

CENTRAL SCOTLAND BLACK GROUSE STUDY GROUP

NEWSLETTER 2014

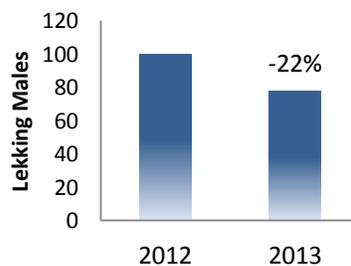
Welcome to the second issue of CSBGSG newsletter, which aims to keep all members up-to-date with black grouse numbers in the Study Group area, and to communicate relevant information and any local news.

Mixed fortunes for black grouse in 2013

2013 saw an unusually late spring, with snowfall in May delaying surveys and evidently affecting black grouse too.

A 22% decrease in lekking males was seen between 2012 and 2013 from a sample of long-established leks. Central Scotland was not alone, a similar trend was also seen across Argyll with a 30% decline.

The decrease is likely to have been the result of a poor 2012 breeding season. Prolonged rainfall in spring after chick hatching reduces breeding success as chicks are prone to the effects of exposure and chilling.



Change in number of black grouse males from a sample of leks in Central Scotland

Reduced recruitment of chicks into the population may then have been further compounded by reduced over-winter survival following the prolonged winter and late arrival of spring.

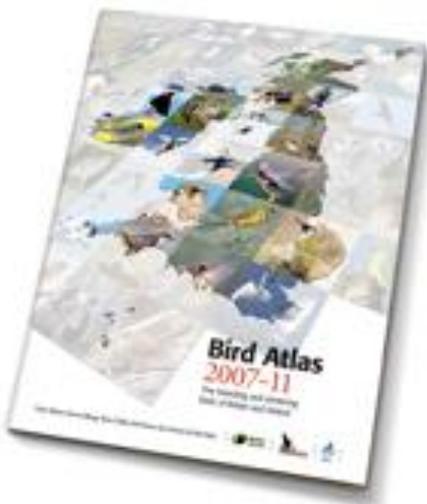
Despite the decreases, early indications of breeding success

following the dry summer of 2013 show promising signs. Brood counts in Loch Arklet (The Great Trossachs Forest) in late summer showed high productivity - which will hopefully lead to more males at leks this year. All we need now is some good spring weather.

Doug Shapley, RSPB Black Grouse Project Officer douglas.shapley@rspb.org.uk



Bird Atlas 2007-2011



The new 2007-2011 Atlas of breeding and wintering birds gives comprehensive accounts of changes in distribution and abundance for all species of bird across Britain and Ireland.

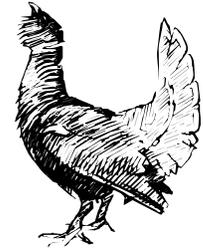
The species account for black grouse illustrates a 29% contraction in breeding range since the 1968-72 atlas and a 5% loss in winter range since the 1981-84 winter atlas. Most noticeable are losses in central and south Scotland, Wales and parts of north

England. These include local extinctions on Islay and in the Peak District, although a reintroduction effort is ongoing in the latter.

Reported contractions in range come as no surprise following the last national survey in 2005 which highlighted a 22% population decline since the 1995-96 survey, with the largest declines in southern Scotland. Recent figures further highlight the importance of the populations across central and southern Scotland.

Caper no more...

In 2013, all partner organisations (SNH, Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority and RSPB) agreed that the local metapopulation on the Loch Lomond islands is functionally extinct.



Spring capercaillie surveys have been carried out on the Loch Lomond Islands SPA since 2008. These evolved to searches for signs as an indicator of presence and possible breeding. In 2012 and 2013, there was no evidence of caper breeding on the islands despite comprehensive surveys. Only 4 'possible' sightings of individual birds were reported during 2012 and just 2 in 2013.



One of the last few capercaillie nests on the Loch Lomond islands – 2005

The decline is likely to result from a combination of factors including a run of wet summers which have seriously affected chick survival, predation, loss or fragmentation of habitat, collisions with deer fences, and human disturbance.

The nearest strong population is now in Speyside, well beyond the distance that capercaillie will travel to search for territory or a mate. This leaves any remaining birds on the Loch Lomond islands isolated, with no realistic prospect of being joined by individuals from elsewhere. Alan Bell, Natural Heritage Manager, Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park alan.bell@lochlomond-trossachs.org

Callander Black Grouse Project update

2013 was the second year of the Rural Priorities scheme contracts to improve habitat for black grouse in the Callander area.

Six new native woodland plots, totalling 36ha, are now well established. An 110ha woodland plot where cattle grazing has been managed to encourage gradual regeneration of trees, shrubs and heath is showing encouraging results: monitoring shows some key habitats already improving,



National Park volunteers mark sections of deer fence to deter bird strikes.

with less browsing damage to regenerating tree saplings.

Lek counts in 2013 showed low but stable numbers of black grouse: it is anticipated that it will be a number of years before results of targeted conservation measures become evident.

The Callander Black Grouse Project has been developed in partnership with Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park Authority: graeme.auty@lochlomond-trossachs.org

Your records needed

We **welcome all records** of black grouse within the Study Group area (and even outwith) from any time of year. All we need is a grid reference or location of the sighting and date. All records add something to our knowledge of black grouse e.g. broods help inform productivity in different areas; winter flocks can indicate a new lek nearby in spring, and even if you think we might already know about a lek, tell us about it anyway because we might not!

Please send records to Yvonne Boles Yvonne.boles@rspb.org.uk or 07843 513369.