

Pheasant News and Notes

May 2019



Trivia Question

What is the northern-most North American Breeding Bird Survey route on which pheasants are regularly detected?

Farm Bill and USDA News

“We don’t know.” That was the answer to virtually every question posed by AFWA’s Jen Mock Schaffer to the USDA-FSA’s Beverly Preston and Cathie Feather at the federal agency budget briefings hosted by AFWA on April 18th. “When might you be done with CRP rule-writing?” “Is there a chance we could get a general CRP sign-up before December?” “Will you release rules as individual decisions are made, or will you release no information until every last detail is decided?” I felt sorry for everyone involved in the briefing but especially Jen, who tried valiantly to come up with a question they could actually answer and keep the conversation going. To be fair, there is a lot of new prescriptive language in the new Farm Bill such as the various interdependent CRP acreage caps and floors that will be no picnic to make work, so I guess it’s no surprise that answers are hard to come by at this point.

U.S. Senators Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.), Ranking Member of the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry, and Joni Ernst (R-Iowa), Chairman of the Subcommittee on Rural Development and Energy, led [a bipartisan letter](#) urging U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Secretary Sonny Perdue to utilize a department-wide National Water Quality Initiative to prioritize conservation measures in the 2018 Farm Bill to address water quality. We’ll see if and how that idea ends up in the implementation language.

Notes from Around the Pheasant Range

Pheasants Forever recently [announced](#) a new partnership with [The Climate Corporation](#), a subsidiary of Bayer (formerly Monsanto) and makers of the [FieldView](#) precision agriculture platform. FieldView clients capture spatial data from tens of millions of acres of cropland each year, and with their consent, Climate’s staff and products can help them analyze those data to identify underperforming acres. Some of those acres might be more profitably taken out of production and enrolled in conservation programs.

Bayer, like many global companies, has a public-facing corporate goal of environmental sustainability, so working to take some less profitable land out of intensive production and into a more conservation-friendly use isn’t as paradoxical as it may first appear. Ryan Heiniger, PF’s Director of Agriculture and Conservation Innovations, has lead a small team of PF staff (including your Plan Coordinator) to help create the partnership with Climate and start some cooperative work (the photo below is from our most recent meeting at Climate’s office in St. Louis, Missouri).

As a pilot effort, over the next few months Climate will be contacting its clients in areas covered by PF’s precision agriculture specialists and inviting them to jointly examine their productivity data to identify conservation opportunities that might help their bottom line. Data privacy is obviously a central issue, so no data are shared with PF unless the client so chooses. The first email contacts went out to southwest North Dakota clients in the last few weeks. Depending on how the pilot goes, future offers

could be tailored to specific conservation needs and priorities depending on the client's location. The team is certainly excited about the potential outcomes, but if nothing else it will be a good test of landowners' willingness to use these tools in ways that benefit wildlife and what kinds of nudges work or don't. More on this as things develop.

In other good news, hopefully everyone saw the [M.S. student position announcement](#) for the multi-state brood count evaluation project. Roadside

brood counts are used by several states to predict fall hunting conditions, so their reliability can affect agency credibility and R3 outcomes. Thanks again to Iowa, South Dakota, Kansas, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Idaho and Nebraska for pledging the funds needed to move the project forward. The next step is getting cooperative agreements signed, so it's not a done deal quite yet.



Bonus trivia question: what is the most important aspect of pheasant ecology that has never been actually measured? I'll give you a minute to think about it. Pheasants are among the most studied wild species so there's not much left completely unexamined. Are you done thinking? Okay, here's my candidate: no one has measured the probability of an August pheasant brood roosting at a given distance from the nearest road subsequently occurring on that roadside the next morning, let alone the covariates (e.g., dew, age of chicks, land cover, etc.) that affect the probability. Having no estimate of this whatsoever, interpretation of brood route data is and always has been uncomfortably squishy. I'm not sure why no one has ever measured this given the importance of fall hunting forecasts, other than brood ecology in general is hard to study.

