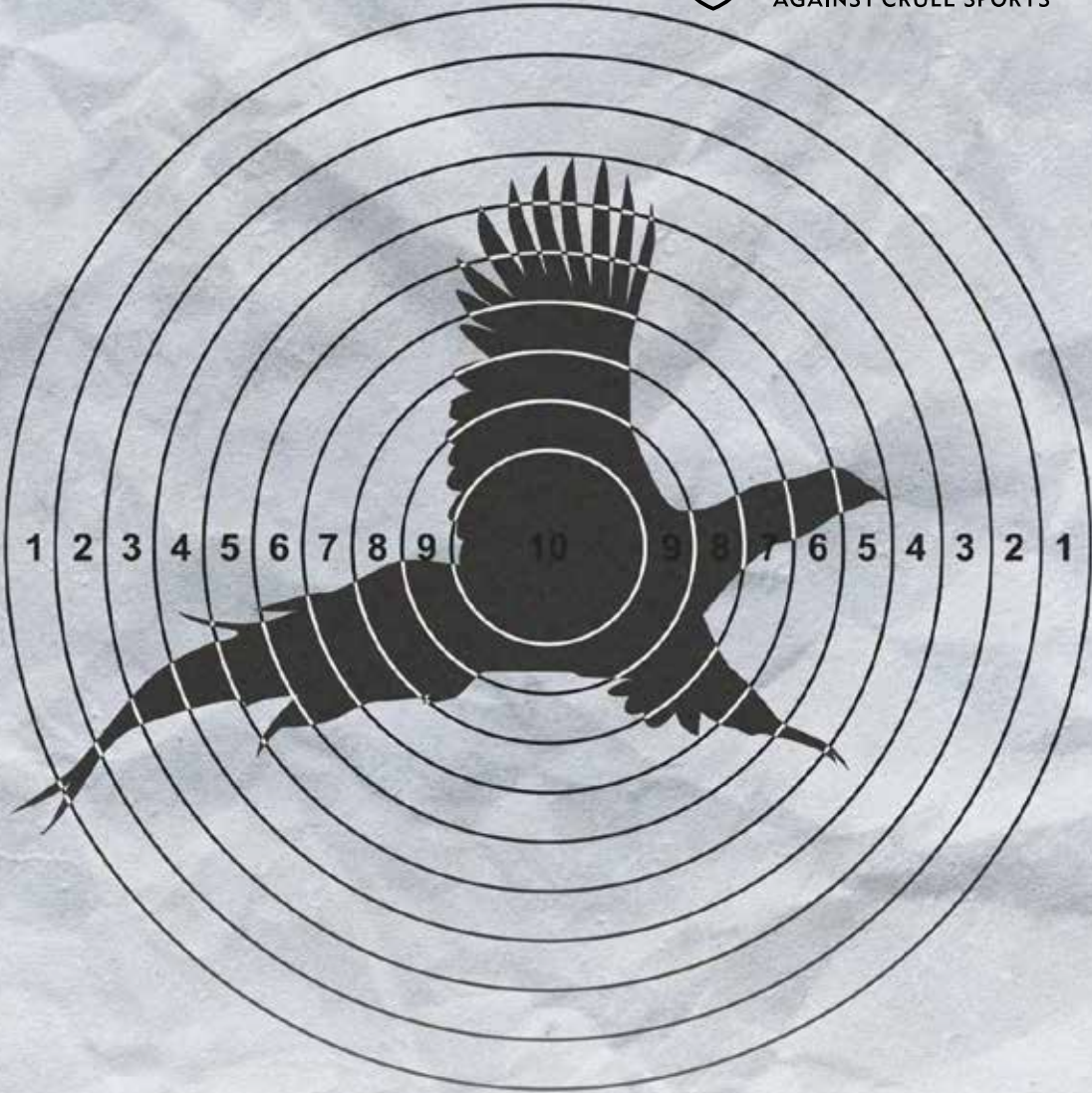




LEAGUE
AGAINST CRUEL SPORTS



SHOOTING

A guide to shooting in England & Wales

Note: there are different laws for firearms in England & Wales, Scotland & Northern Ireland. This information leaflet focuses on England & Wales.

