

# REPORT: CANNED PHEASANTS

## The Ethical Perspective

The concept of 'put-and-take' originated in Europe. Captive-bred birds of the same species as the indigenous birds are released in suitable habitat to boost the wild population. In its original and ethical form, the captive bred birds are gradually released in the wild in areas specifically managed for gamebirds by means of acclimatising pens. This process takes place over several months prior to the shoots. The birds are adapted to the environment and behave like wild birds, offering ethical hunting in the spirit of the 'Fair Chase'. The birds which survive, being adapted to the environment, breed themselves or interbreed with the wild birds, thereby boosting the wild population.

This is a cumbersome process, and in order to make it more cost effective, batches of birds are released from cages directly in front of the hunters, sometimes screened from the hunters by vegetation. The final and most despicable variation is to throw the birds up into the air by hand, one by one, offering sure targets for the so-called 'sportsmen' waiting in line below.

This is nothing more than live target practice or 'canned hunting' in the worst sense. It is used to offer 'English Pheasant Shoots' in South Africa and can certainly not be called hunting or 'fair chase'. It constitutes animal cruelty because wounded birds are rarely followed up and because battery-bred birds are used.

These unfortunate birds have never flown before and have no hope of surviving in the veld. Those that escape the shooters' guns will certainly die from starvation or, if they are lucky, be taken by predators. Such practices are indefensible in a civilised society.

It is even more despicable from a conservation point of view. Captive bred birds, especially exotic species, contribute nothing to wild game bird populations and also do nothing to motivate landowners to conserve the natural game bird habitat. Indigenous wild game birds can only be produced on natural habitat, and this motivates private landowners to conserve that habitat. A healthy habitat not only sustains game birds, but also countless other creatures. Thus, the ethical and sustainable utilization of indigenous wild game birds have ensured the conservation of natural habit and the survival of countless animals, forming the backbone of the justification of our sport.

— Editor, 'Wingshooter'

## The Scientific Perspective

The use of exotic captive bred birds will be disastrous for the conservation of our indigenous wild birds. Wild birds can only be produced on natural habitat, and the use of captive bred birds removes the incentive for landowners to maintain and develop natural habitats.

This has become abundantly clear in England where the use of captive bred pheasants has removed the incentive for maintaining the natural habitat, resulting in a near-disastrous decrease of the indigenous partridge populations.

In contrast, the indigenous Scottish grouse, which cannot be bred in captivity, is thriving through natural habitat development and has become one of the most sought after and expensive gamebirds in the world. Another example is the Ducks Unlimited programme in America where their policy of maintaining and developing habitat for indigenous waterfowl has led not only to a tremendous increase in the duck and geese populations but also to all other wild animals depending on the wetland habitats.

In South Africa, our indigenous gamebirds have been under tremendous pressure from habitat destruction, monocultures, exotic plants and poisons. They are still seen as a pest by most landowners and it is only in recent years that we have managed to convince some farmers of the value of indigenous gamebirds and thereby provided them with an incentive to preserve natural habitat. This habitat development will not only benefit all wild animal species but will also lead to the development of our gamebird industry as a whole by offering an exclusive variety of gamebird species in a fair chase. In contrast, the use of exotic, captive bred birds will contribute nothing to the environment and will only lead to the enrichment of certain individuals. It is also doubtful if overseas hunters will be attracted to buy expensive airfares to come and hunt the same bird in the same manner when they can do it much cheaper in their own countries. We would urge the landowners in the Mpumalanga highlands to rather concentrate their efforts on developing their property for the highly sought after greywing and redwing partridges, which not only will attract more overseas hunters but which would also benefit the conservation of our endangered wattled crane and the whitewinged flufftail.

Throughout the world, the primary cause of a species' decline has been habitat destruction and not hunting pressure. Thus, contrary to popular opinion, the use of captive bred gamebirds will invariably lead to increased pressure on our indigenous gamebirds. — Dr PJ Viljoen

## Policy of SA Wingshooters

Because the captive-bred pheasants cannot survive in shootable numbers in the veld after release, they are taken from cages and thrown up by hand into the air (usually on a hill-side) to be shot by the guns waiting below. SA Wingshooters says this is indefensible in a civilised society. The shooting of captive-bred and released guineafowl is even more damaging, because semi-domesticated guineafowl strains are used which cannot breed efficiently in the wild and which then interbreed with wild guineafowl and cause a population crash of the wild guineafowl flocks.

The only exclusion from this 'ban' is gundog training events and Field Trials (limited use under strict supervision). Finally, the abhorrent practice of canned bird shooting is severely damaging to the public image of hunting and can be equated to canned lion shooting. The SA Wingshooters Association will take disciplinary action against members who participate in such shoots.

