

Gamekeeper CD - Teaching Notes

The following notes are intended to provide teachers and education providers with a guide to the accompanying presentation and include further ideas for pupil interaction.

Slide One

- There are nearly 5,000 gamekeepers working in Great Britain today.
- Their job is to look after the game birds and all the other wildlife in the area under their stewardship.
- Their gundogs, spaniels and Labradors are used to both flush out game birds (usually the spaniels) and to retrieve birds (usually the Labradors) which have been shot.

Slide Two

Main facts already on screen..

- May need to explain a 'Hunting Forest' was not just a woodland, but a very large area set aside for hunting, shooting and falconry.
- The original role of the keeper was to look after the 'game' (animals protected by law and hunted under licence by sportsmen), also to protect it from vermin and from poachers. The landowners kept game to provide both sport and provide food.
- In the picture of 'old keeper' explain what is hung behind him. The 'Gibbet Line' – the traditional way of a keeper hanging all the vermin he catches on a line showing his employer he was doing his job. Never used today.

Slide Three

Press the left hand mouse button to bring up each fact.

- The role of a gamekeeper has been and is very important as far as the future of the British countryside is concerned.
- Make the point how small most of the conservation areas under control of wildlife trusts actually are compared with the much larger areas controlled by keepers.
- Explain what a SSSI is – Site of Special Scientific Interest – an area important to preserve because of special conditions and species which exist there.
- Conclusions drawn in a report by The Game Conservancy Trust based on recent research puts forward the view "Conservation is not about protecting nature from the hand of man, it is about managing our flora and fauna so that it sustains us physically and spiritually." The underlying ethic is one of "conservation through wise use."

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Slide Four

There are 2 gamekeepers on this slide, dressed in traditional hardwearing, warm suits made of tweed (wool) which they wear on shoot days. Maybe explain difference between 'breeks', 'plus twos' and 'plus fours'. These trousers evolved before Wellington boots existed and people in the countryside wore leather gaiters up to the knee. The 'breeks' fit tight around the knee, 'Plus Twos' hang down 2 inches and the 'Plus Fours' hang down four inches. This extra cloth is to allow room for bend in the knee.

On normal working days you are more likely to meet modern gamekeepers wearing Goretex waterproof and windproof clothing with fleeces for warmth.

These are the six areas the contents will cover.

- Gamekeeper- 'man on the spot'; everyday manager of a wide range of habitats- first person to notice any problems e.g. damage, pollution, rural crime, etc.
- Because he is there everyday, he is in the best position to monitor fluctuations in pest/predator numbers and react before the change becomes significant.
- Shoot days- very few each year in any particular wood and the rest of the year it is kept quiet and undisturbed.

Slide Five

The habitat slides are accompanied by the sound of the dawn chorus. This birdsong continues for slides 5, 6 and 7.

- Typical British countryside is a mixture/tapestry of fields growing a variety/assortment of crops separated by hedgerows with areas of woodlands of various sizes. It is very much man made and far from the original natural wilderness.

It is like this due to the historical influences of :-

- a) field sports such as hunting and shooting
- b) farming
- c) forestry

In the countryside today there is a high level of ongoing co-operation and liaison between these three.

- Hedgerows, woodlands and some farm crops e.g. wheat, beans and especially game crops provide shelter and food.

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Slide Six

Shows some of the main types of habitat i.e. woodland, river valleys, ponds and lakes, moorland etc. Each particular habitat is favourable to species who enjoy/need/are dependent on those particular conditions found in each.

- As well as game birds, in **woodland** you might find- e.g. squirrels, badgers, foxes, deer, birds of prey such as tawny owls, buzzards and sparrow hawks and other birds like tree creepers and woodpeckers.
- On **rivers** you might find- e.g. fish (such as trout, salmon, pike), otters, mink, water-voles and ducks
- On **ponds and lakes** you might find- e.g. fish, amphibians (such as frogs and newts) and birds such as water hens, coots, grebes and herons.
- On **moorland** you might find e.g. adders, common lizards, and birds of prey such as short eared owls, harriers, merlins and hobbies, as well as other ground nesting birds such as curlew, peewit and grouse.

Slide Seven

- Game/conservation crops are specially planted in small patches by the gamekeeper, this is because they provide very good shelter (cover from predators and weather) and a wide variety of seed sizes that suit game birds and also many other species.
e.g. Millet- bottom left- very small seeds
Sunflower- bottom right- large very nutritious seeds.
- The rich vegetation is a vital source of protein and is the base of the food chain supporting a range of insects and particularly their larva- these are so important for chick survival.