Why Have We Produced This Leaflet?

The League Against Cruel Sports campaign to end shooting which includes the caged breeding of game birds for commercial shooting estates and associated predator management (snares/traps/shooting).

For more information visit our website [here](#)

This leaflet is a compilation of different 'non-League' related issues that are frequently referred to our supporter-funded [Animal Crimewatch](#) team for help and advice.



Firearms

Let's start with the basics by explaining from a legal perspective what a firearm is. We will focus on:

- Shotguns
- Rifles
- Ammunition
- Air weapons



Shotguns, rifles, and air weapons are all called firearms in law because they are a lethal barrelled weapon of any description from which any shot, bullet or missile is capable of being discharged.

If you want to read more click [here](#) for the Firearms Act 1968.

the law on firearms separates them into:

Shotguns

[Section 1 Firearms \(Handguns and rifles\)](#)

Air weapons

Section 5 firearms

(military, guns hidden as something else)

Handguns

Since the Dunblane school shooting in 1996, all handguns are now illegal with some exceptions.

There are legal restrictions for people with criminal convictions.

Click [here](#) for information.

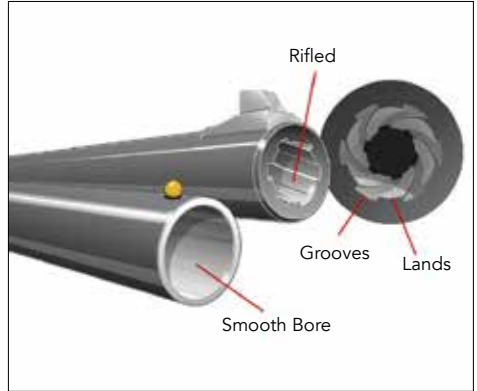


Shotguns v firearms

Shotguns are smooth barrellled, and a rifle (firearm) has a grooved barrel.

Shotguns must have a barrel no shorter than 24" (60cm)

This includes a fold down 'poacher shotguns'



Most shotguns are either 'full bore' sometimes called 12 gauge

A useful chart for calibres of ammunition for shooting species.



or the smaller, less powerful .410



Certificates

The Firearms Act 1968 states you must have a licence to have a gun (other than air guns) and this includes ammunition. Each gun held on a certificate has to be authorised for a specific use; for example, shooting deer, clay pigeon shooting, etc

Ages

Anyone under 14 cannot be issued with a firearms certificate.

Shotgun Certificate

APPLICATION FOR THE GRANT OR RENEWAL OF A FIREARM AND/OR SHOTGUN CERTIFICATE

FORM 100 (REV. 2011)

PLEASE READ THE NOTES CAREFULLY (PAGES 13-16) BEFORE COMPLETING THE APPLICATION FORM

You may type your responses except where your signature is required. Otherwise, you must use black ink and write in **BOLD CAPITALS** throughout, except where signing. A continuation sheet is provided at page 7 for further information.

I am applying for (tick each box which applies)

Firearm certificate Grant Renewal Shotgun certificate Grant Renewal

Do you wish to apply for a shotgun certificate which will expire at the same time as your firearm certificate? Yes No

PART A: Personal details	PART B: Personal health & medical declaration <i>If necessary, continue on page 7</i> Important: Read notes 9-14 before completion.
1. Gender <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female	10. Have you ever been diagnosed with or treated for any of the medical conditions in note 1? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
2. Title	11. Terms of your GP or GP practice a. Name
3. Surname	b. Address
4. Pseudonyms (state all)	c. Postcode
5. If you have an employer and a name other than that given in answer to questions 3 and 4 please complete below: (include surname(s)) Previous name(s) (p/s)	d. Telephone
6. Home address	e. E-mail
a. Postcode	12. Details of all previous GP practices during the past 10 years (not more than 4). Continue on page 7 if necessary.
b. Home tel number	a. Name
c. Mobile number	b. Address
d. Home E-mail	c. Postcode
Any previous home addresses in the last 5 years? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No (if yes please give details on page 2)	d. Telephone
7. Height	e. E-mail
8. Date of birth	13. Have there any periods in the past 10 years when you have not been registered with a GP or have consulted medical practitioners other than at your GP practice? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
9. Place of birth	
10. Nationality	
11. Occupation	
a. Work address	
b. Postcode	
c. Work tel number	
d. Work E-mail	

Shotguns

Shotguns must be held on a Section 2 (Firearms Act 1968) Shotgun Certificate.

