

# Grouse shooting: Stop the Inglorious Twelfth

What is referred to as the Glorious Twelfth – the start of the grouse shooting season – is rather more inglorious for the grouse and other wildlife that lose their lives in the name of this cruel 'sport'. Natalie Bennett calls for the end of grouse shooting and the management of grouse moors in a way that doesn't harm people or planet.



Image: Alastair Rae (CC BY-SA 2.0)  
A red grouse, common to UK moorlands.



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Today is the 'Inglorious Twelfth', the day that peaceful, inoffensive red grouse in the UK will suddenly find themselves driven by beaters towards line of guns seeking to blast them out of the sky.



It is a slaughter, pure and simple, mysteriously described as a 'sport', something of great importance to a small percentage of the population, unknown or at best mysterious to most.

Inglorious Twelfth is not of course what the shooters call it – for them it is the 'Glorious Twelfth'.

Today is horrible to anyone who can imagine what it is like for these birds, and the other animals of the uplands, suddenly facing a hail of deadly lead.

Yet the targets that fall before the guns today are only a tiny fraction of the total bloodshed associated with the Inglorious Twelfth.

To make it happen, to ensure the maximum number of grouse are ready to be slaughtered on this day, there's a continual massacre on the moors. There is slaughter of inoffensive, beautiful [mountain hares](#) – that might carry a disease affecting the grouse.

There's the [mass killing](#) of potential grouse predators such as foxes, weasels, stoats, crows and ravens, often in traps and snares that also trap many other non-target species, wild and domestic.

All of this slaughter is, astonishingly in 2019, perfectly legal.

But there's another slaughter that isn't – of protected raptors.

That was the immediate reason why I and a couple of thousand other people [gathered yesterday \(11 August\) in Derbyshire](#), for a newer and much prouder tradition of Hen Harrier Day.

This was the fifth such Hen Harrier Day, celebrating the species that's suffered most at the hands of illegal persecution [linked to driven grouse shooting](#), although far from the only one. [Scotland's golden eagle](#) is another.

Since the focus brought by Hen Harrier Day campaigners, there's been a modest recovery in their numbers. In a deep failure of judgement, the BBC news was celebrating this yesterday morning – celebrating the fact that there's now five per cent of the number of breeding pairs of the species called the Skydancer that there should be on England's moors.

But at Hen Harrier Day this year there was an additional factor – a global one. For it came in the week when the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released a major report bringing into sharp focus the [importance of land use for tackling our climate emergency](#).

It said that the management of the two-thirds of ice-free land has to change dramatically if our planet is to continue to sustain humanity.

It highlights one of the reasons why I first became involved in Hen Harrier Day four years ago, after I'd visited Hebden Bridge and seen the [disastrous impact of driven grouse moor management](#) on the downstream land, as well as the loss of carbon stores and collapse in bioabundance associated with it.

For management of land for driven grouse moors is an extreme case of the hugely widespread mismanagement of our common heritage, and a risk to all of our futures.

It illustrates a point that applies to some degree to all of our land – as the IPCC was highlighting – that you might own land, or lease it, but that cannot give you the right to do what you like with it, not if that involves disastrous impacts on others.

John Donne said “no man is an island”. Well it is also true that no land exists in a vacuum.

We all need every last possible inch of it to function as a carbon store, to slow the flow of floodwaters, to protect biodiversity and bioabundance and to hold healthy soil that can feed us.

No owner can be allowed to harm us all by damaging those functions, or slaughtering the wildlife that is our common heritage.

In five short years, the campaign to save the hen harrier has come a long way. It has been at the heart of the development of a new, energetic, exciting campaign organisation, [Wild Justice](#), that's also just starting to take on the incredible destruction wrought by a sister 'sport', pheasant shooting.

And yesterday, as I addressed the crowd, I suggested that some time soon there would indeed be a truly Glorious Twelfth, a day in August when the grouse, and the other wildlife on the moors, can continue their existence in peace, as the land begins to be managed in ways that doesn't harm people or planet.

Chris Packham suggested to the crowd yesterday that this might be a 10-year project – with at the halfway point a great deal having been achieved.

He could be right, but I reckon it might be sooner than that. For politics now is uncertain, the only thing we know is that massive change is on the way.

Extinction Rebellion is on the streets, as it was at Hen Harrier Day yesterday. Young people are taking regular climate strike action. The world is changing fast, as it has to.

Bring on the genuinely Glorious, peaceful, hunting-free, Twelfth, as part of this new and essential age. And then we can have a Hen Harrier Day that celebrates a new world that every participant yesterday helped to bring about.

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