

Black Grouse *Tetrao tetrix*

Red-listed; UK BAP listed

Uncommon resident breeder Estimated population in NE Scotland: 700 lekking males (c.20% of Scottish population, c.14% of UK)

Habitat and breeding ecology

Black Grouse are found on moorland edges, usually close to forest plantations and native pine and birch woodlands, now almost entirely above 300m, though at lower altitudes in the past. In NE Scotland, they may be more often associated with open habitats than they are in other parts of the UK, but they may also occupy large restocked areas in forests. Leks are usually on grassland areas within moorland, or on short heather, burnt patches or boggy ground. Of 62 nests found in the Forest of Birse and Glen Tanar between 1982 and 1986, 92% (n=29) in Birse were on dry heather moorland especially where there were some scattered naturally regenerated Scots Pines. In Glen Tanar, nests were found in the old pine forest and in both wet and dry moorland sites. Between 30% and 69% of hens nested within 1km of the four leks at which they were caught and marked (Picozzi 1986). In late summer, broods were most often found in wet moorland flushes where there were abundant invertebrates.



Greyhen attending lek: Ed Duthie

Scottish distribution and status

Still widely distributed across upland Scotland, though declining in many areas. The national survey of 2005 estimated 3,344 (range 2,580-4,171) lekking (displaying) males. In Grampian, Tayside and Fife there were 1,500 males, - a 7% decline compared with the previous survey in 1995-96, though this was not statistically significant. Numbers in South & West Scotland declined significantly (Sim *et al.* 2008).



Lek site near Rhynie: Ed Duthie

Distribution and status in North East Scotland

The main concentration (about 75%) of Black Grouse in NE Scotland is in mid- and upper Deeside particularly on the Mar Lodge, Balmoral and Dinnet Estates. In 2006 there were 194 males at 14 leks on Mar Lodge Estate. The increase here is associated with a reduction in deer grazing pressure on moorland and woodland vegetation. In Donside, leks are more scattered, though some still hold 20 males or more. Black Grouse are rather scarce in Moray and most leks, other than those on the Glenlivet estate, are small or consist of just a single displaying cock. An exceptional lek of 14 males was recorded in north Moray in 2005. A small outlying population at Aultmore appears now to have gone. In Aberdeenshire, the main range retraction has been in the east of the area, in lower Deeside and one or two lowland peat mosses. For example, birds were still present at Turclossie Moss near New Pitsligo in 1989, but are absent now. Control of crows and foxes on shooting estates probably allows populations to persist on open moorland and hill ground, but the main influences on numbers appear to be forest felling and restocking together with variation in grazing pressure.

Changes in distribution

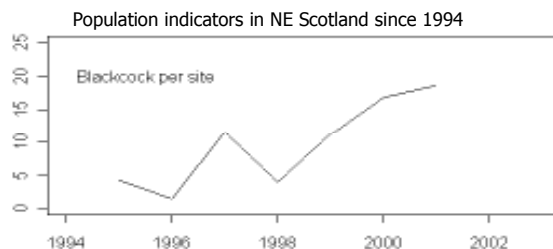
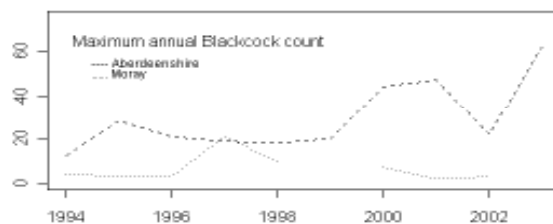
There was clearly a considerable decrease in range between 1968-72 and 1981-84, but since then, the distribution in the area has remained roughly stable or increased in some areas. Small losses from outlying peripheral hill sites and some lowland mosses have been balanced by infill in core areas, and occupied recording units increased by 21% up to 2002-06. This trend is not shared by north Moray, where rapid afforestation and moorland fragmentation have made conditions less suitable, but forest restructuring in the coming years may help this situation.

Population and trends

A survey in 2005 revealed 506 lekking males in Aberdeenshire and Moray. This is a minimum as not all leks were visited; a total of c.650 lekking males was estimated by Francis & Pout (2006). Recently, other leks have been found and Deeside lek numbers have increased further. Evidence from several sources suggests numbers are stable or increasing in Deeside and probably Donside, though they are probably decreasing in Moray.

