

North Sea Interreg PARTRIDGE project demonstrates how to support farmland biodiversity from the bottom up

Launched in November 2016, the North Sea Region Interreg PARTRIDGE programme is pioneering cross-border collaboration to increase farmland biodiversity by 30% through the introduction of simple, low-cost measures



Dr Francis BUNER, PARTRIDGE project lead co-ordinator



Eleven partner organisations from the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Scotland and England, at ten 500-ha sites (two in each country), are demonstrating how farmland wildlife can be restored by up to 30%, in a project that will run till 2020.

PARTRIDGE also aims to influence the current CAP talks for the post 2020 period and the post Brexit agri-environment policy. Target 3a of the current EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020 aims to: 'increase the contribution of agriculture to maintaining and enhancing biodiversity'. However, hardly a week goes by without reports of the continuing decline of farmland wildlife across Europe. This makes for depressing reading, especially considering that the factors responsible for farmland biodiversity loss are well understood: a combination of habitat loss, overuse of pesticide and predation.

To achieve a 30% increase in farmland wildlife, PARTRIDGE is using science-based management plans (which include the establishment of 7% high-quality habitat, supplementary winter feeding during the winter hungry-gap and legal predator management) and a bottom-up approach implemented by more than 100 local farmers, hunters, volunteer groups and other stakeholders and government agencies. The local management packages are tailored to the needs of the project's farmland wildlife ambassador, the grey partridge.

The grey partridge is one of the best indicators of farmland ecosystem health; where partridges thrive, biodiversity is high and ecosystem services remain in-



Phil HOGAN, European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, and Martijn van DAM, Dutch Secretary for Economic Affairs, visiting the Oude Doorn site, Netherlands, 2017.

tact. In areas where few or no partridges exist the farm environment is typically found to be very degraded.

PARTRIDGE's most effective habitat measures are the introduction of diverse flower mixes which provide suitable habitat all-year round, together with beetle banks, winter stubble and arable margins.

Farmland habitat measures supported by agri-environment schemes (AES), which provide vital financial aid to farmers to help them manage their land in ways which are beneficial to wildlife and the broader ecosystem, are not new. They are

a widespread strategy aimed at recovering farmland biodiversity across Europe, under Pillar 2 of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

Ensuring that AES schemes fulfil their potential is a huge challenge, as evidenced by ongoing national declines in farmland biodiversity. Locally, declines have been reversed where AES measures are established on good-quality soils, are managed as agronomic crops and cover at least 7% of farmed area. Fulfilling the potential of these schemes more widely requires targeted advice on AES best practice, collaboration between neighbouring farmers and active involvement by local stakeholders.

Early success of PARTRIDGE

After only one year, PARTRIDGE has achieved considerable early successes, in particular an exceptional uptake of high-quality habitat measures on almost all ten demonstration sites. This has resulted in the creation of habitat improvements that already exceed 7% of the farmed areas at most sites, which significantly exceed levels typical of current



PARTRIDGE project partners discussing project habitat measures at one of the German demonstration sites.

agri-environmental schemes across Europe. Across the partner countries new or much-improved PARTRIDGE flower mixes have been introduced, and in the Netherlands and Belgium, beetle banks have been established for the first time.

To highlight the urgency of halting the loss of farmland wildlife, the PARTRIDGE project puts very high emphasis on communication activities and in-depth, targeted advice. The demo sites are used to showcase best practise not only to local farmland stakeholders but also to local, regional and national decision makers and agencies especially those involved in agri-environmental schemes and agro-policy in general.

To date, already more than 500 people have visited the PARTRIDGE demo sites,

among them prominent visitors such as the Danish and Belgian Environment Ministers and the EU Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development.

Additionally, cross-border visits for all stakeholders, including farmers and landowners are being organised, resulting in a flow of information exchange and enthusiasm among all involved. At most of the project sites PARTRIDGE has already managed to ignite a sense of 'pride' for partridge/wildlife-friendly farming.

If you wish to know more about the PARTRIDGE project, please visit: www.northsearegion.eu/partridge or visit us at our stand at the FFA in Brussels on 27 March 2018.



Wildlife Estates celebrates private conservation in Belgium

The first annual Belgian Wildlife Estates Gala Diner and conference, which promotes the incredible contribution made by private landowners to European biodiversity, took place at the Cercle Gaulois in Brussels.

On Monday 5 February, 20 landowners from across Belgium, were presented with the Wildlife Estates Label as recognition

for their exceptional management practices and contributions to supporting biodiversity.

In the presence of Humberto DELGADO ROSA (Directorate-General for Environment, European Commission), Konstantin KOSTOPOULOS (CEO Wildlife Estates) and Carlos OTERO (Chairman of the European Scientific Committee of the Wildlife Estates label) 12 new labels were awarded.

In Belgium, 20 areas of private conservation have been awarded the label in total, covering over 18,500 hectares.

The prestigious event was sponsored by Martin de COCK DE RAMEYEN, Managing Director of Agriland (www.agriland.be) and whose wife is owner of a Wildlife Estates domain in the Belgian Ardennes. Aware that biodiversity is one of the fundamental pillars of agriculture, Agriland actively supports the Wildlife Estates Label.

Vous êtes propriétaire de terres agricoles et vous cherchez une formule efficace et rentable pour la gestion de votre bien: l'équipe d'Agriland se met à votre disposition.

L'objectif d'Agriland est d'assurer une optimisation financière en toute transparence et de renforcer le lien que vous avez avec votre terre. Nous vous informons sur les évolutions en matière d'agriculture, rencontrons les institutions publiques, encourageons l'emploi local et soutenons le verdissement par une gestion respectueuse de l'environnement.

Plus d'infos sur www.agriland.be

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Wildlife Estates proud to participate in PARTRIDGE project

Jessica WILLIAMS, Wildlife Estates

Whitburgh Farms, a member of Wildlife Estates Scotland, was chosen as one of 10 demonstration sites across the participating countries. Whitburgh Farms was awarded the Wildlife Estates label in 2017 and is an exceptional showcase for the benefits of sustainable farming practices and active wildlife management plans.

The estate is just over 500 ha and is dominated by cereal production (wheat & barley) and oilseed rape. Located in Midlothian, just south of Edinburgh, Scotland, this area was traditionally a stronghold for grey partridge in Scotland.

The team at Whitburgh have been actively managing the land to encourage the re-establishment of grey partridge populations for a number of years. They were previously operating with 5% of total hectareage set aside for grass margins, cover strips and biodiversity-friendly hedgerows with considerable success. Now, through participation in the PARTRIDGE project, they hope to develop additional measures to reach the 7% target, focusing on larger blocks and strips of cover crop and improved hedgerow management.

The Wildlife Estates Label represents a voluntary commitment by land owners to work to a high standard of wildlife management and conservation. The project was developed to communicate the benefits of enhancing biodiversity to land managers, thanks to rigorously-tested, cost-effective and sustainable land management practices. It also helps to improve political and public perceptions of private estate management, and promotes an understanding of the many economic, environmental, and other public benefits they deliver.

A PARTRIDGE project open day will be held at the Whitburgh Farms on the 4th May 2018. For more information please visit: www.northsearegion.eu/partridge

If you would like to learn more about Wildlife Estates or to apply for the label please visit: www.wildlife-estates.eu