is happening at their university and no doubt consternation will grow if the university doesn’t act quickly to end it.”

	<p>Claim: This statement is deliberately misleading and not supported by available evidence.</p>
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This statement is conjecture, unsupported by evidence. It is deliberately misleading and projects opinions onto others which they may not share.

“With more than 69 percent of the public opposing shooting birds for ‘sport’ there is clear support for the University of Reading to commit to ending shooting at Hall Farm.”

	<p>Claim: A YouGov survey commissioned by LACS and Animal Aid supports this statistic. However, the question considers only ‘sport’ as a reason for shooting birds. The failure to consider the wider benefits delivered through game shooting render the survey highly questionable in its objectivity.</p>
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A recent independent survey commissioned by BASC found that 69% of non-shooting respondents were supportive of live quarry shooting when considered alongside the conservation, economic and wellbeing benefits it delivers.

“Leasing land for game bird shooting has become increasingly controversial because of the routine damage caused to wildlife and the environment.”

	<p>Claim: This statement is misleading and not supported by evidence, and ignores evidence to the contrary.</p>
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BASC and other organisations promote and recommend best practice stocking and release

guidelines in the Code of Good Shooting Practice. These stocking guidelines are based on the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust’s Guidelines for Sustainable Gamebird Releasing (GWCT 2006)⁸, which were developed using evidence from research conducted by the GWCT.

The underlying objective of woodland creation or management for game is to provide a positive conservation balance (Woodland Trust & GWCT n.d.). Pheasants are primarily birds of woodland edges, and show a strong preference for shrubby cover (Robertson, Woodburn, & Hill, 1993⁹; Robertson et al. 1993¹⁰). Therefore, a significant amount of habitat management is focused on managing woodlands, woodland margins and hedgerows, to maximise the quantity and quality of these features, with 41% of UK shooting providers reporting that they create or maintain hedgerows and 37% creating or maintaining small woodland ‘coverts’ (PACEC, 2014). This can lead to shooting estates having up to ten times the woodland cover of non-shooting estates and for hedgerows to be better connected to woodlands (Oldfield et al. 2003)¹¹.

Woodland management for shooting usually improves habitat for a broad range of wildlife, and game crops provide important cover and food for many farm and woodland birds in winter (GWCT 2003¹² & 2006, also see BASC white papers on environmental benefits of lowland game shooting in the UK, and the role of shooting in landscape scale land management¹³).

Land managed for shooting is more likely to use traditional, labour-intensive, woodland management techniques, such as coppicing, which are beneficial to birds and other wildlife (Fuller & Green 1998¹⁴; Fuller, Stuttard, & Ray 1989¹⁵) and encourage the growth of understorey vegetation (Draycott et al. 2007). Abundance of breeding birds increases in the presence of game management, which is important in increasing populations of nationally declining passerines (Stoate & Szczur 2001¹⁶).

It is likely that releasing very large numbers of pheasants into a pen for a long duration can result in changes to ground flora, yet this can be controlled for by ensuring stocking densities are not too high (GWCT 2003). A large-scale survey of 159 broad-leaved woodlands in England concluded that the impacts of pheasant releasing on vegetation structure and bird communities was positive or benign, rather than negative (Draycott et al. 2007).

“Pheasants and partridges, which are born on factory farms before being released, are often only wounded when shot out of the sky by gunmen rather than being killed instantly. Many of the birds hit the ground suffering from painful injuries, only to then have their necks broken or be clubbed over the head with a beater’s stick.”

Claim: This statement is misleading and not supported by evidence.



Respect for Quarry; a code of practice (BASC 2010¹⁷) provides guidance to shooters to minimise the likelihood of wounding loss, from appropriate gun and cartridge combinations, range judging, use of trained dogs for the retrieval of birds, and ensuring birds are appropriately handled to ensure fitness for human consumption.

“Native predators, including foxes, stoats, weasels and corvids, are also trapped and shot by gamekeepers to ensure a plentiful supply of game birds for shooting parties.”

Claim:



This statement is misleading and not supported by evidence. This statement is heavily biased, and ignores the benefits of predator control.

Evidence suggests that the positive effects of predator control on breeding success affect other, non-game, species. Ground nesting birds might be expected to benefit from the control of mammalian and avian predators and several studies have shown the control of predators, particularly foxes and crows, to have positive impacts on breeding success, densities and diversity of waders in the UK.

