

NARGC Grey Partridge Conservation Project

Classroom Lesson Plan - Junior Infants to 2nd Class

Theme	Helping the Grey Partridge
Suggested duration	40-50 minutes
Curriculum areas	SESE, Science, Geography, English and Visual Arts
Key focus	Wildlife, habitats, conservation and caring for nature

Teacher Background Information

What is a Grey Partridge?

The Grey Partridge is a native Irish farmland bird. It is a small, round-bodied bird that spends most of its time on the ground rather than in trees. Its brown and grey feathers provide excellent camouflage among grass, crops and field margins.

Grey Partridge live mainly in farmland and open countryside. During autumn and winter, family groups often remain together. A family group of partridges is known as a covey.

Grey Partridge were once much more widespread across the Irish countryside, but their numbers declined dramatically during the twentieth century. Today the species is of high conservation concern in Ireland and needs carefully managed habitat and conservation work.

What does a Grey Partridge eat?

Adult Grey Partridge eat a mixture of seeds, grain, leaves, shoots and other plant material. Young chicks have different needs. During their first weeks of life they depend heavily on insects and other small invertebrates, which provide the protein and energy they need to grow.

Why has the Grey Partridge become endangered in Ireland?

Grey Partridge need safe nesting places, insect-rich areas for chicks, seeds and plants for food, and plenty of cover in which to hide. Changes in the countryside over many decades reduced some of these resources. Larger fields, loss of suitable field margins and nesting cover, and reductions in wild plants and insects all contributed to the decline.

Because Grey Partridge nest on the ground, eggs, chicks and adult birds can also be vulnerable to predators. Successful conservation therefore requires a combination of good habitat, food, cover, monitoring and, where appropriate, responsible predator management.

What are the NARGC and its volunteers doing?

NARGC clubs and dedicated volunteers are involved in practical conservation work designed to give Grey Partridge a better chance of surviving and breeding. The key message for children is that saving the Grey Partridge is not simply about putting birds into the countryside - the birds need the right home in which to live.

- Working with farmers and landowners to create and improve suitable habitat.
- Planting conservation crops that provide food and shelter.
- Creating grassy nesting areas and insect-rich places where chicks can feed.
- Providing winter food and cover.
- Carrying out appropriate predator management to protect vulnerable nesting birds and chicks.
- Rearing and releasing Grey Partridge as part of carefully managed conservation projects.
- Monitoring birds to learn whether they survive, pair up and successfully raise chicks.

These habitats can benefit much more than Grey Partridge. Wildflowers, grassy margins and conservation crops can also provide food and shelter for bees, butterflies, insects and other farmland birds.

Learning Intentions

- Recognise a Grey Partridge and know that it is a native Irish farmland bird.
- Identify some of the things a Grey Partridge needs to survive.
- Know that chicks eat insects while adults also eat seeds, plants and grain.
- Explain in simple terms why Grey Partridge have become rare.
- Identify ways that people can help Grey Partridge and their habitats.
- Understand that farmers, landowners and volunteers can work together to protect wildlife.

Key Vocabulary

Grey Partridge - a native Irish farmland bird.

Habitat - the place where an animal lives.

Conservation - looking after and protecting nature.

Chick - a young bird.

Nest - the place where a bird lays its eggs.

Camouflage - colours or patterns that help an animal hide.

Covey - a family or group of partridges.

Volunteer - someone who gives their time to help.

Lesson Sequence

Part 1 - Meet the Grey Partridge

Suggested time: 5-10 minutes

Show the children a photograph or picture of a Grey Partridge. Ask: Has anyone seen this bird before? What colours can you see? Is it a big bird or a small bird? Do you think it spends more time in trees or on the ground?

Explain that the Grey Partridge is one of Ireland's native farmland birds and that its brown and grey feathers help it disappear among grass and crops.

Quick camouflage activity: Ask why the bird might be brown and grey rather than bright blue or pink. Imagine it sitting quietly in long grass. Would it be easy for a predator to see?

Part 2 - What Does a Grey Partridge Eat?

Suggested time: 5 minutes

Ask the class what they think a Grey Partridge might eat. Explain that adults eat seeds, grain, leaves, shoots and other plant material.

Guessing game: What does a tiny Grey Partridge chick like to eat?

A. Fish B. Insects C. Apples

Answer: B - Insects. Insects give growing chicks the protein and energy they need.

