



THE NEW ZEALAND GAME AND CONSERVATION ALLIANCE

A GUIDE TO OPERATING AN UPLAND GAME PRESERVE IN NEW ZEALAND



Game shooting is an accessible sport enjoyed by many thousands of people from all walks of life, all over the world.

The sport of driven shooting teaches participants safety, respect for game and an appreciation of the countryside.

It provides a bridge between town and country by offering recreation in the countryside and also economic benefits to help sustain a healthy rural community. It offers the opportunity for all ages and genders to participate in an outdoor pursuit that mixes tradition with sport.



The NZ Game and Conservation Alliance, which represents all aspects of driven game shooting, trusts that you find this booklet helpful, informative and encourages you to join and participate in our sport.

Note: This booklet should be read in conjunction with our booklet 'A Guide to Driven Shooting in NZ'.

INTRODUCTION

This booklet has been written as a resource for shooting enthusiasts who may wish to start and operate an upland game preserve in New Zealand.

Upland game preserves can provide landowners, many who for generations have had a duck shooting culture, with an additional income source or sporting opportunity for friends, family, and clientele on their property.

With options that include walk up days, family and friends driven shooting to professionally run shoots, there are many ways in which the sport can be integrated into a rural property.



There are many participants involved in a day of driven shooting, not just those shooting. Firstly, there is the gamekeeper who invests months of their time into breeding, raising and feeding the birds.

Then there are those involved with catering, management, those in the beating and picking lines, usually with dogs by their side.

Not only do these people often freely give their time, they usually have travelled large distances to be there to ensure a truly memorable day for all participants.

On a driven shoot day, guests experience the generosity of the landowner and their family, appreciate the ten months' worth of work put in by the gamekeeper, wonder at the skill of the dogs working the field along with their owners, enjoy the tastes of the game at the table, share time with those whose passion for the outdoors mirrors theirs and come away with memories that will last a lifetime.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

01	Upland Game Preserves
02	Quarry Species
03	Types of Shoots
1.0	Walk up Shoot
2.0	Syndicate / Family & Friends Shoot
3.0	Professional Shoot
04	Suitable Land
05	Infrastructure
06	Predator Control
07	Role of a Gamekeeper
08	Feed Management
09	Financials
10	Mentoring
11	Preserve Status
12	Purchasing Game Birds

01 GAME PRESERVES

UPLAND GAME PRESERVES ARE AREAS OF PRIVATE LAND WHERE GAME BIRDS ARE RELEASED FOR PEOPLE TO HUNT RECREATIONALLY.

Upland game preserves have been operating for over 40 years - they provide valued recreational hunting opportunities, contribute millions to the rural economy and provide many full time jobs.

Upland game preserves are either gazetted by Fish and Game or administered by the Department of Conservation.

The Wildlife Act of 1953 is currently being reviewed (2023) and The NZ Game and Conservation Alliance will be making submissions to help achieve an efficient, simple and effective application process.

02 QUARRY SPECIES

GAME BIRDS IN NEW ZEALAND TRADITIONALLY INCLUDE SPECIES SUCH AS DUCKS, SWAN, PHEASANTS, PARTRIDGE AND QUAIL. HOWEVER, DRIVEN SHOOTING IN NEW ZEALAND IS PRIMARILY FOR PHEASANTS AND RED LEG PARTRIDGE. THEY ARE BRED AND RELEASED ONTO PRESERVES FOR THE PURPOSE OF SPORT HUNTING.

Pheasants are by far the most popular released game bird on Upland Game Preserves as they are hardy and can adapt to many climates and habitats in New Zealand. They can survive in most forest, pasture, wetland settings - all areas that can provide access to clean water, shelter from extremes of weather, disturbance, and predators.

They forage for seeds, berries & invertebrates and will roost in trees where available but are also just as likely to roost on the ground, particularly during dry and warm weather. Pheasants fly infrequently, most often when avoiding predators. Their flight is short and powerful, with rapid acceleration which is why they are a favourite of the hunter.