A licence holder can have as many shotguns as they can safely accommodate, without having to prove any reason for needing each individual weapon.

Ages

There's no minimum age for the possession of a shotgun certificate.

A person under the age of 15 may have an assembled in certain circumstances.



Air weapons

When it comes to air guns it's all about how powerful the air pressure to fire the pellet is (muzzle velocity).

In law it must be under 12ft lbs muzzle velocity. If you want to understand you can watch this [Youtube video](#)

The general law is that you have to be 18 or over to possess an air weapon – but there are a few exceptions where under 18's can have an air weapon – if you want to know more click [here](#).

Some further reading on air weapons and the law can be found [here](#).

There are slightly different rules for air guns in Scotland because they all need to have a [licence](#)

There are two calibres of air pellet which are .177 (smaller) and .22 (larger).



Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 Section 38: Air weapons: age limits

This amends sections 22, 23 and 24 of the Firearms Act 1968 to change the age at which a young person may own an air weapon and to tighten up on when it may be used unsupervised.

The present limit is raised from 14 to 17.

It will be an offence for anybody to give an air weapon to a person under 17.

This means that no-one under 17 will be able to have an air weapon in their possession at any time unless supervised by someone who is aged at least 21 or as part of an approved target shooting club or shooting gallery.

However, 14-16-year-olds (inclusive) will be permitted to have air weapons unsupervised when on private land, provided they have the consent of the occupier.

Firearms and young people

If you want to read more about the laws regarding Section 1 Firearms, Shotguns or Air Weapons please click [here](#) for a simple guide by Norfolk Police.

It's illegal to possess, purchase, or acquire any weapon of whatever description designed or adapted for the discharge of any noxious liquid, gas or other thing.

Section 5(1) (b) Prohibited firearm (click here for more information).

Example 1: There have been incidents where hunt staff have forcibly taken (robbery) spray bottles with citronella from hunt saboteurs and used it to spray the faces of the saboteurs.



Example 2: There have been incidents where hunt staff have spray bottle of fox urine and have sprayed the 'noxious substance' in the face of hunt saboteurs.



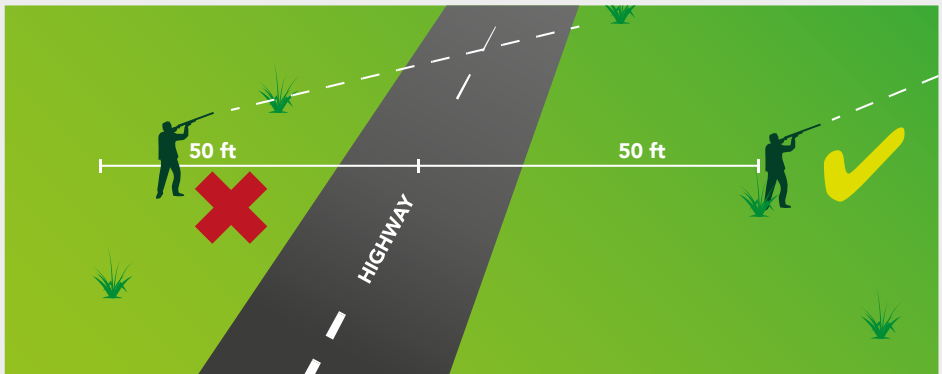
Firearms in public places

The starting point to this is, you cannot have a firearm, shotgun, air weapon (loaded or not) in a public place. This includes imitation firearms without lawful authority or reasonable excuse, (proof lies with you).

