



# game / wild meat



## what is it?

It's all about harvesting meat from the wild. In the UK, the kind of wild animals that are good to eat (apart from fish) include deer, rabbits, squirrels, ducks, geese, game birds such as partridges and pheasants, and pigeons. They can be shot, humanely trapped, or they could be road kill. Game animals can also be farmed, but then the benefits of truly wild game (below) are lost.

What we don't mean is the shooting industry, which isn't really about food, it's an incredible waste of resources and is the most expensive way imaginable of feeding yourself, in terms of energy and money. Animal Aid quote gamekeepers themselves when it comes to the figures. It costs around £30 to produce a pheasant for shooting, and the average price for a bird is £2, but most birds don't make it to the table at all. It's about killing animals for fun, and for social status / prestige reasons. US executives are flown over to shoot game in the UK for this reason. And almost none of the birds shot are wild (although grouse are).

Over 50 million pheasants are raised intensively, from battery eggs, fed grain that needs lots of land to produce, and released into the 'wild', where many of them get run over, starve or become easy meals for predators, because they're not really wild at all. Plus these 50 million introduced animals are competing with native wildlife for food. Also, the shooting industry is responsible for the snaring and shooting of other wild animals that prey on game birds, including birds of prey. Breeding birds for 'sport' has been banned in the Netherlands, and we support Animal Aid's campaign to have it banned here. So, back to truly wild animals.



*Plucking a road-kill pheasant for roasting.*



*Red deer in the Scottish Highlands have no natural predators, and numbers can be controlled by shooting for human consumption, although there is a proposal to reintroduce wolves into the wild in Scotland.*

## what are the benefits?

As long as the animals are not from an endangered species, this is probably the most eco-friendly way to eat meat. It's more sustainable than the meat industry, and as long as hunters have a conscience, involves less animal suffering. Food can be harvested from nature – no land needs to be cleared for farms. It also involves no chemicals, hormones, abattoirs, pasture or animal housing, or land to grow animal feeds.

Many game species are pests: grey squirrels ring-bark and kill trees, especially maples, and out-compete the native red, which has become very rare. Rabbits eat crops and young trees, and deer prevent re-forestation by eating young shoots.

Wild meat has a lower fat content than domesticated animals, and is therefore healthier.

Harvesting meat or plant foods from the wild involves no alteration of natural ecosystems, so has a lower impact than even a vegan diet – especially if the wild meat is local and the plants are imported. Perhaps the most sustainable (and healthiest) diet possible is mainly local and vegan, with the occasional meal including wild meat.

Red deer have no predators in Scotland, and so if left unchecked, will increase in numbers until they damage the ecology of their range, by overgrazing, preventing the re-growth of trees etc. Their numbers need to be controlled somehow. From an ecological perspective, controlling their numbers by shooting or by the proposed reintroduction of wolves will both work; but from an animal welfare perspective, shooting is probably the more humane option (i.e. is it more or less painful, stressful and terrifying to be shot or to be chased to exhaustion and torn apart by wolves?). Whatever your position on this, we think that it's a debate we can all have whilst still agreeing on the need to live in harmony with nature.



### what can I do?

Firstly, you can only shoot or trap game on your own land, or if you have the permission of the landowner. See [basc.org.uk](http://basc.org.uk) for codes of practice.

#### Shooting

Air rifle: shoots pellets; suitable for rabbits, squirrels and pigeons; you don't need a licence.

Shotgun: for moving targets, relatively short-range (up to 35m) – e.g. squirrels moving through trees.

Rifle: single bullet, up to 300m, but more usually around 100m; best for deer.

You need a shotgun licence for a shotgun and a firearms licence for a rifle. Licences are available from the police. Guns need to be kept in a locked metal cupboard bolted to the wall. There are seasons in which some animals can be shot legally; other animals can be shot all year round.

If you want to shoot game, you should think about insurance (landowners will probably want to see it before they allow you to shoot on their land). Talk to the dealer you bought the gun from. Plus, don't try to shoot game until you are a very good shot, and know that your quarry will be killed cleanly. You can't use a bow and arrow to hunt game in the UK (although you can in other countries).

#### Trapping

We only condone trapping where the animal is killed instantly, not snares that can hold an animal in terror for hours or days.

Rabbiting: ferrets are put down rabbit warrens, rabbits are flushed out into nets, then killed instantly with a sharp blow to the back of the head, or a twist to break the neck. Don't try it if you don't know how to do it. Go rabbiting with people who know how to do it first.

#### Roadkill

You're not allowed to take home roadkill you hit yourself (it would encourage people to try to hit animals deliberately). The usual roadkill is deer, rabbit and pheasant, but some have developed recipes for pot-roasted fox or badger burgers. Waste not, want not. However, you have to know what you're doing. If it's a healthy animal that died in a collision, the body is still warm and it's winter then it's probably fine – but inspect it carefully. In warm weather, the intestines can burst and flies can lay their eggs throughout the body very quickly. A pheasant may be good for the pot, but deer are trickier as they may have been ill (TB is a big one with deer but tularaemia is common with



*Wild meats can be seen on TV programmes and on the menus of top restaurants, and are becoming more available from butchers.*

rabbits too), so less able to avoid an accident. Any animal could be fresh but harbouring a parasite. It's important to know what to look for. There are also issues for pets and fleas.

#### Preparing

Many find wild meat too strong or 'gamey'; but if it's prepared and cooked properly, game can be delicious. Wild animals have harder lives than domestic animals, and so their meat is tougher, so game is often hung for up to 10 days to allow enzymes to break down proteins and improve tenderness and flavour. The skin should remain on during hanging to retain moisture. The animal must be bled and gutted immediately after killing, then hung, skinned / plucked, butchered and cooked. As these are very practical skills, perhaps a course is the best way to learn.

#### Cooking

Game tends to be very lean, so you have to make sure that it doesn't dry out during cooking. Also, it can be tough unless cooked for a long time. Casseroles and pies are excellent ways to serve game. You can find recipes in books and online.

### resources

- [lowimpact.org/game](http://lowimpact.org/game) for more info, courses, links, books etc, including:
- Kate Fiduccia, *the Wild Game Cookbook*
- Louise Gray, *the Ethical Carnivore*
- BR Peterson, *the Roadkill Cookbook*
- Graham Downing, *the Deer Stalking Handbook*
- [basc.org.uk](http://basc.org.uk) – info and codes of conduct on shooting pigeons, rabbits, deer etc.
- [animalaid.org.uk](http://animalaid.org.uk) – against the shooting industry
- [bbc.co.uk/food/search?q=game](http://bbc.co.uk/food/search?q=game) – game recipes

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