



# Lagopus

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(Redirected from [Ptarmigan](#))

*"Ptarmigan" redirects here. For other uses, see [Ptarmigan \(disambiguation\)](#).*

**Lagopus** is a small genus of birds in the [grouse](#) subfamily commonly known as **ptarmigans** (/ˈtɑːrmiɡənz/). The genus contains three living species with numerous described subspecies, all living in [tundra](#) or cold upland areas.

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## Taxonomy and etymology [ edit ]

The *genus* *Lagopus* was introduced by the French zoologist [Mathurin Jacques Brisson](#) in 1760 with the [willow ptarmigan](#) (*Lagopus lagopus*) as the *type species*.<sup>[1][2]</sup> The genus name *Lagopus* is derived from [Ancient Greek](#) *lagos* (λαγός), meaning "hare", + *pous* (πούς), "foot", in reference to the feathered feet and toes typical of this cold-adapted group (such as the [snowshoe hare](#)). The specific epithets *muta* and *leucura* were for a long time misspelt *mutus* and *leucurus*, in the erroneous belief that the ending of *Lagopus* denotes masculine gender. However, as the Ancient Greek term λαγυττός is of feminine gender, and the specific epithet has to agree with that, the feminine *muta* and *leucura* are correct.<sup>[3]</sup>

The English name *ptarmigan* comes from the [Scottish Gaelic](#) name for the bird, *tàrmachan*, whose origin is unknown. The p- was added due to a mistaken belief in a Greek origin, as if the word were related to the Greek word πτερῶν (*ptērón*), "wing".

## Description [ edit ]



egg of a Lagopus

The three species are all sedentary specialists of cold regions. Willow ptarmigan is a circumpolar [boreal forest](#) species, white-tailed ptarmigan is a North American [alpine](#) bird, and rock ptarmigan breeds in both [Arctic](#) and mountain habitats across [Eurasia](#) and North America. With the exception of the red grouse, all have a white winter plumage that helps them blend into the snowy background. Even their [remiges](#) are white, while these feathers are black in almost all birds (even birds that are predominantly white, such as the [Bali myna](#)) because [melanin](#) makes them more resilient and thus improves flight performance. The *Lagopus* grouse apparently found it easier to escape [predators](#) by not being seen than by flying away.<sup>[*citation needed*]</sup>

These are hardy vegetarian birds, but [insects](#) are also taken by the developing young. In all species except for the willow ptarmigan, the female takes all responsibility for nesting and caring for the chicks, as is typical with [gamebirds](#).

## Species [ edit ]

The genus contains three species:<sup>[4]</sup>

Living species of <i>Lagopus</i>			
Common and scientific names	Image	Description	Range and status
<a href="#">Willow ptarmigan</a> (also willow grouse and red grouse) <i>Lagopus lagopus</i> Linnaeus, 1758		Summer: marbled brown and reddish with black tail and white underparts; winter: most subspecies have white plumage except for black tail.	10-20 subspecies. Circumpolar range in forest and moorlands of northern Eurasia and North America. Status: Least Concern.
<a href="#">Rock ptarmigan</a> <i>Lagopus muta</i> Montin, 1781		Summer: grey and brown upperparts; winter: white plumage. Distinguish from willow ptarmigan by habitat – higher elevations and more barren ground.	20-30 subspecies. Arctic and subarctic Eurasia and North America on rocky mountainsides and tundra. Status: Least Concern.
<a href="#">White-tailed ptarmigan</a> <i>Lagopus leucura</i> Richardson, 1831		Summer: greyish-brown and speckled; winter: white plumage. Males identifiable by reddish eyecombs. The smallest ptarmigan.	Alpine areas above the timberline in North America from Alaska and western Canada to New Mexico. Status: Least Concern.

The distinctive [British](#) form of willow ptarmigan, the [red grouse](#) (*Lagopus lagopus scotica*) has sometimes been considered a separate species, *L. scotica*, but this is no longer accepted.

## Fossil record [ edit ]

Two prehistoric species and two paleosubspecies are only known from fossils:


- Lagopus atavus* ([Early Pliocene](#) of [Bulgaria](#)? - [Late Pliocene](#))
- Lagopus balcanicus* (Late Pliocene of [Varshets](#), Bulgaria)<sup>[5]</sup>
- Lagopus lagopus noallensis* ([Pleistocene](#) of [W Europe](#))
- Lagopus mutus correnzensis* (Pleistocene of W Europe)

## References [ edit ]

- ↑ *Brisson, Mathurin Jacques* (1760). *Ornithologie, ou, Méthode Contenant la Division des Oiseaux en Ordres, Sections, Genres, Especes & leurs Variétés* (in French and Latin). Paris: Jean-Baptiste Bauche. Vol. 1, p. 26, Vol. 1, p. 181
  - ↑ *Peters, James Lee*, ed. (1934). *Check-list of Birds of the World*. Volume 2. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press. p. 29.
  - ↑ *David, Normand; Gosselein, Michel* (2002). "The grammatical gender of avian genera"". *Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club*. **122** (4): 257–282 [258, 279].
  - ↑ *Gill, Frank; Donsker, David*, eds. (2019). "Pheasants, partridges, francolins"". *World Bird List Version 9.1*. International Ornithologists' Union. Retrieved 3 April 2019.
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- Madge, Steve; McGowan, Philip J. K. & Kirwan, Guy M. (2002): *Pheasants, partidges and grouse : a guide to the pheasants, partridges, quails, grouse, guineafowl, buttonquails and sandgrouse of the world*. Christopher Helm, London. ISBN 0-7136-3966-0

**Lagopus**

Temporal range: Early Pliocene to present



Willow ptarmigan (*L. lagopus*)

**Scientific classification** ✎

Kingdom: [Animalia](#)

Phylum: [Chordata](#)

Class: [Aves](#)

Order: [Galliformes](#)

Family: [Phasianidae](#)

Subfamily: [Tetraoninae](#)

Genus: ***Lagopus***  
Brisson, 1760

**Type species**

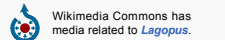
*Tetrao lagopus*  
Linnaeus, 1758

**Species**

*See text*



A red grouse (*Lagopus lagopus scotica*) in the [Yorkshire Moors](#) of [England](#)



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Categories: [Lagopus](#) | [Bird genera](#) | [Provincial symbols of Newfoundland and Labrador](#)

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