



Pheasant Specialist Group Code of Practice on live trapping of pheasants

Introduction

Conservation of wild Galliformes includes the need to obtain data on populations, behaviour, demographic parameters and other information. Although much important data can be collected remotely using observations of free-ranging animals, there are significant limitations. Many species are secretive and difficult to observe. In addition, some data are simply difficult or impossible to collect without capturing and marking the animal. However, capture and marking of animals, whilst providing immense opportunities, also comes with risks. This paper deals with issues relating to capture and marking of wild Galliformes in an effort to ensure that it is done in the most humane fashion, as well as in a way that results in an animal that behaves similarly to those that have not been captured.

All reputable conservation organisations will wish to ensure that research in their respective study areas is conducted to the highest standards of animal welfare. Two IUCN/SSC Specialist Groups, the Pheasant Specialist Group and the Partridge, Quail & Francolin Specialist Group, have formulated these documents to provide researchers with detailed practical guidelines for capturing and handling galliformes.

Since a high percentage of galliformes are classified as endangered, any research which creates disturbance to them and/or their habitat should be conducted in such a way as to cause the minimum of disruption. Actual trapping techniques are not published here, as it would be irresponsible to provide such information to those who might use it for poaching or other unethical purposes.

General issues

1. The principal aim is to capture the bird with the minimum level of disturbance and to avoid mortality and injury so that it can then be released and studied in its natural environment.
2. Snares and traps should be set in such a way as to minimise the capture of other species.
3. Snares and traps should be checked on a regular basis, at least every 2 hours, to ensure that the bird is not held in a stressed position for longer than necessary and to minimise the risk of predation whilst it is restrained. Obviously, any disturbance when monitoring the trapping area can result in discouraging birds to frequent the vicinity. Therefore, remote monitoring might be considered if practical. Otherwise, locating traps where they can be monitored using binoculars can prove effective.
4. When checking traps, it is recommended that researchers carry with them all the necessary equipment, such as measuring tools, rings or tags, ring pliers and radio tracking gear, for processing and releasing the bird on the spot. This will reduce the stress on the bird being handled in the trap, taken back to a base position, and then returned for release at the site of capture.
5. Snares will function throughout the night, even though Galliformes will not. Therefore, unless night checks are to be maintained, snares should be disabled during the hours of darkness so that nocturnal species are not caught accidentally.

6. Field researchers must have proper permits. Many countries have particular regulations pertaining to the trapping or snaring of animals, and it is the responsibility of the researcher to investigate local legislation so that no laws are broken. For example, in the UK it is illegal to capture any game pheasant other than for ringing (banding) during the “closed breeding” season (Feb. 2nd to Sept. 30th), or to use leg snares without a licence.
7. If radio tracking is to be used in a field project, the method of trapping the birds must be detailed in the project proposal, including the proposed number of birds to be caught. No support can be given to any project without this information. The Pheasant Specialist Group will not support any project where leg-snaring is proposed unless it is convinced of local expertise, the researcher’s competence, and also has proof of permission. This is particularly important with threatened (i.e. Red List) species.
8. It is a condition of PSG endorsement that all project reports will include data on trapping results. It is only in this way that PSG will be able to pass on information to future investigators as to the most successful and humane trapping methods.
9. Principal Investigators should ensure that they have researched the species to be captured before undertaking their study. For example, Mountain peacock pheasants suffer immensely from stress and most wild birds fail to survive any method of capture.
10. Any transportation of wild birds must comply with the legal regulations which pertain. The IATA recommendations offer helpful guidelines (at the time of writing the web address is www.iata.org/ps/publications/9105.htm).

Snaring

1. There have been a number of instances where birds have been injured, killed or predated as a result of leg snaring. Therefore, the Pheasant Specialist Group will only support projects where leg snaring is undertaken by those with sufficient expertise and training. Such training should be received from someone who has previously trapped birds for scientific study. Many hunters, although efficient at catching birds, have no need to keep the bird alive or healthy, so may use methods not suitable for minimising stress or injury. Researchers will not be regarded as “expert” with just a few hours training from such a hunter.
2. If training is required and cannot be arranged locally, please contact the PSG for advice and help.
3. No leg snare should be set in such a way that it results in the bird being suspended off the ground by one leg.
4. No leg snare should be sufficiently long that it allows a trapped pheasant to take off at speed from the ground with sufficient momentum to inflict injury to its own leg.
5. A bird that has been snared by the leg will often run in circles around the base of the trap. This can result in the snare winding around the base or the surrounding bushes, and shortening until the bird has no movement at all or it becomes entangled. Fitting a swivel to the snare can limit some of these problems.
6. With any form of leg snare, the material (often fishing line) can cut into the flesh. By providing slight thicker gauge nylon, the researcher can often limit this injury. A mild disinfectant cream can be applied to any such injury before releasing the bird, but it should be well-rubbed in so that sand and grit do not adhere.
7. Widely spread individual traps often result in poor capture rates, unless the researcher is sure of a particular route used by an individual or groups of birds. However, lines of appropriately placed traps spaced at 10 to 15 per kilometre, have been known to catch several birds per week.
8. It is virtually impossible to create species-specific leg snares where there may be many ground-dwelling birds, as well as mammals and reptiles. Even tortoises can be caught accidentally. A trap that leaves a turkey comfortably on the ground could whisk a bobwhite up in the air and leave it dangling like a yoyo.

