



GREYLAG GEESE

This Advisory Leaflet relates to the management of greylag geese: *Anser anser*, for the purpose of protecting agricultural crops.

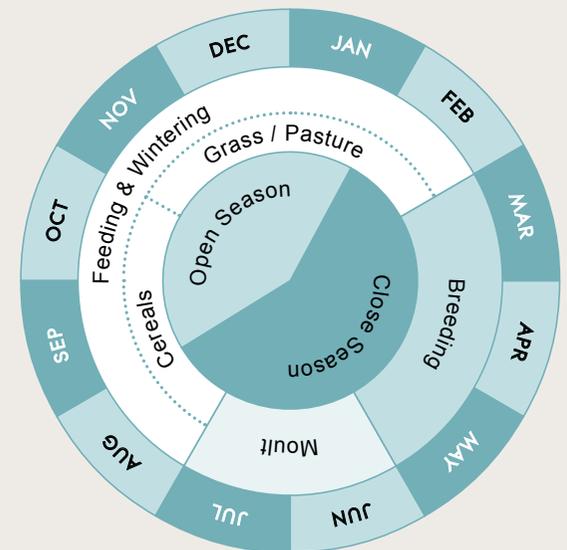
Historically geese wintered on saltmarsh and coastal habitat but with changes in land use over hundreds of years, have switched to easier pickings on agricultural land where they often come into conflict with crofting, feeding on cereals in the late summer and grass throughout the winter and spring.

Greylag geese nest from March/April onwards on croft and as well as on more inaccessible areas of moorland throughout the Islands. When the young have fledged and the adults have completed their

moult in July, they move to arable land and areas of improved pasture where there is better feeding.

On Uist, crop protection has previously been delivered through Local Goose Management Schemes and by Machair LIFE+ from 2010 to 2013. Funding for greylag geese has now been diverted to Adaptive Management on Uist, Lewis and Harris. However, non-lethal crop protection by crofters and land managers will still be essential in order to protect arable and grass crops from goose damage.

This leaflet provides advice on different methods of crop protection that are available.





© RSPB Machair LIFE+



© RSPB Machair LIFE+



© RSPB Machair LIFE+



© RSPB Machair LIFE+

GEESE BEHAVIOUR

Some crops may be more vulnerable to geese than others. Arable crops are generally more attractive to geese than grass especially where there are isolated areas of crop. Crops close to sources of disturbance such as roads and buildings, or areas where natural surveillance is high may be less likely to suffer damage. Geese also prefer copped machair where they have a good field of view, being more wary of areas where they cannot see predators/danger approaching.

Geese can adapt their feeding behaviour and cannot be trusted to stick to regular patterns. Maintaining vigilance can be a problem where crops are grown on the machair distant from the croft itself, especially on wet and windy days when there is little activity. Coordinating efforts within the township can help to ensure that someone is always around to watch crops.

TACTICS

Any method of crop protection will become less effective as geese become accustomed to it. Don't put equipment out until geese are on the machair. Move it around every 3 - 4

days and keep swapping between different methods to keep geese wary, particularly if they are moving closer to the crop.

Coordinate efforts within your township. Sharing crop surveillance and protection with your neighbours can reduce the burden on individuals. Small plots of standing crops surrounded by stubble are more likely to be a target for geese. If possible, try to harvest all crops in the area around the same time.

Sometimes it may be possible or necessary to let geese settle, especially when adaptive management is happening. With less natural refuges, geese are continually being pushed from one field to the next, which makes it difficult to shoot them. If geese are on stubble and are not posing an immediate threat to crops it may be safe to let them stay there rather than pushing them off, perhaps into a neighbours crop.

Don't leave equipment out longer than is necessary. Remove it as soon as your crop has been harvested otherwise it will be damaged or lost during bad weather. Geese will also become accustomed to it and your neighbours' crop protection will be less effective.

CROP PROTECTION

Fencing

A standing crop can be effectively protected using electric fencing posts strung with two strands of visible twine, wire or tape along exposed edges and close to the crop (<50cm). Birdscare humming wire has been shown to be particularly effective.

Visual scaring

Different types of kite are available. Place to the side of a crop, where geese are likely to land and periodically swap between swooping, soaring and brightly coloured kites.

The *Crop Guard* is reported to be extremely effective and being robust should last for many seasons with care.

Scarecrows are most effective when they are placed just inside the crop itself and moved around often.

Vehicles and agricultural equipment parked next to a crop and moved often can give an impression of human activity.

Audible scaring:

Ropes of bangers have a timed fuse to periodically 'bang' over 6 or 12 hours.

Read the instructions.

Rockets have been used in a controlled manner by employed goose scarers but permission must be obtained from landowners before using them. **Read the instructions.**

Gas scare guns can be placed near a crop to give a periodic loud bang but maintenance can be an issue.

Note: All audible scaring equipment should be used so as not to cause disturbance to neighbours. They should not be used continuously as geese will become accustomed to their noise.

Other options

Shooting geese may be an option of last resort when other crop protection measures have failed.

Note: Resident greylag geese can only be shot during the close season under licence and as part of an overall strategy to prevent damage to agricultural crops. The close season is 1 February to 31 August (21 February to 31 August if below the high water mark). For more information on licensing see: www.snh.gov.uk

KEY POINTS

- Be vigilant – watch your crop and coordinate efforts within your township
- Be proactive – take action to protect your own and your neighbours' crops
- Be unpredictable – regularly move equipment around and swap between different methods of crop protection

USEFUL CONTACTS

Scarem Kite Systems (kites)

T 01992 524991 | M 07802 628011
www.scarem.co.uk

Cochranes Kites (kites)

T 01993 832868
www.cochranes.co.uk

Portek (all kit including Crop Guard, contact for stockists)

T 01539 722628
www.portek.co.uk

Ecopro Ltd (bangers)

T 01449 710066 | M 07834 057888
www.ecopro.co.uk

MacGregor Supplies (bangers)

T 01463 717999
www.macgregorsupplies.co.uk



CONTACT INFORMATION

For more information, please contact the RSPB

Email: robin.reid@rspb.org.uk, or jamie.boyle@rspb.org.uk | Telephone: 01859 550 463, 01876 560 287

Produced by Conserving Scottish Machair LIFE+ Project