Shooting on, near or over a public footpath

This is complicated to explain but the essence is this:

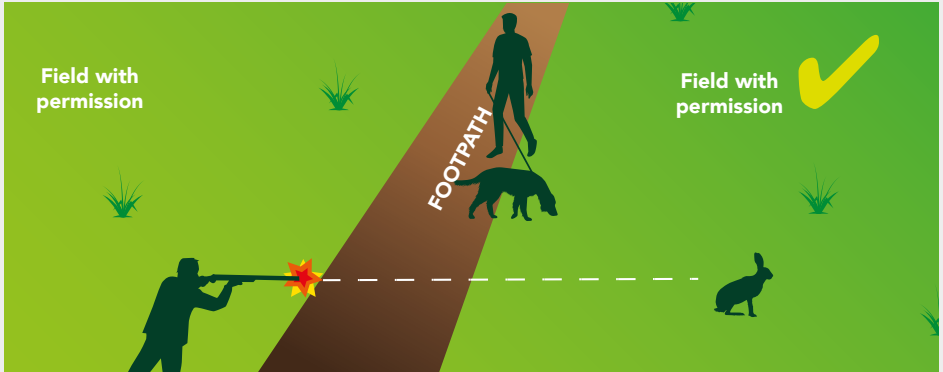
Section 161 (2) of the Highways Act 1980 makes it an offence in England and Wales without lawful authority or reasonable excuse to discharge any firearm within 50 feet of the centre of a highway which consists of or comprises a carriageway, and in consequence a user of the carriageway is injured, interrupted or endangered.



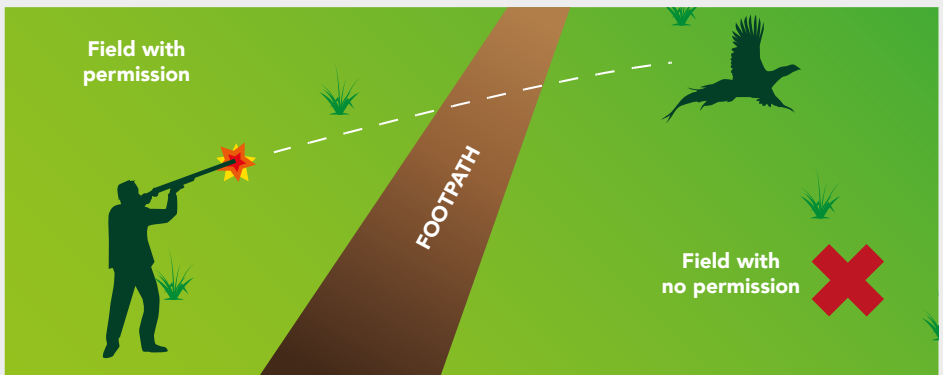
For the purposes of Section 161 (2) of the Highways Act 1980 (as amended), a 'highway' is restricted to a public right of way for the passage of vehicles and does not include footpaths, cycle tracks or bridleways. Therefore the 50 feet rule described above does not apply to rights of ways that cross private land, such as footpaths.

It's important to remember the discharge of a firearm is not prohibited in itself. It must also be proved there was an injury, or that someone's passage was interrupted or interfered with – for example, if they have been forced to make a detour.

When the footpath runs across private land, the ownership of the land and sporting rights are unaltered. Therefore, a person with the shooting/sporting rights has as much right to shoot on or over footpaths on their land as members of the public have to walk (to pass and repass) along it as a means of communication. So, the public and the shooters have a concurrent right to the footpath, and it's up to both parties not to obstruct the other.



However, if you shoot over footpaths, only do so if you have permission to 'drop shot' over the land on the other side. To fire onto land that you have no right to shoot into or over is 'constructive trespass', a civil matter.



