

The Rules of grouse management

→ **ADRIAN BLACKMORE** explains why staff from Rules restaurant headed off to a grouse moor ahead of the Glorious 12th.

Rules, London's oldest restaurant, and one of the most celebrated in the world, specialises in classic game cookery for which it is renowned. Dedicated to providing the traditional food of this country at its very best, it has been at the forefront of serving grouse for generations. In over 200 years, the restaurant has been owned by just three families, with the most recent owner being John Mayhew who bought it in 1984. He is also the owner of the Lartington Estate in Co Durham, and each year different members of staff are invited up to the North of England so that they can learn about game management, and the best ways in which it should be served.

In early August, the Senior Management team from Rules visited the Newbiggin & Hunstanworth Estate on the Durham/Northumberland border to see where the red grouse that it serves each season comes from. Whilst some of the team had visited grouse moors before, and were extremely well versed in game management, for others it was their first opportunity to hear from those responsible exactly what goes into the management of this totally wild game bird; a bird that is unique to Britain, and the distribution of which is restricted by heather moorland that is managed for shooting.

The Newbiggin & Hunstanworth Estate consists of three moors: Newbiggin,

Nookton, and Hunstanworth, which together total some 5,000 acres. The visit for Rules, which I was delighted to organise, covered the environmental, economic and social importance of grouse shooting to the British uplands. Head keeper Rob Mitchell, and Darren Jaques, who is responsible for the management on Nookton Moor where the visit took place, explained the crucial management of the habitat that is carried out, which includes the rotational burning of small patches of heather to provide food and cover that benefits not just grouse, but also all those other species of ground-nesting birds that share this habitat to breed. It is that management which has helped conserve this unique landscape, where elsewhere it has been totally lost.

Ground nesting birds are also particularly vulnerable to predation, especially by foxes and stoats, and the ways in which these are legally controlled

were explained and, in the case of one unfortunate stoat, seen! For many in our remote uplands, grouse shooting is also the main economic driver, and Rob Mitchell explained the considerable casual workforce that is employed on each shoot day, whether it is as beaters, pickers-up with their dogs, flankers, or loaders for the guns. And as neighbouring moors will try to de-conflict their shoot dates well in advance of the season to ensure that there are sufficient available on each day, it is not unusual to find some people out on the fells for anything up to six days a week during the height of

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the shooting season. But it goes beyond the financial benefits. Grouse shooting in our uplands is not about landowners, employees or individual interests, it is about whole communities - and of course the red grouse. For Rules, the visit was summed up perfectly by Ricky McMenemy, its managing director: "The opportunity for us to get out on a grouse moor, especially so close to the start of the season, is a rare privilege. All the team came away with much more appreciation and understanding of the work the guys at the estate have to do, and to hear them talk with such passion



There's a recipe from our Game-to-Eat campaign's new grouse booklet on p41



Adrian Blackmore explains the importance of grouse shooting to our rural communities in the uplands.

"IT IS DUE TO SHOOTING THAT RED GROUSE ARE NOT ON THE ENDANGERED SPECIES LIST."

about their work was really special. It was not just the birds that impressed us but the importance of the shoot to the flora and fauna and local community. We came away with a really positive feeling about the grouse we serve in our restaurant."

Paradoxically, it is due to shooting that red grouse are not on the endangered species list, and the numbers of many of those birds that share its habitat during the breeding season remain at the high levels they do. The management on which grouse rely continues regardless of whether or not there is a sufficient surplus of grouse to shoot in a season, and the income from letting days is essential to help offset the considerable cost of that management. With all the factors that can adversely affect their

About Rules

In over 200 years, spanning the reigns of nine monarchs, it has been owned by only three families . . . just before The Great War, Charles Rule, a descendant of the founder, was thinking of moving to Paris; by sheer coincidence he met Tom Bell, a Briton who owned a Parisian restaurant called the Alhambra, and the two men decided to swap businesses. (During the war Tom Bell was an officer in the Royal Flying Corps, and left the running of the restaurant to Charlie, the Head Waiter, who had served Charles Rule for many years.)

In 1984 Tom Bell's daughter sold Rules to John Mayhew, the present owner. Today Rules seats around 90 people and employs 90 staff. Visit Rules: 35 Maiden Lane, Covent Garden, WC2E 7LB 020 7836 5314 www.rules.co.uk Follow on Twitter @RulesRestaurant

population, there can be some years when no shooting can take place, and that has sadly been the case this season, with the bad weather in May and early July being responsible for many moors having to cancel some or all of their shooting. This will have a significant impact not just on moor owners, but on many upland communities where numerous individuals and businesses will have been seriously affected. ●



The senior management team from Rules with Adrian Blackmore (front left), John Mayhew (Centre), Daphne Scott-Harden, owner of the Newbiggin and Hunstanworth Estate, and Rob Mitchell and Darren Jaques (front right)

Photo: Verity Johnson photography <http://verityjohnson.zenfolio.com/>



The control of predators benefits ground nesting birds.



Rob Mitchell explains how a grouse drive works.