Slide Eight

Research has shown that game crops benefit a range of British birds and are particularly useful to birds as shelter and as a source of food during adverse weather conditions – winter.

The numbering of photographs in slides 8 & 9 gives teachers the opportunity to see if pupils can name any of these birds.

1. Blackbird
2. Dunnock (Hedge sparrow)
3. Linnet at nest
4. Tree sparrow
5. Song thrush

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Slide Nine

1. Chaffinch
2. Goldfinch
3. Reed bunting
4. Redpoll
5. Greenfinch
6. Yellow hammer

Slide Ten

Shows the main types of game birds, the accompanying sound is of pheasants only:

1. Grey partridge (indigenous)
2. Redleg/French partridge
3. Grouse (indigenous)
4. Pheasant- cock and hen pheasants have different plumage – explain why – male brightly coloured to attract females and females camouflaged so that they can safely sit on eggs for 24 days.

Slide Eleven

- Gamekeepers are only one of many different people who work in the countryside. Maintaining the countryside in its current state costs money, therefore income is necessary- shooting is an efficient means of getting some of it- much of this money is used to further improve habitat and conservation. This process was going on in the British countryside long before 'conservation' became such a popular word. Much of this is at no cost to the U.K. taxpayer. It is mainly funded by landowners and people passionate about their sport and the countryside.

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Slide Twelve

- Predators have sharp teeth, beaks and claws. They catch and kill other animals for food.
- Photographs- name fox and stoat.
- Predators are at the top of the food chain,
e.g. **Fox – Rabbit – Carrots.**

If you are confident with the concept explain 'food webs' and the dynamics within them.

- Gamekeepers keep predator populations under control, this is not only because they jeopardise the population of game birds but also many other animals as well. This is a skilled/sophisticated process and a good keeper can play a very significant role – **Keeping the Balance.**

Question: What happens if there are too many predators?

Answer: Populations of prey species, including 'game' will be reduced, sometimes quite dramatically.

Slide Thirteen

Move the cursor over the pictures to play the sound of those predators showing a speaker symbol.

- Name the six predators in screen order- (left hand button on mouse brings up names but only in the same sequence as the pictures) – discuss what sort of thing each of these animals might eat.
- Many animals such as mink, stoats and foxes communicate by scent as well as by sound.
- Predator control of such species is within the law.

Slide Fourteen

- Get pupils to name the foods eaten by the fox- talk about foxes sometimes killing large numbers of prey- e.g. a) all the chickens in a hen house. b) they kill a lot of leverets (young hares) GCT say 70%+ - this is one of the reasons hare populations are under threat in some areas. c) foxes kill even healthy lambs in some upland areas- this, consequently, is highly expensive for Welsh hill farmers. d) foxes kill all species of ground nesting birds also taking both their eggs and chicks.

Slide Fifteen

- Gamekeepers, from experience, will know the best/most effective method to employ/use for each particular predator.

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Slide Sixteen

- On the left- gamekeeper setting tunnel trap; in the middle you can see the fen trap set position with the safety on (fen traps work like giant mouse traps):
- Explain why it must only be set in a tunnel. It is illegal to set such a trap in the open where non-target species or even pets and small children might step on it.
- Explain why there are strong twigs (excluders) put at the mouth of the tunnel - eliminating non-target species.
- Why is this so important -- because this trap kills whatever it catches.

Slide Seventeen

- The telescopic site on a rifle makes it so much more accurate and the bipod makes the gun very steady. Most keepers could hit a one inch circle at 100metres. Providing the gun is 'big enough' (i.e. of the right calibre); then shooting an animal, especially something as big as a fox or a deer, can be achieved with a 'clean kill', -this is the best way of doing it.
- Free running snares- can be very effective- the skill is in setting the snare. It holds the animal which is then shot. The 'stop' on the snare prevents it tightening.