When combined with habitat management, predator control has been found to locally reverse the declines seen in farmland bird species such as song thrush, whitethroat, dunnock and blackbird (Stoate & Szczur 2001).

The shoot tenant confirms that control of foxes by shooting occurs on the shoot. This is done to minimise predation of game birds, ground nesting farmland birds and minimise impacts on the farms sheep farming enterprise. Control of avian and mammalian predators is widely recognised as a conservation tool, endorsed by Songbird Survival Trust and conducted by RSPB on a number of their reserves.

The shoot tenant confirm that they do not undertake trapping or snaring on site. This is not because of welfare concerns of these legal / legitimate control measures but because of the labour required to set and regularly check traps and snares.

“These practices upset the delicate ecology of the countryside and result in an overall decrease in biodiversity, when wildlife is driven out or forced to compete for food and habitat with large numbers of non-native game birds.”

Claim:



This statement is not supported by evidence, and ignores contrary evidence that shows a net-benefit to biodiversity from game shooting and associated management practices.

Woodland management for shooting usually improves habitat for a broad range of wildlife, and game crops provide important cover and food for many farm and woodland birds in winter (GWCT 2003 & 2006, also see BASC white papers on environmental benefits of lowland game shooting in the UK, and the role of shooting in landscape scale land management).

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Food hoppers and feeding rides are used by shoots to encourage pheasants and partridges to use specific areas. Typically, only around a quarter of this food is eaten by gamebirds (Sánchez-García, Buner, & Aebischer, 2015¹⁸) with songbirds consuming a significant proportion. This can increase overwinter survival for some species (Siriwardena, Calbrade, & Vickery, 2008¹⁹), and is likely to improve breeding success (Stoate & Szczur, 2001). This could be especially important for species such as yellowhammer, linnets and corn bunting which are known to use hoppers (Brickle, 1997²⁰).

References

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- ⁴ Draycott, R. A. H., Hoodless, A. N. & Sage, R. B. (2007). Effects of pheasant management on vegetation and birds in lowland woodlands. *Journal of Applied Ecology*, 41(1), 334-341.
- ⁵ Public and Corporate Economic Consultants (2014) The Value of Shooting: The economic, environmental and social benefits of shooting sports to the UK.
<http://www.shootingfacts.co.uk/>
- ⁶ The Personal Value of Shooting
<https://basc.org.uk/wpcontent/uploads/downloads/2016/10/The-personal-value-of-shooting-LOW-RES.pdf>
- ⁷ Poultry and Game Meat - UK - October 2015 <http://store.mintel.com/poultry-and-gamemeat-uk-october-2015>
- ⁸ Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust (2006). *Guidelines for sustainable gamebird releasing*, available at: <https://www.gwct.org.uk/media/208606/Sustainable-gamebird-releasing.pdf>
- ⁹ Robertson, P. A., Woodburn, M. I. A., & Hill, D. A. (1993). Factors affecting winter pheasant density in British woodlands. *Journal of Applied Ecology*, 30, 459-464.
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- ¹¹ Oldfield, T. E. E., Smith, R. J., Harrop, S. R., & Leader-Williams, N. (2003). Field sports and conservation in the United Kingdom. *Nature*, 423(6939), 531–3.
<http://doi.org/10.1038/nature01678>
- ¹² Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust (2003). *Woodland conservation and pheasants*, available at: <https://www.gwct.org.uk/media/208626/woodland-conservation-and-pheasants.pdf>

¹³ Available at: <http://basc.org.uk/wp-content/plugins/download-monitor/download.php?id=1216>

¹⁴ Fuller, R. J., & Green, G. H. (1998). Effects of woodland structure on breeding bird populations in stands of coppiced lime (*Tilia cordata*) in western England over a 10-year period. *Forestry*, 71(3), 199–218. <http://doi.org/10.1093/forestry/71.3.199>

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¹⁷ BASC. (2010). Respect for Quarry; a code of practice. https://basc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2013/02/respect_for_quarry_2010.pdf

¹⁸ Sánchez-García, C., Buner, F., & Aebischer, N. J. (2015). Supplementary winter food for gamebirds through feeders: Which species actually benefit? *The Journal of Wildlife Management*, 79(5), 832–845. <http://doi.org/10.1002/jwmg.889>

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