

Hunting in Scotland

Key figures

Area
78 772 km²

Protected areas
Approx. 20%. Hunting occurs over large parts of this area

Population
5 168 500 (2008 estimate)

Number of hunters
Estimates vary e.g. 77 300 (SCSTG, 2004) and 200 000 (PACEC, 2006) people shoot/stalk in Scotland

Main game species

Big game - Red deer (*Cervus elaphus*), roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus*), fallow deer (*Dama dama*), sika deer (*Cervus nippon*)

Small game - Red grouse (*Lagopus lagopus scoticus*), ptarmigan (*Lagopus mutus*), black grouse (*Tetrao tetrix*), capercaillie (*Tetrao urogallus*), snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*), mountain/blue hare (*Lepus timidus*), pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*), red-legged partridge (*Alectoris rufa*) grey partridge, (*Perdix perdix*), certain duck and geese species, woodcock (*Scolopax rusticola*) brown hare (*Lepus europeus*)

Hunting* in Scotland

Here we use the term hunting to include shooting and stalking. Hunting takes place in both upland and in lowland areas (e.g. on farms and in woodlands). Shooting influences the management of 4.4 million hectares of land in Scotland and it is an important economic activity worth around £80M to the Scottish economy (2004 estimate). The two highest profile game species in the uplands are red deer and red grouse whereas pheasant shooting is important in the lowlands.

The game

Whilst red deer and red grouse coexist in many places approximately half of the area is managed primarily for red grouse shooting. These birds are typically 'driven' or flushed over stationary shooters. People who shoot are usually paying clients or guests of the landowners. Grouse 'bags' (numbers shot) can vary dramatically from year to year depending on a number of factors but there has been a general decline in grouse abundance over the last few decades. In common with grouse, pheasant shooting is usually driven and shooters are often members or guests of a shooting syndicate that rents or owns the shooting rights. The majority of pheasants are reared and released by gamekeepers who manage habitat and certain predator species for this purpose.

Red deer range freely over large parts of upland Scotland. Hunters pay land-owners to go out with stalkers to shoot red deer stags but the female (hind) population is usually managed by the stalker with the aim of enhancing the supply of trophy stags. Around half the reported 70,000 red deer culled each year are taken in woodland as part of forest protection programmes. Roe, sika and fallow deer are also mainly hunted in woodlands.

Hunting rights

Game species in Scotland are considered to be 'res nullius' (belonging to nobody). Rights to shoot are attached to the land but can be leased out. In more recent years, concerns about low numbers of some species (e.g. capercaillie, black grouse and grey partridge) have resulted in voluntary shooting restrictions. In contrast, the exclusivity of rights to shoot deer on private land has weakened in recent years following state intervention to control deer numbers for the purpose of habitat restoration.

Recruitment

You need to be 17 in order to purchase a shotgun but may use one at a younger age if under supervision. The British Association for Shooting and Conservation run 'young shots days'.

* Note that the term hunting often only applies to hunting with hounds in the UK.

HUNT is an interdisciplinary international research project, financed by the EU's 7th Framework Programme, looking into the wider meaning of hunting in the 21st century.

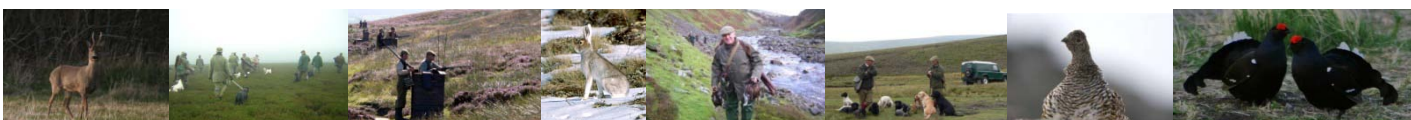


Photo: N. Bunnefeld, O. Strand, P. Jordhøy

The hunter

In 2001, grouse shooting supported a total of 940 full time equivalent jobs across Scotland and £17 million of GDP. Scotland is also a popular destination for shooting based tourism which involves 1.5 million gun days per year, worth £240 million to the economy. More men shoot than women and it is still unusual to see a woman working in the professions of gamekeeping and stalking.

Prerequisites for hunting

Hunters must be in possession of certificates to own firearms and to purchase ammunition. In Scotland in 2008, there were 69,481 firearms certificates and 50,022 shotgun certificates on issue. There is no statutory obligation for training but many gamekeepers and stalkers will undertake voluntary training to increase their competency in managing game, habitats and food safety. Mandatory training for professionals is currently being proposed by the Scottish Government as a means for gamekeepers and stalkers to demonstrate competency, to devolve responsibility for sustainability and welfare to the professionals and reduce bureaucratic controls on hunting. The need to move towards mandatory training is currently being contested by the professional hunting bodies.

Management and the rules of the game

Management of deer and game birds is governed by specific UK and Scottish legislation and is also affected at the European level by conservation statutes such as the Habitats and Birds Directives. Alongside these formal structures there are a range of less formal written codes that are produced through collaboration between government agencies and hunting related organisations (e.g. the Deer Commission Scotland's Best Practice Guidance) which covers a range of aspects related to the responsible management of hunting. Close seasons (when game cannot be shot) are set out in the Game (Scotland) Act 1772, the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and deer specific legislation. Killing foxes with hounds has been illegal in Scotland since 2002 but this form of hunting continues in a modified form.

Controversies

The following list gives an indication of current issues in 2009. First, deer range freely across landscapes where one landholding may wish to manage deer at low densities to reduce grazing impacts and a neighbour may wish a higher deer density to ensure sufficient hunting opportunities. Second, the Scottish Government released the Wildlife and Natural Environment Bill consultation document to reform outdated legislation with the suggestion of removing the close season for stags. This has resulted in debates about deer welfare. Third, increase in deer populations combined with increased traffic has led to increase deer-vehicle collisions costing millions. Fourth, conflict has existed for many years with regards to the predation of red grouse by hen harriers. Illegal persecution of raptors is thought to have hampered the recovery of some of these populations.

More on Scottish hunting

British Association for Shooting and Conservation: www.basc.org.uk

Scottish Gamekeepers Association: www.scottishgamekeepers.co.uk/bds

Scottish Country Sports Tourism Group: <http://countryssportscotland.com/>

Scottish Countryside Alliance: www.scottishcountrysidealliance.org/

Game and Conservation Wildlife Trust: <http://www.gwct.org.uk/>

Deer Commission Scotland: <http://www.dcs.gov.uk/default.aspx>

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