Part 3 - Build a Partridge Home

Suggested time: 5-10 minutes

Tell the children: We are going to imagine that a family of Grey Partridge has arrived beside our school. We have to build them the perfect home.

- A safe place to live and nest.
- Seeds and plants for food.
- Lots of insects for the chicks.
- Long grass, crops and plants for hiding and shelter.

Ask whether a big empty field with nowhere to hide would be a good home. Then compare it with a field edge containing long grass, flowers, seeds and insects. Introduce the word habitat.

Part 4 - Why Do Grey Partridge Need Our Help?

Suggested time: 5 minutes

Explain that many years ago Grey Partridge could be found in many more places around Ireland. Over time the countryside changed. Some long grassy places and field edges disappeared, and in some places there were fewer insects for chicks to eat. As suitable homes became harder to find, there were fewer Grey Partridge.

Teacher note: Avoid presenting farming negatively. Explain that conservationists work with farmers and landowners to create places where wildlife can thrive alongside modern farming.

Part 5 - Become a Partridge Conservationist!

Suggested time: 5-10 minutes

Tell the children that NARGC volunteers help look after the countryside and wildlife. Ask them to become conservation volunteers. Give a thumbs up if an action helps and a thumbs down if it does not.

- Planting flowers and special conservation crops. - Thumbs up!
- Removing all the long grass where birds can nest. - Thumbs down!
- Creating safe grassy places for nests. - Thumbs up!
- Making places where lots of insects can live. - Thumbs up!
- Leaving no food or shelter during winter. - Thumbs down!
- Farmers, landowners and volunteers working together. - Thumbs up!

Part 6 - Grey Partridge Movement Activity

Suggested time: 3-5 minutes

This works particularly well with Junior and Senior Infants. Ask everyone to stand beside their chair.

- Partridges spend lots of time walking and running on the ground. - Walk on the spot.
- A fox is nearby - CAMOUFLAGE! - Everyone freezes.
- The fox is gone - look for seeds! - Pretend to peck at seeds.
- The chicks have hatched - find some insects! - Pretend to search for insects.
- Danger - hide in the long grass! - Everyone crouches down.
- The family is back together - we're a covey! - Everyone stands again.

Review and Colouring Competition

Part 7 - What Have We Learned?

Suggested time: 5 minutes

1. What bird did we learn about today?

The Grey Partridge.

2. Where does the Grey Partridge live?

In farmland and the countryside.

3. What do baby partridge chicks love to eat?

Insects.

4. What does a Grey Partridge need to survive?

Food, insects, long grass, plants, shelter and safe places to nest.

5. What can people do to help?

Look after and create good habitats and work together to protect wildlife.

Part 8 - NARGC Grey Partridge Colouring Competition

Suggested time: 15-20 minutes, or use as a separate Visual Arts lesson.

Tell the children that they are now going to enter the NARGC Grey Partridge Colouring Competition. Before they begin, return to the camouflage discussion and look again at a photograph of a real Grey Partridge.

Ask: What colours can you see on the bird? Encourage the children to colour their Grey Partridge as realistically as they can and to think about the colours that help the bird hide in the Irish countryside.

Junior and Senior Infants

- Recognising colours.
- Careful colouring.
- Talking about the bird.
- Enjoying the activity.

1st and 2nd Class

- Using more realistic colours.
- Careful observation of a reference photograph.
- Discussing camouflage.
- Remembering facts learned during the lesson.

Optional Extension Activities

Design a Partridge Habitat

Ask children to draw the perfect home for a Grey Partridge, including long grass, flowers, insects, seeds, chicks and field edges or hedgerows.

Partridge Food Hunt

Place pictures around the classroom showing seeds, insects, grain, leaves, fish, chocolate and ice cream. Children identify which things belong in a healthy partridge habitat.

Junior Infant Sentence

"This is a Grey Partridge." Children draw or colour the bird.

Senior Infant Sentence

Complete "The Grey Partridge lives ____." or "The chick eats ____."

1st and 2nd Class Writing

Complete: "A Grey Partridge is ____." "A Grey Partridge chick eats ____." "A Grey Partridge needs ____." "We can help Grey Partridge by ____."

Key Message to Finish the Lesson

The Grey Partridge is part of Ireland's wildlife. It needs food, shelter and safe places to raise its chicks. By looking after habitats and working together, farmers, landowners, conservationists and volunteers can help give the Grey Partridge a future in the Irish countryside.

NARGC

Protecting our countryside and passing our wildlife heritage to the next generation.