

## **PRESS RELEASE on Behalf of the Fingal Grey Partridge Project**

### **Ireland's native Grey Partridges return to North County Dublin after 50 years**

#### **Innovative Ways of Promoting Wildlife on the Farm**

Today, the Minister for the Department of Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht, Jimmy Deenihan T.D., released the first batch of native Grey Partridges from a release pen on a farm near Oldtown in north County Dublin.

After releasing the Grey Partridges in Fingal, Minister Deenihan said: "I am delighted to take part in this event, returning a native Irish bird to Fingal, where it has not been seen since the 1960's. This project clearly shows how farming practices in the 21<sup>st</sup> century can collaborate with nature conservation agencies to the betterment of our wildlife."

The Grey Partridge Release programme is part of the first year of an ambitious five-year project to re-establish a viable population of Irish Grey Partridge in north County Dublin. The Irish Grey Partridge Conservation Trust and Fingal County Council are managing the Grey Partridge reintroduction project in Fingal. Up to recent years Ireland's naturally occurring population of Grey Partridge was in serious danger of extinction, with only 22 birds nationally, in a single location at Boora Bog in Co. Offaly.

The National Parks and Wildlife Service is responsible for the conservation of the Grey Partridge. Over the last number of years a conservation project funded by the NPWS has turned the fortunes of the species around from a critically low 22 to 932 birds. The NPWS funded Grey Partridge project in Boora is regarded as the most successful conservation project in Europe by scientists from the UK's Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust, the leading scientific authority on the species.

Mr John Walsh of the Irish Grey Partridge Conservation Trust said, "the Boora project has worked and the population has increased to a point where the National Conservation Strategy for the species has moved on to its next phase. Not only will grey partridge benefit from this project, but also a range of other farmland birds that have unfortunately declined over the last number of decades. We greatly appreciate the co-operation of local farmers who have made this project possible"

Seventy Grey Partridge from the Boora project have been donated by the National Parks & Wildlife Service to kick start the project. Over the duration of the project a number of conservation strategies for the grey partridge will roll out on farmland in Fingal. These strategies are designed to increase the breeding productivity of the released birds. The newly established population will be augmented with birds from the captive breeding programme for two years. The longer-term objective of the project is to reach sufficient numbers of Partridges that are recruited from the wild population which will facilitate an expansion of the grey partridge within North Dublin.

The project will focus on the creation of suitable habitats within three intensive cereal farms in the Oldtown area. A series of 3-4 metre wide habitat strips over the 3 farms will stretch out over 10km. These strips will be located along the margins of the headlands. The establishment of a demonstration farm where profitable farming and biodiversity can co-exist without the loss of farming output is key goal of the project. This innovative approach is effectively a tweak of modern farming practices, which will ensure that many farmers see the benefits of this type of project and will continue to act as they always have, as custodians of biodiversity in the countryside.

Mr Hans Visser, Biodiversity Officer with Fingal County Council stated that "Rural Fingal has lots of suitable farmland for grey partridge to thrive in the wild, and we hope this pilot project will demonstrate to other farmers in Fingal what can be done for wildlife conservation in an easy and straightforward way. A narrow habitat strip in the least productive part of the field will have a minimal impact on farm income, while being of great benefit to farmland wildlife".

The project is funded by Fingal LEADER Partnership through the Rural Development Programme 2007 -2013 and Fingal County Council and is supported by the National Parks & Wildlife Service, the National Association of Regional Game Councils and three local farmers.

**ENDS 26/10/11**

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## NOTES TO EDITORS

The focus of the project is on the creation of suitable habitat for Grey Partridge within three intensive farms in the Oldtown area.

- At least ten kilometers of habitat strips are to be created within the next year, with half of these strips already in place. These strips are 3-4 metres wide and are located along the headlands and comprise of Kale, Oats and Linseed.
- These strips will provide suitable habitat for breeding, feeding and shelter for the adult and young partridges.
- It should be noted that these strips will not only benefit the Grey Partridge. Many other declining farmland species such as Yellowhammer, Tree Sparrow, Stock Dove, Hare, Bees, Butterflies and Bats will also benefit from these measures.
- A monitoring program is in place to assess the impact of the habitat strips on the many other wildlife species too.