

Conservation efforts at Lechlade farm recognised in charity award

Thursday 22 October, 2020

Congratulations go to organic farmers at Oxleaze Farm in Lechlade after winning this year's Cotswold Grey Partridge Trophy. The award, run by national conservation charity the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) and generously supported and sponsored for almost twenty years by Mark and Jane Tufnell of the Calmsden Estate, recognises people's efforts in helping to reverse the decline in grey partridge numbers.

This achievement is the result of their passion for sustainable, environmentally friendly farming which the Mann family bring to their land. Their grey partridges aren't flourishing by chance – the family provide and enhance hedgerows, pollinator habitat, grassy margins and wild bird seed mixes and use the supplementary feeding agri-environment option to deliver food, nesting habitat and cover from predators.

Since 2014 the farm has taken part in the GWCT's [Partridge Count Scheme](#), a national effort to monitor this much-loved bird and the results have been impressive. Oxleaze has seen its autumn grey partridge density rise from just over 8 birds per 100 hectares to 47; the net result, 148 grey partridges in this year's autumn count.

Partridges are just one species to benefit from the conservation work on the farm. Charles and Chippis Mann have run the farm since 1978 and since the mid-90s have put in 35 acres of species-rich semi-natural grassland (the equivalent of 17 football pitches), planted 30,000 new trees and over 25,000 hedge plants. They also have a forward-thinking approach to the way the farm is run, with all heating and hot water supplied by a biomass boiler and the residential and commercial properties on the farm powered by solar energy.

It's very much a family affair, with Charles taking on the farm bought by his father in 1948 and his three children now involved in running both the business and farming operations. The next generation of the Mann family will have a host of wildlife to look after, with bird and butterfly species increasing year on year, plus healthy numbers of voles and field mice and an entire underclass of bugs and beetles on the rise. All this while producing pasture-fed Aberdeen Angus cattle.

GWCT advisor, Austin Weldon, is incredibly supportive of the farm's success: "It was a great delight to award the Mann family this prestigious trophy. My fellow judges, Mark Tufnell, George Ponsonby and Frank Snudden, and I all felt this family had made an admiral effort to help not only greys but other wildlife on their farm. Their holistic approach to caring for the environment and nurturing wildlife is clearly delivering great results, more landowners will need to bear this in mind as concepts such as natural capital and the shift to environmental delivery come to the fore through ELMS. The Mann's success demonstrates what can be achieved without having a huge budget making it a great demonstration for others to follow."

Mark Tufnell commented: "It's exciting to see the number of grey partridges flourishing across a much wider area in the Cotswolds now and the trophy is there to encourage more farmers and land managers in their efforts to help this iconic bird. Farming and conservation can go hand in hand as the work of GWCT shows."

Why the grey partridge?

The grey partridge is one of the most rapidly declining farmland birds in Europe - its numbers have declined by more than 90% since the 1970s. It has also been the subject of thorough research, so we have a more detailed picture of what is driving the decline in grey partridge numbers than for many other species sharing the same farmland ecosystem. Labelled a 'barometer of the countryside' the grey partridge is an ideal indicator of arable farmland ecosystem health: where partridges thrive, other farmland wildlife also thrives. Those wanting to learn more should read [Farming With Nature](#), a new book based on scientific research, which provides a practical guide to how conservation efforts aimed at the grey partridge can benefit farmland biodiversity. It is available at www.gwctshop.org.uk.

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