03 TYPES OF SHOOTS

UPLAND GAME SHOOTING TYPICALLY FALLS INTO THREE MAIN CATEGORIES:

- 1.0 WALK-UP SHOOT
- 2.0 SYNDICATE / FAMILY & FRIENDS SHOOT
- 3.0 PROFESSIONAL SHOOT

1.0 WALK-UP SHOOT

Sport provided is usually in the form of walked-up or 'rough' shooting where a team of guns walk in a parallel line shooting game as it flushes from cover in front of the shooting line.

Costs are kept to a minimum by reduced labour (not employing a full-time gamekeeper), catering, hosting, and transportation inputs. However, there is a minimum amount of care required for the birds to ensure a level of success - either by volunteers, the landowner/staff, or by a keen sportsperson who would like somewhere for friends or family to shoot.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND LAND REQUIREMENTS INCLUDE:

- Suitable land - areas of appropriate cover that are large enough to accommodate walking guns are required. All the other elements of a day's sport are variable and restricted only by the imagination and resources of the operator
- Reliable feed & water systems
- Suitable habitat and cover to for the birds to grow, shelter and roost
- Predator control

FINANCIAL REQUIREMENTS INCLUDE:

- Purchase of birds, usually poults. Rearing is an option but requires substantial inputs necessitating more capital expenditure and risk
- Regular feeding – grower pellet to approx. 10wks followed by grain
- Some basic equipment such as feeders and traps for predator control
- Costs are usually shared amongst the participants

PERSONNEL REQUIREMENTS INCLUDE:

- 'Guns' - numbers can vary from two to a dozen
- A dedicated organiser

2.0 SYNDICATE / FAMILY & FRIENDS SHOOT

This style involves a group of people shooting set days over a season and then splitting the combined costs and resources amongst themselves.

Financially, a satisfactory goal may be to break even by providing the number of peg days that would otherwise be purchased elsewhere, for a similar or reduced cost.

A team may have been shooting together for many years and will usually be aligned in their views & expectations on what makes for a good day of sport.

Typically, a member takes on the role as organiser or 'syndicate captain' as the point of contact for the day-to-day management of the operation. This person may pay less for their share, in return for their time and expertise.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND LAND REQUIREMENTS INCLUDE:

- Land area 100ha to over 1000ha
- Daily bag numbers from 20 to over 100



3.0 PROFESSIONAL SHOOT

Professional shoots are organised game shooting days for a group of paying guns (between eight or nine) for between 16-25 shooting days each season.

They will employ one or more professional gamekeepers and fees for guns are generally all inclusive of transport, catering, hosting, and most other costs associated with the days shooting.

The birds are driven over a line of guns, usually by a team of beaters led by a gamekeeper, at heights and angles that provide challenging shooting.

A team of pickers-up are usually involved also, to humanely collect and, if required, dispatch any shot game birds.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND LAND REQUIREMENTS INCLUDE:

- Minimum land area is 500ha
- Transport for both guns and helpers
- Staff & equipment (vehicles etc.) already in use that could be incorporated into the running of the shoot and are able to be shared with other cost centres, reducing overall CAPEX for the shoot
- Quality catering & hosting facilities
- Generally sound infrastructure, such as roading

FINANCIAL REQUIREMENTS INCLUDE:

- Costs are recovered through the sale of the whole day and a premium is commanded from the provision of a high-quality product.
- Operating on a professional level requires a year-round commitment to staffing and other costs, with income being limited to deposits and then balance payments throughout the shooting season as days are completed (May - August)

PERSONNEL REQUIREMENTS INCLUDE:

- Full time gamekeeper

OTHER RISKS THAT NEED TO BE CONSIDERED:

- Disruption to shooting from severe weather events
- Unplanned costs from crop failures (if crops are being used)

NOTES TO CONSIDER FOR ANY UPLAND GAME PRESERVE VENTURE:

NUMBER OF SHOOT DAYS

Various factors will dictate the number of shoot days that an operation may aspire to and this will ultimately dictate the scale and costs of the enterprise.