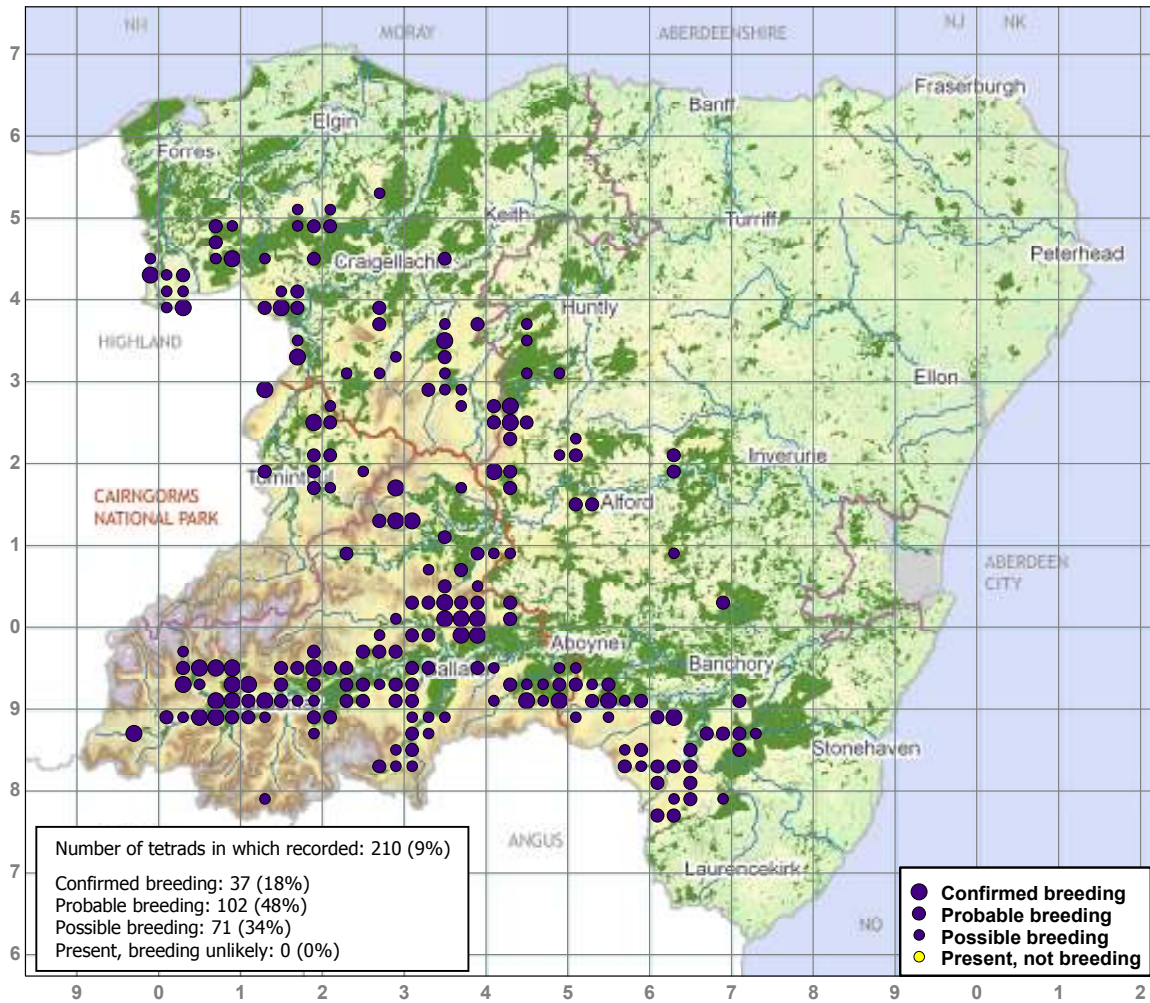
References

Francis & Pout 2006; Picozzi 1986; Sim *et al.* 2008.

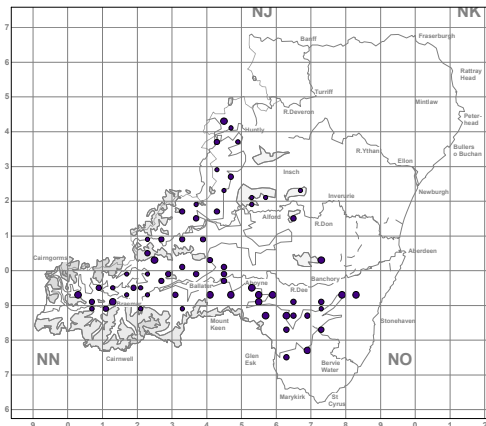


Author: Ian Francis. Species sponsor: RSPB Scotland

Black Grouse breeding distribution in NE Scotland 2002-2006



Black Grouse 1981-1984



Aberdeenshire & Aberdeen City:
 Occupied recording units

1981-84: 66
 2002-06: 80
 Change = +21%

NE Scotland:
 Change in occupied 10km squares 1968-2006 = -7%

Black Grouse 2002-2006