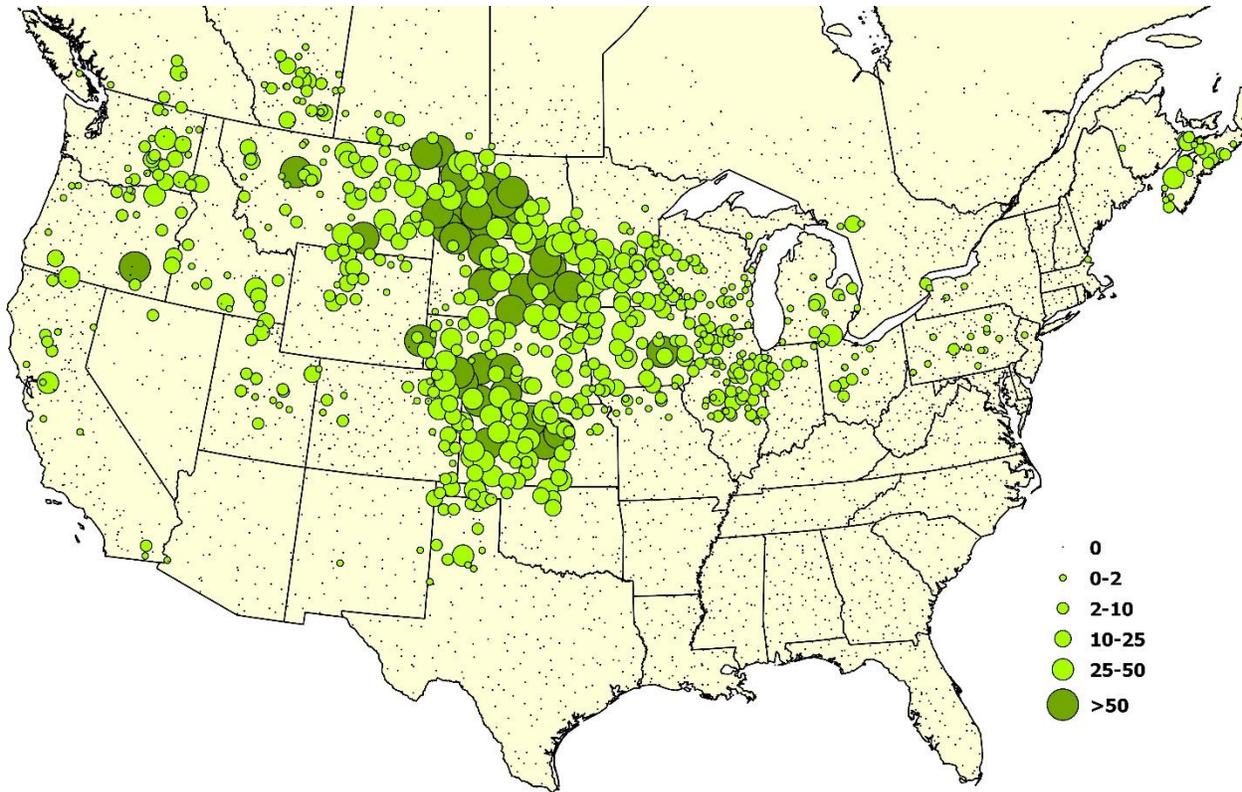
So there, I've thrown down the gauntlet (or exposed my ignorance if someone sends me some published data on this). If you've got radios on birds in early August, ask some unfortunate technician to be in the field before first light to document roost locations, then monitor where the birds go for the first few hours of the morning (i.e., during the roadside brood count period). Even better, do this in conjunction with a coworker counting broods along the roadside and figure out how many of your radioed birds are detected by the observer. If you're lucky enough to get satellite tags to work, the first part should be a piece of cake assuming your location accuracy is fine enough.

To sweeten the pot, I suggest we name this set of probabilities after whoever measures them first, as in "after applying the (*your name here*) probabilities to our roadside brood counts, the density of pheasants in the sampled area was 14.4/km²." (Not that measurements on one study area would be applicable everywhere, but you get the idea.) Just think, you could be famous! Well, at least around the keg at future Tech Committee meetings anyway.