<https://www.shootinguk.co.uk/answers/what-is-the-closest-to-a-footpath-you-can-legally-use-a-shotgun-20105>

https://basc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2013/01/rights_of_way_access_england_wales_2012.pdf

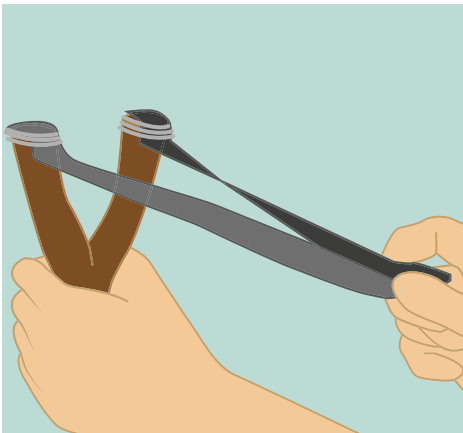
Catapults

Catapults (slingshots) are not a firearm, but they are commonly used to 'shoot' wildlife and this section provides some basic information.

It isn't illegal to have a catapult in a public place, but if it's intended to be used to cause injury or damage, as it could be classified as an offensive weapon.

It's the purpose of its use that is the important factor. If the missile kills or injures a bird then potentially [Sect.1 Wildlife and Countryside Act \(WC&A\) 1981](#) crime(s). If used to kill or take animals on [schedule 5 W&CA Section 9](#) offence.

Also, if they kill on land without permission, then poaching offences can be considered. This includes rabbits (if they have no permission) [Section 11G W&CA](#)



For example, a person may be driving along a country lane with their window open and see a pheasant, shoot and kill it. As they have no permission, they have committed a poaching offence. [Section 19 W&CA 1981](#) gives powers for a constable to stop and search suspects with reasonable cause that any person is committing or has committed an offence within the W&CA.

Crossbows

[Section 3 Crossbows Act 1987](#)

- No one under 18 can have possession of a crossbow (unless under the supervision of someone 21 years or over).

This does not apply to a crossbow with a draw weight of less than 1.4KG [Section 5](#)

[Section 11\(1\)\(b\) Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981](#)

makes it illegal to use any crossbow or bow to hunt and kill or take any wild animal.



Shooting foxes

In law, a fox is not a protected species, and they can be shot. This is usually referred to as pest control.

Shooting foxes at night

The practice of shooting foxes at night using either a 'night sight', thermal sight or using a high-powered light commonly known as lamping, is legal assuming the landowner's permission has been granted.

Shooting foxes in a cage or snare

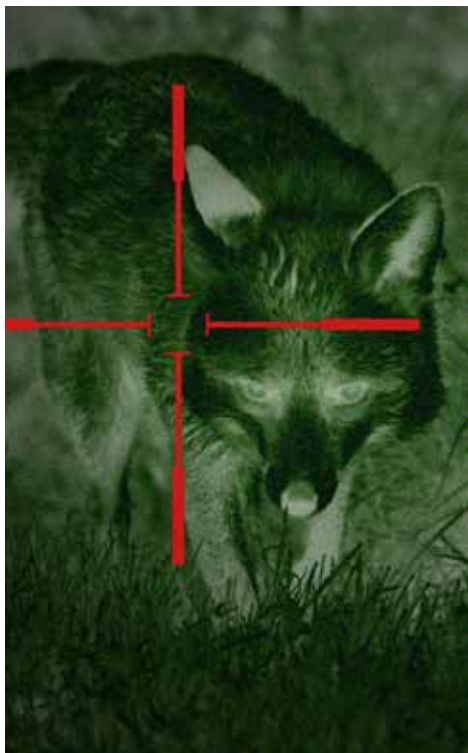
If a fox has been 'reduced into the control of man' (caught in a trap or snare) its status transfers to becoming a protected species for the purposes of [section 2\(b\) Animal Welfare Act 2006](#). and therefore the fox must be dispatched humanely without causing any distress or unnecessary suffering.

Disposal of fox carcass

The Animal Crimewatch team sometimes get reports of dead (shot) foxes being discarded in hedgerows or displayed as a 'trophy'. Old gamekeeping practices called this a 'gibbet' – displaying of shot vermin along a line/string.

Further reading

The British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC) have produced a guide to shooting at night <https://basc.org.uk/codes-of-practice/night-shooting/>



Shooting wood pigeons/corvids & other species

The killing, injuring or taking of all wild birds is illegal under [Section 1](#) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 unless permitted under a General Licence issued by the relevant country (England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland) or allowed within the relevant shooting season. There is no 'shooting season' for wood pigeons.

