

Trusted Game – the assurance a gamekeeper needs



Tim Weston, NGO Development Office (South) discovers more about this relatively new initiative by talking to the vets involved.

Trusted Game was launched late last year by a group of specialist gamebird veterinary practices keen to provide a low cost, accessible, and evidence-based auditing and standards scheme to support those who rear and release pheasants, red-legged partridges and mallard ducks in the UK.

Vets Rita Alves of Daltons Game Consultancy and Mark Elliott of South Downs Veterinary Consultancy, along with Dan King of Sandhill Vets, put the scheme together through 2021. Trialling audits on some of their game farming clients and shoots, they identified key indicators of success and failure, and by pooling their work and comparing that with existing best practice advice, they built the guidance from the ground up to be specific to gamebirds.

I was keen to discuss this with them, and how it would all work in practice.

We already have an auditing scheme and standards in the UK. How is this different? Trusted Game is unique in that it is based

around the existing partnership between you and your vet. Guided by standards, it is a more formal record and audit of how everyone is working together to ensure the health and welfare of the birds. The project aims to ensure birds are reared and released in assured conditions throughout their lives by well-trained individuals, so customers, the public and government can all 'trust' in the process.

The audits and advice become part of your clinical record and are confidential to you and your vet. The standards are evidence-based and acknowledge that there is no 'one size that fits all' due to the diversity and nature of all those projects and businesses involved in game.

Although the scheme is focused on ensuring the health and welfare of birds at all stages until release, it does cover more than that with the advice, guidance and training provided.

Why vets?

Vets are in a unique position as they are

already engaged with their clients on a day-to-day basis and – for many – this will just be formalisation and/or enhancement of existing processes into what we hope will become a nationally-recognised scheme.

Vets are experienced and involved in auditing and standards in much of farming already as most other farming sectors have similar schemes in place. Vets are often the first port of call for guidance and support and they will already know the sites well and have knowledge enabling honest review over a period of time (years) rather than a limited snapshot on the day of an audit. As well as it being logical, it is more practical and inexpensive as vets have to visit sites annually in most instances anyway.

Reference to known standards, agreed by the vets involved and by pooling knowledge, is also extremely useful when investigating problems that arise. And a key point is that visits from Defra and/or Trading Standards have become more common, for game farms especially, in the last couple of years, and your vet is often the first line of defence →



The scheme is focused on ensuring health and welfare of birds, and provides advice, guidance and training.



Mark Elliott is one of the founding vets for the Trusted Game scheme.

when questions are raised, so it helps everyone to have points of reference.

The game sector, being a once-a-year cycle rather than continuous production, has been slow to adopt these methods and it is harder to make changes and see results without accepted norms for comparison.

Will the scheme itself be accredited?

Accreditation by third parties is prohibitively expensive and an impediment to rapid roll out, so not at this time. However, it could easily become so if needed in the future. Our aim today is that Trusted Game is accessible, inclusive and affordable for all shoots and farms, no matter their size. To ensure consistency in process and purpose, the vets involved will voluntarily be re-validated annually by colleagues, much as happens with GPs in the UK. Vets are independently regulated by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, and Trusted Game is designed to be part of routine veterinary practice.

Do you have an idea of cost?

Agreements will be between you and your vet, but will have a capped maximum, aiming for affordability so that all rearing fields and shoots over 3,000 birds are audited annually, and smaller shoots every two to three years.

You mention training for gamekeepers and game rearers – what does that involve?

The British Veterinary Poultry Association's Gamebird Working Party has already agreed curricula for education to be provided by

specialist practices. Like the Trusted Game project, these curricula are available to all veterinary practices enabling them to provide courses for clients. They launch this spring (Covid permitting) and we would encourage everyone to get involved. Being evidence led, Trusted Game endorses these courses, and will evolve more as need arises. All practices that support the Trusted Game project will be running them for clients.

Are you assisting clients with marketing their game produce

Not directly, although we are sure in the very near future that game dealers will require some verification of welfare standards to reassure their markets. Most clients currently do not report issues placing their product.

I don't use a specialist gamebird vet – can my vet get involved?

Yes – the project is open to all vets. All we ask is that they are British Veterinary Poultry Association Members; that they agree to the re-validation process to ensure standards are consistent and met; that they commit to formal game-related CPD annually to update their own training; and that they submit antibiotic use figures to the annual VMD/RUMA data collection project (part of government antibiotic reduction initiatives). ●

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT TRUSTED GAME

Trusted Game has a website, www.trustedgame.co.uk, and email: info@trustedgame.co.uk. You can contact your vet and, if not already, ask them to get involved. Vets can call Rita, Mark or Dan for more information and join with the other practices already on board with the project. If you would like to see the standards either ask your vet, or email us with a request and proof of membership of the NGO or related organisation. ●

Game Bird Health & Welfare Scheme assured by vets

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