

Guidance for Gamekeeping Talks and Displays

These guidance notes have been put together as an aid for any talk on gamekeeping or estate visit displays that you might be asked to give.

The following pointers will help you to give a successful talk and make sure that you cover as many important aspects as possible, about the work that we do:

1 — THINK ABOUT YOUR AUDIENCE

- Who are you giving your talk to? Is it a group of children or adults? Do they know anything about gamekeeping? If they are a wildfowling or wildlife group, then you will need to structure your talk accordingly. You must ensure that you pitch your talk to the group's needs otherwise you will lose them in the first five minutes.
- How many people are you talking to? If there are a lot of people, you may need to move people around several displays and then do the talk.

2 — PLAN YOUR TALK

- Think ahead about any props that you can use, such as traps, antlers, predated and good eggs, which will make your talk more interesting.
- It might help to base what you say around four separate headings, such as Sport, Economy, Food and Conservation.
- Remember that the majority of people will know far less than you about gamekeeping, so you will need to explain things carefully and thoroughly.
- Talk about what you know about and what you do. Try to get over why you care about your job and the countryside.

3 — HOW TO START THE TALK

- Introduce yourself and then ask how many of the group know what a gamekeeper does. Then ask those who have met a gamekeeper to raise their hands.
- Explain the main reason why gamekeepers exist, namely to provide good sport for our employers.

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Then go on to explain how we do this:

- Tell them how many keepers work on your estate or shoot
- Talk about the size of the estate and the sort of habitats it covers
- Explain how you rear and release birds or rely only on wild stock

And then:

- Explain how the shoot supports the local economy by providing income and jobs for hotels, shops, butchers and pubs.
- Talk about your beaters, the sorts of jobs they do and why they enjoy coming out on shoot days
- Explain how keepers harvest their crop by shooting and what a tasty and healthy meat game is.
- Try to make it clear that although some people may question how you can care for your pheasants and partridges, if you're going to kill them, the shooting season is a very small part of the valuable conservation work that is carried out all year round.
- Talk about your shoot days and how many you have a year. How they are organised and why people enjoy them so much.

4 — TRY TO PROMOTE GAME

- Ask how many people have ever eaten game. If a few put their hands up, ask them what they ate and what they liked about it.
- Explain why the meat is healthy and tasty. Try to dispel the myth that it is a luxury and encourage more people to try it. You could even roast a pheasant and a partridge and take the cold meat along for those who want to, to try.
- Use the photos to explain in more detail about the different types of game birds and what make them so special.
- Explain which species are indigenous and which have been introduced.
- Talk about the differences between low ground and upland shooting.

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5 — EXPLAIN THE PREDATOR/PREY RELATIONSHIP

- Explain that as game birds are ground nesting and they lay a lot of eggs, they are particularly vulnerable to predators, along with other threatened species such as the skylark, plover and waders.
- At this point, you can hold the picture cards up one by one and ask your audience to shout out whether the species is a predator or prey.
- Tell your audience how much damage rats, squirrels and hedgehogs can do. Highlight how good predators are at their job and how we need to keep a balance in the countryside in order for the more vulnerable species to survive.
- Explain how unbalanced our landscape has become, particularly because of man's waste, which has caused the country's rat population to soar. Go on to talk about the fox and the reasons why it is one of the worst predators.
- Take along a fenn trap and a snare to explain how valuable methods of pest control actually work. Stress that they are humane and legal.
- Larsen traps are a good aid for explaining the threat from avian predators and how we control it. Many groups are aware of the decline in songbirds and are interested to know how they can legally deal with the magpies in their area.

6 — CREATION OF HABITAT

- Explain how our countryside has always been managed. What we see now is not a natural landscape. Hedges, ditches, woods and spinneys are all man made for a reason. Much of our countryside was shaped for agriculture, but also for sport.
- Wildlife and wild game flourished thanks to the enclosure system and the isolation of crops. As game became more abundant, so did the sport of shooting. As the sport grew in popularity, shoots started to supplement their wild stock with reared birds, leading us to today's climate where most shoots operate a put and take policy.
- In the early days, there was much more bio-diversity, i.e. more insects, more little birds and less predators as more of the countryside was kept.
- Mention any special projects you have done on your estate to help wildlife and/or rare animals.

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- Talk about game crops, why we plant them and the good they do for other species apart from game birds. Explain how the seed bearing crops keep lots of little birds alive through the winter and how cover in spring protects chicks and fledglings from avian predators.
- These crops also provide cover and food for small mammals such as voles and field mice and feed for Barn owls and kestrels.
- Above all, try to get across the point that gamekeepers care passionately about the countryside and its future. The job isn't just about killing game birds for sport.

7 — SOME USEFUL TIPS

- Use your experiences and try to add as many amusing or interesting anecdotes as you can.
- Pick out some historical facts that are relevant to your estate or shooting in general.
- Take your time. Try to speak slowly and clearly.
- Encourage people to ask questions throughout the talk, not just at the end. That way, you can steer your talk towards the group's interests.
- Don't get bogged down in too much detail, unless asked a specific question about a particular aspect of the job and try to finish on a high note with a positive message.

8 — FURTHER HELP

If you would like further help then please contact:

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