The controls for shooting wood pigeons and certain other species falls under General Licences which are reviewed annually. These licences are a not a physical licence a person has to apply for and possess, but more of a general exemption to the law if the conditions of the licence are adhered to.

(GL42) General Licence to kill or take certain species of wild birds to prevent serious damage

Permitted target species for which action is to be taken	Livestock direct attack	Livestock feedstuffs spread disease	Crops fruit vegetables	Fisheries	Inland waters
Canada goose	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓
Carrion crow	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
Egyptian goose	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗
Feral pigeon	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗
Jackdaw	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
Magpie	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
Monk parakeet	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗
Ring-necked parakeet	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗
Rook	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
Wood pigeon	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗

To shoot wood pigeon, the person must be authorised to do so; this includes the owner or occupier of the land or any person authorised by the owner or occupier of that land.

This General Licence also has 5 conditions to comply with

Condition 1. Alternative lawful methods

Condition 2. Protecting animal welfare

Condition 3. Trapping birds

Condition 4. Using this licence on a site of special scientific interest (SSSI)

Condition 5. Using this licence on or near some European sites

Shooting squirrels

It's legal to humanely shoot grey squirrels using firearm including an air rifle.

Shooting rabbits

The shooting of rabbits is legal provided it takes place on land that:

- belongs to the shooter, or
- permission given by the landowner

Daytime poaching (shooting) rabbits

It's illegal (daytime) poaching under [**Section 30 Game Act 1831**](#)

Note the reference to a cony/ conies is old terminology for a rabbit.



Night poaching (shooting) rabbits

Under [Section 1 Night Poaching Act 1828](#) it's an offence at night to unlawfully take or destroy any game or rabbits on any land, open or enclosed, including public roads, paths and verges.

Night is one hour after sunset to one hour before sunrise.

It's an offence to enter or be on any land, with any gun, net engine (snare) or other instrument (lamp, slip lead) for the purpose of taking game.

The use of a light (lamping) to take game birds is an offence under [section 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981](#).



Firearms and trespass

The fundamental principle is that all land belongs to someone, and a person who (without permission) enters land may be trespassing. In most cases trespass is a civil (not criminal) matter. Trespass in England & Wales is different to trespass in Scotland where there is 'right to roam.' There are some criminal (more serious) versions of trespass, such as [Aggravated Trespass](#), and [Trespass with a Firearm](#). For more information you can download and read the League's [information leaflet](#) on hunt trespass.

Who owns wild animals on land?

Wild animals are not subject to absolute ownership. The owner of the land on which there are wild animals only has a 'qualified

property' in them. This entitles the landowner to hunt, catch or kill the wild animals on their property.

Once the wild animals are caught and killed, they will become the property of the owner.

Sporting rights

Sporting Rights will be detailed in the Title Deeds of land/property and can be held by the landowner or can be transferred to a third party. Depending upon the precise terms of those sporting rights, this might entitle them to be on the land for the purpose of shooting. For further information on sporting rights we recommend you seek professional advice from a solicitor.



Airspace trespass

A person who owns land also owns the airspace above it, up to a height required for the reasonable enjoyment of the land. If someone shoots a firearm over the land without the landowner's permission this could be considered to be constructive trespass, which is a civil matter.

Trespass with a firearm

Section 20 (2) of the Firearms Act 1968 shows it is a (serious) crime to trespass on land with a firearm, or imitation firearm. Note the legislation doesn't say the firearm has to be loaded, nor does it stipulate it is in a cover/sleeve or not.

Hunting with hounds and firearms

It can be expected that hunts (fox, deer, stag and mink) with a pack of hounds and terrier men may have authorised firearms certificate holders amongst the hunt staff who will be in possession of a firearm.

In the event the hunt staff trespass on land AND it can be shown the hunt member has a firearm, the offence of trespass with a firearm can be considered.



What can I do?

If a person is trespassing on your land, you will need to provide evidence of the trespass (prove your ownership of that land) as well as be able to provide sufficient evidence (clear film footage, images) of the person with a firearm.

