

## **Executive Summary - Grouse: Status Survey and Conservation Action Plan 2000-2004**

Grouse have long attracted and fascinated people. Their display behaviour, and particularly their traditional communal mating grounds or "leks," have inspired poetry and folklore as well as scientific theories on sexual selection and the evolution of mating systems. And, in many parts of their range, grouse hunting still plays a major role in the culture, economy, and subsistence of local communities.

This first Grouse Action Plan provides an overview of the distribution, status, and threats to all 17 currently recognised grouse species worldwide and identifies the most immediate conservation needs. It is a product of the joint expertise of the Grouse Specialist Group (GSG), a voluntary network of grouse professionals, and other grouse experts world-wide. The Action Plan was primarily written as a reference guide for decision makers, agency officials, resource managers, funding organisations, but also scientists and students who share the GSG's goal of securing viable population of all species and subspecies of grouse in the wild. The Action Plan also aims to underline the importance of grouse conservation in a broader sense: as typical representatives of a wide spectrum of natural habitats, grouse are indicators of ecosystem health. Their indicator function and their attractiveness to people make grouse suitable flagship species to promote the conservation of ecosystems and biodiversity.

Grouse occupy a wide range of habitats of Eurasia and North America. There are grouse specialised to tundra habitats, to open grasslands, and to the various stages of forest succession. Related to their extensive distribution ranges and often remote habitats, the conservation status of grouse is less critical than that of other galliform taxa. Three species with limited geographic distribution, the Caucasian black grouse, the Chinese grouse, and the Siberian grouse are, however, listed as Near Threatened (IUCN 1996). One subspecies, Attwater's prairie chicken, is Critically Endangered, another, the Cantabrian capercaillie, appears to be Endangered, and a newly proposed species, the Gunnison sage grouse, is considered to be Endangered as well. At regional, national, and local scales, many populations of grouse are declining and threatened with extinction. Thirteen of the 17 species of grouse are included in the national red-data books of at least one country.

Healthy grouse populations require large areas of natural or semi-natural habitat. Thus, they compete with increasing human populations and economic development. Deterioration of habitats has been identified as the major threat to grouse world-wide. Habitat degradation, loss, and fragmentation due to human land use are considered the most important threats. Other frequently named pressures are small population size, predation, direct exploitation, and human disturbance. Current approaches to grouse conservation include legislation, protected areas, surveys and monitoring, habitat management, captive breeding, re-introduction and re-enforcement, predator control, reduction of human disturbance, and education. Integration of grouse habitat needs and human land use practices appears to be the major task for grouse conservationists world-wide.

After a short introduction to grouse and the Action Plan, the history of the Action Plan and the scientific basis of grouse conservation are outlined in chapter 1. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the conservation biology of grouse and summarises major

threats and current conservation measures. Brief accounts for each species are provided in chapter 3, compiling information on status, taxonomy, distribution, population, ecology, cultural importance, threats, research needs, and current and recommended conservation measures. In chapter 4, conservation and research priorities are proposed for the most threatened taxa (Chinese grouse, Caucasian black grouse, Siberian grouse, Attwater's prairie chicken, Cantabrian capercaillie, Gunnison sage grouse). The recommendations were drafted by leading experts on the different taxa and provide preliminary outlines that may be used to develop detailed project proposals. Proposed measures span from population surveys, research into the effects of human land use on grouse habitats and populations, and integration of land use practices and grouse conservation needs to population recovery programmes. Once adequate funding is provided, all drafted projects could be put into practice within the period of 2000-2004. Readers interested in the implementation of any part of the plan are requested to contact the chairman of the GSG or the relevant local correspondents (see Appendix 1). We hope that the Action Plan will find a wide distribution as a tool to promote and implement grouse conservation.