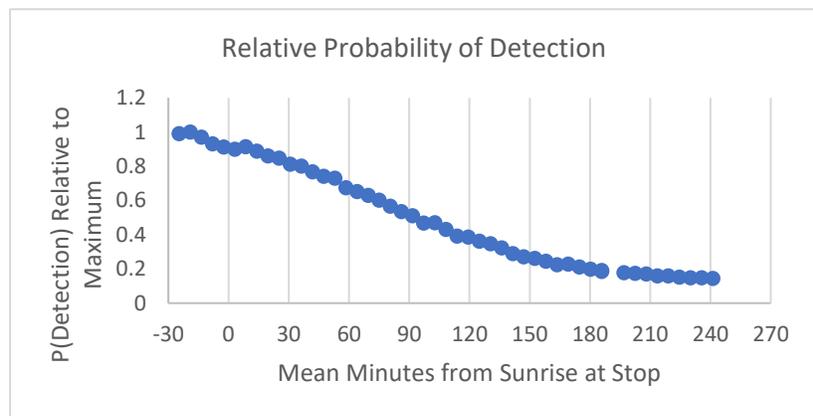
Got another candidate for most important unmeasured parameter? Email it to me and I'll include it in next month's *PN&N*.

Finally, given the radio silence over at USDA I'm beginning to wonder when we'll get an answer on funding our multi-state habitat modeling project with FSA and the joint ventures. Meanwhile I've tried to get some of the available pheasant data sets shaped up, beginning with the North American Breeding Bird Survey data. USGS has at least nominally clean data sets available for 1997 through 2017 so I started there. These include over 3 million lines of data (route x year x species combinations).

The figure below shows the most recent five-year average total count (2013-2017) for each BBS route. Routes are 50 stops apiece, so a total count of 50 equates to an average of one pheasant detected per stop. Routes exceeding this benchmark are shown in the darker green.



The average survey date was June 15th, well past the peak crowing period. Daily crowing persistence was probably also diminished at this late date; at right you can see the counts drop off almost immediately after the surveys begin in the morning. Note that these aren't true detection probabilities, but probabilities relative to the time when the maximum average count occurred (i.e., at stop #2, second blue dot from the left) over all 1997-2017 routes. I started



working with some figures in the literature to see if I could turn these into plausible summer density estimates but haven't cracked that nut yet. I'll let you know if I come up with anything interesting.

Pheasant-relevant Media

[Michigan DNR hopes more roosters will mean more pheasant hunters](#)

[Is the Pennsylvania Game Commission cutting back on pheasants?](#)

[South Dakota governor signs million-dollar habitat bill into law](#)

[Concerns raised over South Dakota bounty program at GF&P meeting](#)

[Pheasant hunting, soil health go hand-in-hand](#)

[Video: Pheasant goes up against a cranky grouse and instantly regrets it](#)

[Massachusetts neighbors complain about pheasant farm](#)

[Pheasant strike kills another motorcyclist in the U.K.](#)

[Animal rights activists burglarize farm, release 9,000 pheasants in the U.K.](#)

[Trends in U.S. gasoline consumption and their consequences for ethanol producers](#)

Recent Literature

[Grand, J., C. Wilsey, J. X. Wu, and N. L. Michel. 2019. The future of North American grassland birds: Incorporating persistent and emergent threats into full annual cycle conservation priorities. Conservation Science and Practice 1\(4\):e20.](#)

[Szemeredy, G., I. Pinter, R. Szabo, J. Lehel, and P. Budai. Model study to investigate the toxic interaction between glyphosate containing herbicide AMEGA and copper sulphate on pheasant embryos. 18th Alps-Adria Scientific Workshop, Cattolica, Italy.](#)

[Manfredo, M. J., L. Sullivan, A. W. Don Carlos, A. M. Dietsch, T. L. Teel, A. D. Bright, and J. Bruskotter. 2018. America's wildlife values: the social context of wildlife management in the U.S. National report, Colorado State University, Fort Collins.](#)

Trivia Answer

The Kachemak route near Homer, Alaska (green dot at right), above the 59th parallel. Yes, I cheated and left Alaska off the BBS route map above; it was hard to fit everything on the page otherwise. The [Birds of Kachemak Bay checklist](#) shows them as "common" there, but the next closest BBS route on which pheasants are regularly detected is on Vancouver Island, British Columbia, some 1,293 miles away. Those Homer birds are on the pheasant version of Gilligan's Island – stay warm, little buddies!



This update is brought to you by the National Wild Pheasant Conservation Plan and Partnerships. Our mission is to foster science-based, socially-supported policies and programs that enhance wild pheasant populations, provide recreational opportunities to pheasant hunters, and support the economics and social values of communities. You can find us on the web at <http://nationalpheasantplan.org>.