Do not confront the person (they have a firearm) but if this is happening in real time, call 999.

If this has happened historically and the threat/risk has gone, call 101 to report the crime.

Gamebirds

There are a number of birds classified as gamebirds and will have their own shooting 'open' and 'closed' season when shooting cannot take place. For further details on shooting season please read our [season calendar](#).

Grouse

(12 August – 10 December)

Pheasants

(1 October to 1 February)

Partridge

(1 September – 1 February)

Pheasants and partridge are non-native species and are either cage bred and reared in the UK or imported as eggs from Europe (France) for production in the UK.

The total number of gamebirds actually released in the UK is unknown because the industry is pretty much unregulated, and the only figures are estimates.

The last formal estimate of numbers was in 2016 by DEFRA who estimated there were 57 million gamebirds released in the UK countryside each year.

47 million pheasants

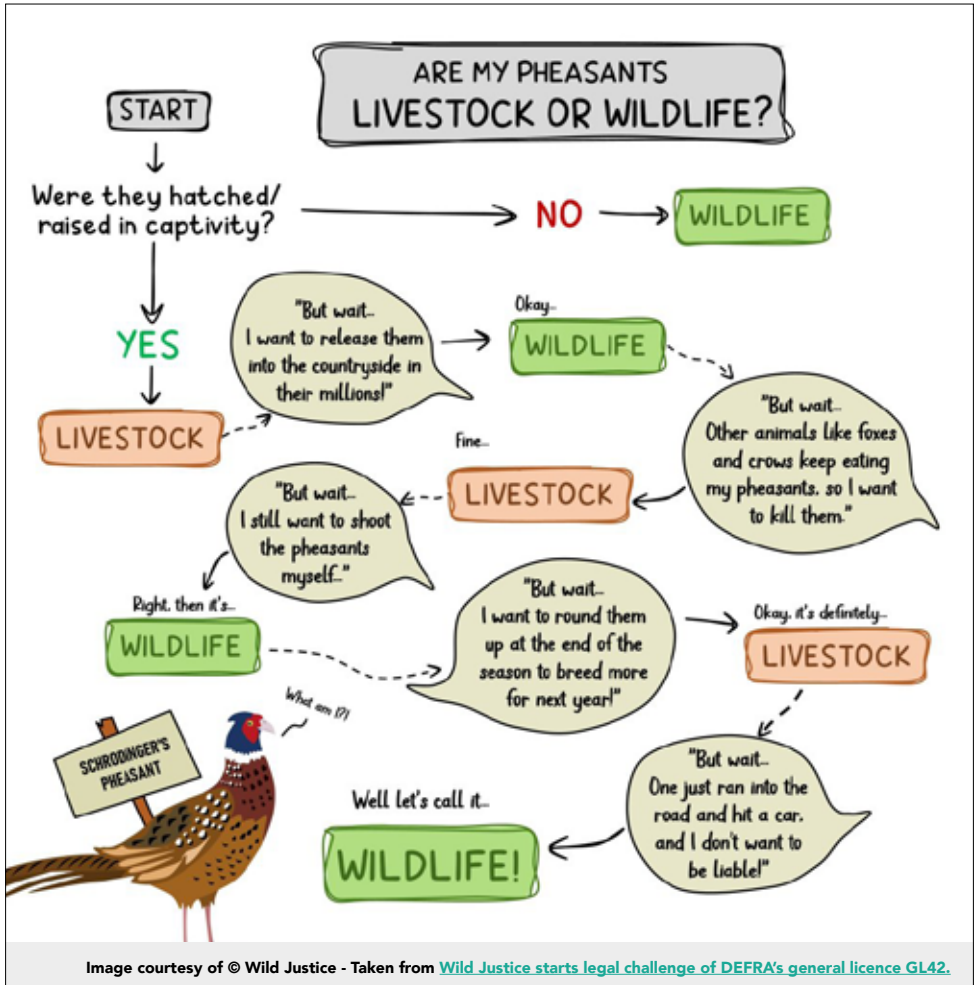
10 million red-legged partridges

The young birds, known as poults, are reared in cages by gamekeepers who will prepare the landscape for their release by killing all possible predators (foxes, corvids, birds of prey) using a range of legal and illegal techniques including snares, traps, poisons, stink pits and shooting.



