

Scottish partridges disappearing

June 30 2007

Scottish ornithologists warned Friday that the grey partridge, once a common game bird, could become extinct if it is not protected from predators.

A report released at the Scottish Game Fair said the partridge's numbers have dropped by 80 percent in the past 25 years -- and have fallen by half since the early 1990s, The Scotsman reported.

Hugh Straker of the Game Conservancy Trust said the bird's survival could be ensured with comparatively modest measures.

"The grey partridge is an iconic species of our farmland, but its population numbers have suffered greatly over the last 50 years," he said. "As there are fewer places to hide, they have become increasingly prone to predation from badgers, feral cats and ferrets, stoats, weasels and rats."

In addition to predator control, Straker suggested farmers can provide more long grass to give the ground-nesting bird places to raise their young, and place feeders strategically in winter for a stable food supply.

About 160 people, many of them farmers, are involved in the grey partridge count, which has been running since 1933.

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