

The Calmsden estate becomes the first ever “double winner” of the Cotswold Grey Partridge Trophy

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Mark Tufnell, owner of the Calmsden estate near Cirencester, has always been crazy about his grey partridges. He was the driving force behind setting up the Cotswold grey partridge group back in the noughties, becoming chairman of the group and has now been awarded a prestigious trophy for his commitment to wild grey partridge conservation.

The Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) teamed up with Mark to help the grey partridge because it has declined nationally by around 92%. Together, we wanted to spread the word within the Cotswolds about ways to reverse the decline of this iconic farmland bird.

After all his hard work, it was no surprise when he was awarded the group's trophy in 2008; given to the person/estate that had done the most for grey partridge conservation during that year. In the early days, the group was sponsored by the investment company that Mark's wife, Jane worked for - Ruffer LLP. However, once Jane left the company, Mark and Jane decided to sponsor the group through their own joint farm business – Calmsden Farms. Their kind sponsorship continues to this day.

The farmland on Calmsden has always held greys, but perhaps the biggest influence on the wellbeing of these iconic birds was the arrival in 2014 of gamekeeper Will Pratt. He inherited just seven pairs that year.

GWCT biodiversity advisor Peter Thompson is full of praise: “Will's enthusiasm for the little grey bird is nothing short of infectious. He is also a stickler for getting everything just right. Habitat in the form of nesting cover, insect rich cover for the chicks, winter cover for protection and supplementary feeding have all been increased and improved. This coupled with thorough, targeted predator control from March to the end of June underpins his success. He and Mark, combined with the other estate staff, make for a formidable team!”

So, what are the results since Will's arrival? Well, in the four years since he arrived, he has overseen the spring pair count go from seven pairs to 40. This year's autumn count has found 257 young – a 5.4 young to hen ratio – making a total of 348 greys on Calmsden this year.

With these results, it was extremely hard to ignore the Calmsden estate when judging for the 2018 trophy winner. So it was with great pleasure that Peter was on hand to award the trophy to Mark Tufnell & Will Pratt during an event held by last year's winner, Paddy McNally of the Buckland Estate in Oxfordshire and his keeper Dan McSharry.

Consequently, for the first time ever, this wonderful roving trophy is back on a familiar mantelpiece and quite rightly so.

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