Code of Practice on the licensed shooting of Brent Geese

This Code of Practice gives guidance to farmers on the licensed shooting of Brent Geese to prevent serious damage to crops. It has been produced by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Central Science Laboratory (CSL), with assistance and support from the National Farmers Union (NFU).

Introduction

1. The Brent goose is fully protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, but provision is made for shooting under licence for the purpose of preventing serious damage to crops. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) is responsible for the administration and issuing of such licences in England.

2. Licences are issued to shoot a specified, maximum number of Brent geese as a means of reinforcing and enhancing other scaring and crop protection measures.

3. Authorisation is given to take a small number of geese in relation to the overall population which frequent the area. Therefore, the use of the licence quota needs to be handled carefully in order to gain maximum benefit and keep within the licence conditions and requirements.

4. Public interest in birds can lead to antagonism towards any action taken against them and this dictates that all problems must be handled sensitively and with regard to the legislation and agreed guidelines.

Guidelines

5. To assist with these aims, the following general guidelines are provided:

- shooters must choose appropriate load and shot size (no smaller than No.5) and not to be tempted to use heavy loads and large shot size such as BB as an excuse for shooting at greater range. This is likely to lead to an increase in the number of wounded birds;

- from 1 September 1999, the use of lead shot is prohibited on or over certain specified areas (i.e. certain SSSIs and below the high-water mark) and for the shooting in any area of certain specified wild birds, including all species of ducks and geese. Full details are available from DEFRA’s European Wildlife Division, Zone Kite, 1/08 Temple Quay House, 2 the Square, Temple Quay, Bristol, BS1 6EB. Tel: 01173 728903. As good practice, it is recommended that cartridges loaded with lead shot should not be used for the non-lethal scaring of geese to avoid leaving large quantities of lead shot lying on the ground;

- shoot only at birds when they are in range. It is not possible to be specific in this respect, but as a guide consider 30-40 yards as a maximum;

- target individual birds with the aim of achieving a clean kill. Do not fire indiscriminately into flocks; this will result in “pricked” birds;

- shoot birds only on vulnerable crops and take action when the geese are coming into the area or have landed on such fields. Avoid shooting as they leave for roosts and do not disturb birds on the foreshore;

- deploy scaring measures as soon as the birds begin to visit vulnerable fields. Reinforce with the shooting of a small number of birds if they remain persistent and unresponsive to the deterrent methods used. Licensed shooting...
should be regarded as part of an integrated goose scaring programme;

- make all efforts to recover and humanely despatch wounded birds. A trained and experienced wildfowling dog can be a particular asset in such circumstances;

- the practice of hanging goose corpses in damaged fields or elsewhere is unacceptable. Such use will create considerable bad publicity and opposition. It is also unlikely to be effective;

- human presence is important in enhancing and maintaining the efficacy of visual and noise generating scaring techniques. These methods can be combined to good effect by incorporating the use of shell cracker cartridges or rockets. Refer to the NFU’s Bird Scarers Code of Practice. Further advice is available from DEFRA’s Wildlife Management Team at the above address; and

- allow geese to remain undisturbed on areas of grassland and, if possible, encourage them to use such sites by maintaining a short sward through mowing or grazing. Decoys may help to attract birds to these fields. This will take the pressure off crops and assist in the chances of achieving successful scaring and crop protection. For further advice on establishing and maintaining such alternative feeding areas, see the DEFRA/CSL advisory note “The Management of Damage by Brent Geese”. (Copies are available from DEFRA’s Wildlife Management Team at the address above.)