



CONSERVATION RESEARCH NEWS

Compiled by Mark Avery



This feature, contributed by the RSPB's Research Department, reports the most interesting recent scientific news relevant to the conservation of Western Palearctic species.

Grouse do not sit on the fence

A recently published study demonstrates that grouse species appear to be particularly vulnerable to killing themselves by flying into deer-fences. The study by Dr David Baines of the Game Conservancy Trust and Dr Ron Summers of the RSPB built on previous work which had shown that Capercaillies *Tetrao urogallus* suffer high mortality from fence strikes in two native pinewoods of Abernethy and Glen Tanar. In this study, 27 5-km lengths of deer-fence were surveyed throughout a year. The study sites were spread widely through the Highlands and included fences next to a variety of different woodland types. Each month, each fence was checked and signs of collisions were noted. Most (93%) of the recorded collisions involved grouse species. Red Grouse *Lagopus lagopus* accounted for two-thirds of all collisions; Black Grouse *Tetrao tetrix* and Capercaillie each accounted for 13%.

Some interesting patterns emerged: Red Grouse collisions were most frequent in spring and on fences surrounding young plantations; Black Grouse collisions were also most frequent in spring, but in areas with low cover of grass and heather *Calluna/Erica*; Capercaillie collisions were most frequent in autumn, adjacent to woodland of native Scots Pine *Pinus sylvestris* and near areas of bilberry *Vaccinium*.

It is somewhat ironic that a measure which will aid regeneration and growth of forests, from which woodland grouse should benefit eventually, has a large harmful effect on Black Grouse and Capercaillie, both declining woodland grouse. The authors point out that, from these grouse species' points of view, the preferred method of protecting trees from deer would probably be deer-culling rather than deer-fences.

BAINES, D., & SUMMERS, R. W. 1997. Assessment of bird collisions with deer fences in Scottish forests. *J. Appl. Ecol.* 34: 941-948.

Redshank favoured by grazing saltmarsh

Almost half of the UK's breeding Common Redshanks *Tringa totanus* nest on saltmarsh. A study at The Wash by Dr Ken Norris, Tony Cook, Barry O'Dowd and Chris Durdin of the RSPB showed that Redshank densities were highest in areas dominated by Sea Couch *Elymus pycnathus*. Also, Redshank densities were higher in areas grazed by cattle than in ungrazed areas. The study suggests that grazing at a level of one cow per hectare through the year provides the mixture of tussocks and shorter vegetation favoured by nesting Common Redshanks.

Over the next decades, there will be an inevitable loss of saltmarsh due to rising sea level. This study suggests a management regime that would help to maximise the value, for one important bird species, of the remaining saltmarsh habitat. It is also likely, however, that some new saltmarshes will be created as part of 'soft engineering' work along the coast, and this study provides a better basis for their management, too.

NORRIS, K., COOK, T., O'DOWD, B., & DURDIN, C. 1997. The density of Redshank *Tringa totanus* breeding on the salt-marshes of the Wash in relation to habitat and its grazing management. *J. Appl. Ecol.* 34: 999-1013.

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