Other methods of trapping pheasants

1. Baited walk-in funnel traps are often used in the UK Gamebird industry to recapture feral birds prior to the breeding season, and may present a humane option in some circumstances. These traps work best for game pheasants when a finer wire netting funnel is attached to the opening. After the bird has walked into the trap, it tramples down the wire funnel, thereby blocking its escape route. However, we have not known this method to be used outside the game pheasant industry, where the birds have previous experience of wire netting and are not alarmed by it.
2. Any wire traps should be of weldmesh construction rather than chicken wire, so as to avoid any self-inflicted “panic” injuries by wild birds.
3. Wire traps should have a soft roof fitted to the inside to minimise scalping. Cloth or foam works well in this situation.
4. Large traps designed to capture numbers of pheasants can result in a dominant male bird inflicting injury on a weaker male or a female. Single cage traps avoid this possibility.
5. The mesh on any trap is recommended by the Game Conservancy Trust in the UK as 7.5 cm square (3inches) so that any captured bird cannot get its neck trapped in the mesh.
6. Drop nets which can be triggered automatically by a trip wire, or manually from a hide have proved to be a successful alternative to leg snares in Northern India. They have the advantage of restraining the captured bird against the ground, thus preventing the sort of leg injuries that pheasants can inflict upon themselves by trying to fly rapidly out of a snare. A series of drop nets can be used to “funnel” birds along a particular path, which can be made to decrease in width as it nears the traps.
7. Many ornithologists / ringers have great experience in mist-netting birds for research purposes; such nets may occasionally catch Galliformes, particularly in densely forested areas, although their expense makes them rather prohibitive. For those interested in this method of bird trapping, we would recommend “Bird Ecology & Conservation – A Handbook of Techniques” by Sutherland W.J., Newton I, and Green RE 2004. Oxford University Press, ISBN 0-19-852086-7
8. In the UK, partridges and grouse are sometimes caught for study by night-time dazzling with high-powered lights. There are specific guidelines about the use of such lights, but we have no experience of their use elsewhere.

Guidance on handling birds after they have been trapped

1. Once a pheasant has been caught in a snare, it must be handled carefully so that no injury occurs.
2. Covering the bird immediately with a dark cloth so that it cannot see can often help the handler, since the bird will usually then struggle much less.
3. The bird should be held firmly around the top of both legs, where they join the body. Here the leg bones and muscles are at their thickest, and can withstand any sudden movements that the bird might make in its endeavours to escape.
4. Holding by one leg increases the likelihood that the bird could twist and injure itself. The bird should never be held by the lower leg.
5. Once a firm grip has been placed around both thighs, and whilst the head is still in darkness, the snare can be released.
6. If the bird is to be held for any length of time (for example, whilst a radio transmitter is being fitted), then the wings should also be folded to the bird’s body and held there, either by hand or by wrapping a cloth around the body.
7. Never hold the bird by the head or neck.

Tagging and Radio Monitoring

1. All animals should receive a metal ring (band) or in some cases a patagial tag for individual identification. In Europe, AVIORNIS is the preferred partner of WPA as the supplier of numbered rings.
2. Note that in some northern climates, metal rings have been shown to build up ice & snow, causing damage to the leg of the bird. In this case, a suitable plastic ring can substitute.
3. The researcher should be trained in proper ringing techniques.
4. Patagial tags should generally be avoided except in certain cases where long-term work has shown minimal impact on the study animals or when marking juveniles whose legs cannot yet receive leg rings. For most pheasant species, an adult ring can be fitted on a juvenile bird once it is around 40 to 45 days old. Prior to this, the ring will usually fall off as the leg and foot are too small.
5. Coloured plastic tags for remotely identifying individuals have been widely used; however, they may cause problems. Any tag visible to researchers is also visible to predators.
6. Any tag attached to an animal must minimise the possibility that it interferes with the animal's behaviour. For example, some colour combinations may reduce breeding opportunities for individuals by disrupting courtship displays.
7. Radio telemetry provides additional opportunities and challenges. Radio-telemetry is an expensive technique, and researchers should be well-trained before depending on it.
8. Two important issues make telemetry a challenge for research – weight and attachment.
9. Researchers should follow well-established guidelines for transmitter size and weight. For example, researchers successfully used 6g transmitters on 160g bobwhite quail in the USA, and the current practice is to use similar transmitters for 400g grey partridge. In the past, researchers have used 18g transmitters on 1000g common pheasants, but more recently transmitters of about 12g have been used.
10. Harness design is crucial and often species specific. The general rule is that larger species in excess of 2000g use some type of backpack harness. For smaller species, neck collars or necklace transmitters seem best.
11. When attaching radio harnesses it is critical that the researcher understands how to handle the bird without injuring it, and also knows the biology of the bird and how the radio will sit on the animal.
12. Backpacks should be tight enough to allow the bird to preen the harness material under the feathers, but must not interfere with flight or other movements.
13. Necklace transmitters should be tight enough to be preened under the feathers, but loose enough to allow the passage of food into and out of the crop. This is critical and requires training and an understanding of the diet of the study species.

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Amongst other sources which might be consulted are:

Code of Conduct for researchers contributing articles
ORYX 35(2), 99-100

Guidelines for the treatment of animals in behavioural research and teaching.
ANIMAL BEHAVIOUR, 2003, **65**, 249–255