Some notes to consider:

- o 20 days equates to roughly once weekly shooting May-Aug, with an additional four dates to be considered. Usually May & June, Sat/Wed/Sat offer the best format
- o May opening weekend can sometimes be hard to fill due to duck shooting commitments
- o 'Beaters Day' is highly valued in NZ, particularly where helpers are unpaid, so keep in mind a day at the end of the season to accommodate this
- o Best practice is to ensure any group of birds are not disturbed/driven more than once per week. Therefore, assuming a typical 'five drive day', a well-managed shoot on this scale would have a minimum of ten drives available

QUALITY OF BIRDS

It is important to consider the experience of your guns as the ability to humanely dispatch a game bird will vary with each skill level.

At all times shoot owners and gamekeepers must endeavour to balance the height of birds with the abilities of the shooters.

Please find further reading on this in our booklet, 'A Guide to Driven Shooting in NZ.'

BOTULISM

Avian botulism spores exist in lakes, ponds and in wet areas. The spores thrive when temperatures rise and oxygen levels drop. Pheasants ingest the bacteria as they feed and the disease causes paralysis and depending on toxicity levels, death.

Botulism amongst pheasants occurs more in northern New Zealand where there tends to be a milder climate.

There are several things that can be done on a preserve to reduce the risk of botulism occurring, including the vaccination of poults prior to release.

The Game Alliance has access to experts in this subject. Please contact them for more information.

04 SUITABLE LAND

THE BELOW POINTS ARE APPLICABLE FOR CONSIDERATION
ACROSS ANY TYPE OF UPLAND GAME PRESERVE

MINIMUM AREAS

Walk-up Shoot - 100ha
Syndicate / Family & Friends Shoot – 300ha
Professional Shoot - 500ha+

TOPOGRAPHY

If driven birds are the aim, then rolling country and/or steep hills and open valleys are desirable. For walked up and rough, the primary concern is that the ground is 'walkable' by a team of guns, so more gently rolling ground is preferable.

COVER

A mix of established woodland, scrub in manageable blocks, along with scattered areas of low to medium height scrub are ideal. Cultivable areas for establishment of annual or bi-annual crops is also desirable.
Native bush can play a role but is generally less attractive to game.

ACCESS

Accessibility is often overlooked but vital to the success of a shoot. Steep terrain may present great shooting opportunities but can also be challenging for moving people around.
Established roading, or the ability to create access is necessary.

BOUNDARIES

The property must be able to hold game in sufficient numbers to provide a reasonable return. The skill of the gamekeeper plays a leading role in this; however, the layout of the land will ultimately influence the outcome.
Minor considerations might be public access areas, roads and proximity to settlements or towns. Other activities such as horses or forestry operations might have an influence.

05 INFRASTRUCTURE

IN MANY CASES EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE CAN BE ADAPTED OR RE-PURPOSED. THERE ARE MANY VARIATIONS ON REQUIREMENTS, LARGELY DEPENDING ON SCALE BUT THE FOLLOWING POINTS SHOULD BE CONSIDERED:

HOUSING

The role of gamekeeping is a 24/7 commitment for the large part of the year, and housing on or close to the place of work is essential. The dwelling should meet standards commensurate with a management level role, ideally with good dog kennels and shed space.

TRANSPORT

Typically, a gamekeeper will utilise an ATV type vehicle for much of their work. The vehicle should be reliable, safe, well maintained, and suitable for the local conditions.

Provision also needs to be made to safely move teams of helpers (beaters & picker-uppers) as well as guns, around the property. Facilities for hanging and transporting shot game are also required, typically on some sort of frame on a trailer behind the picker-upper's vehicle is suitable.

HOSPITALITY

Hosting guns and often helpers in pleasant surroundings and provision of catering throughout the day is an important part of an organised shoot. A common example in New Zealand is to utilise the farm woolshed. These are often historic and attractive buildings and can be easily adapted. Catering can be provided in-house or outsourced.

OTHER

Some thought will need to be given to items such as feeders and drinkers, water supply, and general tooling such as chainsaws, weed eaters etc. during the development phase.

Some shed space will be required, along with secure & dry storage for up to twenty tonnes of pellet feed. Provision for grain storage is also necessary, a good quality silo being the best option.

Depending on the property there may be a requirement for provision of release pens.