Slide Eighteen

- Larsen and ladder traps- two very successful ways of catching corvids (crows, magpies and jackdaws) which do so much damage to the eggs of nesting birds and to quite large chicks.
- Explain how a Larsen trap works,
 - 'Sprung lids' with split perch triggers
 - decoy bird from different area (shelter, food and water) which the resident territorial birds attack
 - Attacking bird enters trap, through the top, triggers the split perch which allows the sprung lid to close
- A Larsen trap could be a very useful teaching aid.
- A ladder trap is a multi-catch trap and can catch large numbers of most corvids. The birds enter through the spaces in the central ladder, to get at the food on the ground and they cannot find their way out.
- Both are live traps- if you catch non-target species you can let them go.

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Slide Nineteen

- Use of poisons- now strictly controlled although still legal- usually used for rodents (squirrels and rats) and must be set inside specially designed bait boxes which excludes other 'non target' animals.

Slide Twenty

- Some animals, when they exist in large numbers can cause a lot of damage- we call them **PESTS**.
- Some of them are very good to eat and a useful food source.

Slide Twenty-one

- Get children to name each pest shown – mention damage each might cause. Deer may not be seen by the children or teachers as a pest and it may be necessary to carefully explain the significant damage they can cause:-
 - (i) reducing diversity of species of woodland plants.
 - (ii) damage to trees
 - (iii) damage to farm crops.

Slide Twenty-two

- Rats are one of the most common pests- they can be found anywhere in the countryside, towns and gardens where there is a food source. Their numbers can increase very rapidly- they not only cause damage; they can carry serious diseases which they can spread.
- This slide shows rats, found in corn crops and rubbish dumps. They often damage food produce in storage making it unfit for human consumption.
- They also eat a lot of eggs and chicks of even quite rare birds.

Slide Twenty-three

- Shooting provides important income for many estates- this money pays for much of the conservation work and encourages estates to maintain a good quality habitat- ponds or woodlands rather than turning all the land over to farming crops.
- The Game Conservancy Trust states that without predator control most of the potential benefits from conservation work would be lost.

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Slide Twenty-four

Game rearing is an important part of modern shooting.

- Top left - game rearing field - usually changed onto fresh ground every year.
- Bottom right- young birds provided with shelter, warmth and food. At this age they are 'happier' in quite large numbers in close contact.
- Top right- older poults out learning to fend and feed for themselves; they need and are given more space. The young pheasants then go to the wood and there is a period of acclimatisation before they are released into the wild.
- Bottom left- a broody hen sitting on pheasant eggs acting as a foster parent - method still used (sometimes) today- it was the way all game birds were raised in the past- very time consuming job- there were far more keepers employed. Large numbers of suitable hens are almost impossible to find these days. Today most eggs are hatched in large incubators

Slide Twenty-five

- Shooting days are meticulously well organised- carefully planned in terms of
 - 1) ground to be covered;
 - 2) skilled people involved, each knowing their particular job;
 - 3) fixed number of people shooting who stick to the agreed guidelines.
- Each day is approximately limited to an agreed 'bag' - number of birds to be shot.

Slide Twenty-six

- On shooting estates nothing is wasted- all the game that is shot is sold and eaten by the general public.
- It is healthy food (low cholesterol).
- Direct from the gamekeeper it is relatively inexpensive food and a delicious, wild meat

Slide Twenty-seven

- The gamekeeper is constantly out and about and an important part of his job is to be very observant. He provides an early warning system for any crime in the countryside and usually has a very good relationship with the local police.

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Slide Twenty-eight

- The modern gamekeeper – either working single handed or as a member of an estate team. Usually a family man with a house provided. His working days are often from dawn to dusk or maybe, at certain times of the year, on into the night.
- On the left the keeper is out deer stalking in full camouflage gear, probably at first light.
- On the right the keeper is in everyday wear, quite often with his Landrover, dog and gun for ongoing pest control.

In the past most of the knowledge/skill needed to become a good gamekeeper was learnt as a lad progressing from 'the boy', to under keeper, to beat keeper, to head keeper, or on some estates from father to son.

There are now a range of courses available at Further Education colleges who specialise in game keeping or wild life management courses. These courses, along with placements for work experience with keepers, provide a sound basis and recognised qualifications before a young fully trained keeper applies for his first job.

Slide Twenty-nine

Further details are available on the National Gamekeepers' Organisation Educational Trust website :- www.gamekeeperstrust.org.uk
or from:-

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In the Events section of the website you will also find details of estate and country school days, at which the NGO Educational Trust hosts a Roadshow. These events encourage schools to visit a local estate and the children can learn about all aspects of countryside life, meet real gamekeepers and see the work that goes into running a modern estate in a sustainable manner.