

Every other month, Ric Smith and Steve Downey of specialist ingredients supplier Ritter Fresh share their sourcing expertise and hand-pick an exclusive recipe to show off the best seasonal produce



# We've nothing to grouse about



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I was once told by an eminent French chef that in French kitchens they envied the British nothing apart from our native red grouse, found nowhere else in the world. There are 18 species of grouse in the world, with five in the UK, but there is only one which interests the culinary world and that is our delicious red grouse, regarded as the king of game birds by shooters and gourmards alike. The shooters because this little devil can reach dizzying speeds of up to 70 miles an hour and present rather a challenging target hurtling towards a first-time, startled gun, with its characteristic low flight and alarming habit of veering away at the last minute. The gourmards because its distinctive taste has, for many, no equal. Just look at the name conferred on the opening day of the season: "The Glorious Twelfth". Glorious for the eager guns assembled to test their skills, glorious for chefs eagerly awaiting



Image: gettyimages.co.uk

the first birds to arrive in time for dinner that very night, and glorious for the likes of me sitting down to eat. Actually, I tend to wait for a few days, until prices have halved and I can visit a restaurant more suited to my wallet.

Red grouse are wild birds, unlike pheasants and partridges which are reared in their millions. Heather moors are managed by gamekeepers to provide perfect conditions for the young grouse to survive. Indeed, chicks are precocial - born with their eyes wide open, feathers in place and able to fly

after just five days and reproduce the following spring. With large broods of eight to 14, the red grouse is one of nature's great survivors.

Heather moorland is rarer than tropical rainforest and the UK is home to 75% of all that remains worldwide, thanks to grouse management. The grouse industry supports the equivalent of 2,500 full-time jobs, given that it is seasonal, as well as investing approximately £100m in conservation projects annually. All of this became possible with technology. From 1853 trains

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provided easy access to the moors, while shotguns became breech loading resulting in enormous bags often topping 2,500 in a single shoot. Today, with clever marketing, people travel from all over the world and pay large sums of money to hunt something that is so exclusively British. Indeed, a few years ago I met a group of Germans who come to London every year for a grouse dinner at a two-Michelin star restaurant before lunch the next day at a three-star gaff. This little bird is doing its bit for the economy and we should be proud to know that it's British.

With only days before the Glorious Twelfth, restaurants all over the country will be preparing their menus and, with that in mind, Alex Bond of Nottingham's brilliant Alchemilla has provided us with one of his recipes.

## GROUSE, BBQ LEEK, TRUFFLE PUREE, QUINCE-GLAZED APPLE AND KAVAS SAUCE (SERVES 4)

**Alchemilla, 192 Derby Road, Nottingham NG7 1NF**  
0115 941 3515

**Ingredients:**

- 4 grouse (plucked)
- 50g chicken livers
- 50g foie gras
- 150g butter (melted)
- 3 eggs
- 3g pink salt
- 8g Maldon salt
- 4 large leeks
- 300g stale sourdough
- 500ml 20% sugar syrup
- 6 quince
- 2 cox apples
- Butter flavoured with Marmite



The name's... Alchemilla chef-patron Alex Bond

► Blowtorch the birds lightly to scorch any remaining feathers, then remove the legs, wings, head and guts, saving the livers and hearts. Remove the wishbone from the crown and reserve for later. De-bone the thighs, season and roll in cling film. Cook sous vide at 85°C for three hours.  
► Take the chicken livers, grouse liver, foie gras, eggs,

pink salt and Maldon. Warm all to 36°C before blending in a Vita-Prep while adding the butter to emulsify. Pass and cook at 100°C in a bain-marie until the core temperature reaches 65°C.

► Barbecue the leeks until heavily burnt all round. Cook in a bamboo steamer until tender. Remove the top green part and outside of the white part to expose the white centre, and reserve for later.

► To make the kavas sauce, remove the crusts from the old sourdough and soak in a 20% sugar syrup overnight. Pass the paste through a muslin, making sure to get as much of the solid as possible. Leave the paste to ferment for 10 days until sour, then bottle and leave to age for at least 14 days. Warm 100ml of the kavas and monte with smoked

A game bird: Bond's glorious grouse



butter until a glossy sauce consistency is obtained. Check seasoning and adjust with a little sherry vinegar and salt.  
► Juice the quinces, then poach the apples in the juice until firm but tender. Reduce the quince to a glaze then drop the apples in to coat them.  
► To serve, roast the bird on the crown in a pan of foaming

butter and rest. Colour the thigh, roast the heart, spread the parfait on a thin piece of toasted sourdough.  
► Reheat the leek heart in the bamboo steamer and brush with a Marmite-flavoured butter.  
► Warm the apple in quince glaze and assemble on the plate. Finish with the sauce.