06 PREDATOR CONTROL

COMPREHENSIVE PEST & PREDATOR CONTROL IS AN ESSENTIAL ELEMENT OF RUNNING ANY STYLE OF SHOOT AS PREDATION PRESSURE CAN QUICKLY RENDER AN OPERATION UNVIALE. YOUNG GAME BIRDS ARE VULNERABLE TO A RANGE OF PESTS SO PROTECTING RELEASED GAME BIRDS WHILE THEY MATURE AND ACCLIMATISE IS A PRIORITY.



While predator species vary around the country, the common ones are mustelids (stoats, ferrets, and the less common weasel) and feral cats. Alongside these, rats and hedgehogs will also need to be controlled. Farm pests such as rabbits, hares, possums, wallabies, deer, or pigs may not prey directly upon game birds, but should nonetheless be kept under control.

All these species have the potential to damage tree plantations and annual crops. The gamekeeper, going about their usual work, is well placed to keep on top of these.

If the property over which you operate includes any native bush or at-risk species, it may be worth consulting with council or Predator Free 2050 as some funding or other resources may be available.

The PF2050 website also has a wealth of information on predator control.

For more detailed information on pest and predator controls methods, suggestions, and tips, please visit our website –

www.nzgca.com

07 ROLE OF A GAMEKEEPER

THE WORKING YEAR FOR A GAMEKEEPER IS BROADLY DIVIDED INTO THE FOUR SEASONS. THE TYPE OF WORK IS ESSENTIALLY THE SAME WHATEVER THE SCALE AND WORKLOAD DOES NOT NECESSARILY INCREASE PROPORTIONATELY WITH LARGER NUMBERS OF BIRDS.

Some defining factors on the amount of gamekeeping resources required are as follows:

- Size of property – time required to travel & conduct work
- Number of planned shooting days & drives
- Suitability of property – land blessed with perfect game habitat will ultimately produce better returns and may require less management
- Additional workload – properties that rear their own birds and/or undertake their own groundwork if establishing game cover crops. General farm or grounds repair and maintenance

Priorities for the professional gamekeeper will always be focused on the care of birds – from delivery of young six-week old 'poults' in Dec-Feb through to the completion of the shooting season at the end of August.

Within this time, workload will peak late summer and early autumn, when the keeper will be committed to seven days/week generally from dawn through to dusk.

For more detailed information on the role of the gamekeeper through the seasons, please visit www.nzgca.com



OTHER PERSONNEL ROLES:

ADMINISTRATION

A successful shoot will need a dedicated person capable of handling the administration side of running an Upland Game Preserve.

Duties of an administrator include:

- Bookings
- Communication - with guns and all other personnel involved
- Invoicing
- Catering requirements
- Health and Safety

ON-DAY ROLES

GUNS

The team of people that shoot the birds.

PICKER UP

The team that stands behind the guns with dogs to retrieve game. All game must be retrieved as soon as it is safe and practical to do so.

BEATER

The team of people (with or without dogs) that work through cover pushing birds to flush over guns.

It would not be possible to run a driven shoot without the assistance of pickers, beaters and their dogs.

Beaters and pickers are the engine room of a driven shoot and their role cannot be underestimated. They are usually volunteers who travel long distances to participate and most are dog enthusiasts who will travel to have the opportunity to work their dogs on game properties.



08 FEED MANAGEMENT

GAME BIRDS REQUIRE A SPECIALLY FORMULATED DIET DURING THE EARLY STAGES OF THEIR GROWTH PERIOD. THE QUALITY OF INGREDIENTS, ALONG WITH PROTEIN CONTENT ARE DIFFERENT TO THOSE OF POULTRY.

The temptation to use cheaper poultry/turkey feed should be resisted. The exception to this may be on a hobby scale where conditions with zero competition may allow the young birds to grow satisfactorily.

Currently there are two compound feed suppliers in New Zealand, one on each island.

Your breeder will have started them on a high protein (+/-28%) starter crumb, and by delivery time they will have graduated onto a slightly lower (+/-24%) protein grower pellet. This is the same feed you will need to continue for at least four weeks after delivery.