Legal status of gamebirds

The legal status of pheasants and partridge is complicated and can be confusing. The law(s) are written to protect both the bird and the shooting industry by changing their legal status depending on the situation. Sometimes the birds are classified as livestock and sometimes a wild bird and this status changes as the season progresses.



“A released captive-reared pheasant may be regarded as livestock if it remains significantly dependent on a keeper for their survival, for example for the provision of food, water or shelter”.

Lord Zac Goldsmith

Shooting of gamebirds – what happens?

Eradication of predators

Gamekeepers are employed to rear the gamebird poults and protect them from predation by foxes, corvids, and birds of prey.

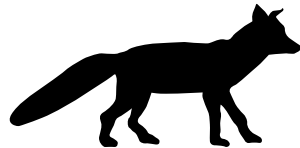
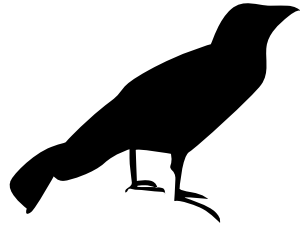
Any act intended to kill, injure or take a bird of prey (raptor) is an offence under [Section 1 Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981](#)

The [RSPB](#) reports annually on bird crime with a focus on reports of bird of prey crime.

Their reporting indicates most incidents of bird of prey crime takes place on gamekeeper managed shooting estates with two thirds of those convicted are employed as gamekeepers.

Illegal killing techniques include direct shooting, the use of poisoned bait, the abuse of cage traps, and pole traps (which have been banned since 1912).

The National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCU) has published its [2022-2025 strategic strategy](#) for tackling wildlife crime and one of the Priority Delivery Groups is 'Bird of Prey Crime' (page 22).



WHAT CAN I DO?

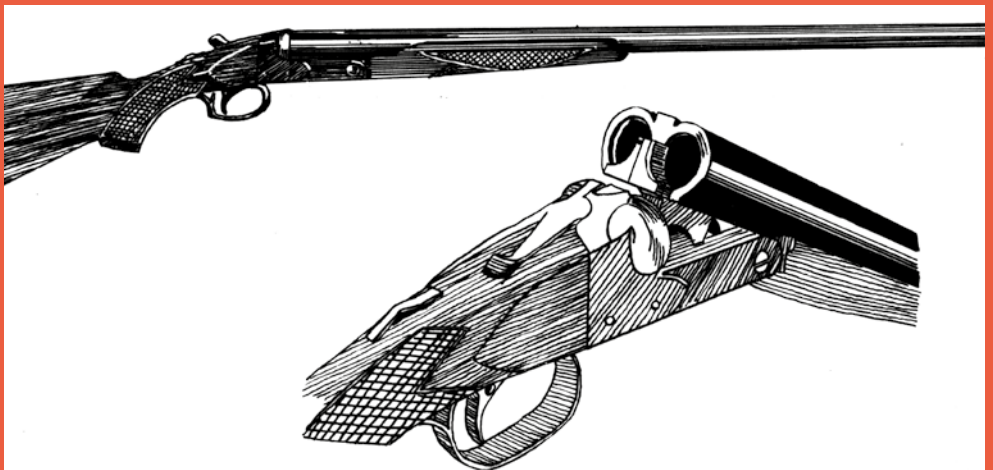
If you have information relating to the commercial caged rearing of game birds or associated wildlife crime such as traps, snares or persecution of birds of prey please contact the supporter funded Animal Crimewatch reporting service and report your concerns.



For more information you can read our information leaflets by visiting [our website](#)

We would also encourage you to report the incident to the **League's Animal Crimewatch team.**

The incident can be reported to us via our online reporting form www.league.org.uk/animal-crimewatch/report/ or by calling our confidential Animal Crimewatch line on **0300 444 1234.**



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