Being a specialised product, your feed will need to be ordered well ahead of time so that the mill can plan for it. Aim to have your order confirmed early December, ready for delivery early January. You will need access to a suitable shed and a means to unload one-tonne pallets. A guideline for your order is to allow 2 tonnes per one thousand birds. With good management this quantity will take them through the crucial growth period to 10 or 11 weeks of age.

The expensive grower pellet ration is quite susceptible to moisture and does not hold together well when wet. To avoid wastage, hoppers will need to be perfectly rain proof, and if feeding on the ground only apply the quantity needed for immediate use.

Grower pellet quantities should be monitored carefully. Preferably, records should be kept of quantities being consumed at each release location; this data may help detect a problem early but will also provide useful information for future years.

Where there is more than one gamekeeper or additional help is used, having daily feed amounts recorded will assist others in keeping the routine on point.

For more detailed information on feed management, please visit www.nzgca.com

09 FINANCIAL

A TYPICAL SCENARIO FOR A MEDIUM-SIZED OPERATION IN NEW ZEALAND WOULD BE A MINIMUM OF SIXTEEN SHOOTING DAYS TO COVER THE COST OF PROVIDING DRIVEN SPORT AND JUSTIFY EMPLOYMENT OF A GAMEKEEPER. SUBSEQUENT DAYS (IF THE GROUND CAN PRODUCE MORE) WOULD BRING THE OVERALL COSTS DOWN AND PUT THE OPERATION ON A BETTER FINANCIAL FOOTING.

APPROXIMATE BREAK-EVEN ESTIMATES (AS AT 2023)

·WALK UP:

- 200 birds released
- Shoot held over 9 weekends
- 6 guns - shoot on three weekends each

·DRIVEN SHOOT:

- 6000 birds released with 2,500 shot
- 8 or 9 guns per day
- 12 shoot days minimum

INVOICING

WALK UP SHOOT:

Usually costs are split amongst participants and are paid as they are incurred or in one lump sum prior to the season opening.

SYNDICATE SHOOT:

Costs are split amongst participants either in one lump sum prior to the season commencing or spread over the months that costs are incurred.

PROFESSIONAL SHOOT:

Invoicing the guns is usually split into two equal payments.

Firstly, a 50% deposit invoice when bookings are taken and the 50% balance invoice usually in April prior to the shoot opening in May.

Refunds are at the discretion of the owner. Guns are expected to find a replacement if they are unable to attend a shoot for whatever reason. However, most preserves will help to find a replacement, usually from a waiting list.

The NZ Game & Conservation Alliance has a budget template available covering expected expenses and income. This can be used to allow a prospective owner to insert their own costs. Visit nzgca.com to download these.

10 MENTORING

The NZGCA offers a mentoring service where you will be put in touch with an experienced gamekeeper and/or preserve owner who will be able to offer advice on the suitability of your property as well as providing a base of knowledge that you can call upon.

Any costs will be for discussion between both parties and is no way associated with the NZ Game and Conservation Alliance

Email info@nzgca.com to find out more

11 PRESERVE STATUS

Please contact us at info@nzgca.com and we will explain the procedures that need to be followed.

Please note that a minimum of 6 months should be allowed for obtaining necessary permits.

12 PURCHASING GAME BIRDS

NZ Game Birds are the preeminent game bird breeders in NZ with over twenty years of experience. They offer comprehensive advice to anyone contemplating the purchase of birds for an Upland Game Preserve.

Please contact Jeff Niblett at NZ Gamebirds - www.nzgamebirds.co.nz

Contact the NZ Game & Conservation Alliance if you would like information on game bird breeders in your area.



A GUIDE TO OPERATING AN
UPLAND GAME PRESERVE IN NEW ZEALAND

NEW ZEALAND GAME & CONSERVATION ALLIANCE

P.O Box 384
Whangaparāoa 0943
New Zealand

info@nzgca.com
www.nzgca.com



The NZ Game and Conservation Alliance would like to thank game keeper Tim Julou for his outstanding work in creating content for this valuable resource which will greatly benefit the future of our sport.