

# Pheasant News and Notes

June 2019



## Trivia Question

According to the IUCN, what is the only modern galliform species listed as extinct?

## Farm Bill and USDA News

This month's good news is that we finally got a new [CRP sign-up announcement](#) from USDA, including an opportunity to extend most expiring contracts for one year. The enrollment period starts June 3<sup>rd</sup> and closes August 23<sup>rd</sup>. The bad news is that only a limited number of [continuous practices](#) (including existing CREPs) will be eligible for enrollment, which angered the Chair of the House Agriculture Committee enough that he [threatened to shut down the sign-up](#). The State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) practice, which is often a state's most effective continuous option for pheasants, is not on the "eligible" list. Incentive payments and mid-contract management cost share payments will also not be offered, which sets a worrying precedent. And USDA doesn't seem to be budging from their plans to delay a general CRP sign-up until December, meaning most plantings for new general enrollments probably won't go in the ground until 2021. A model letter should go to the Management Board this week to help states express their opinions on these concerns if they so choose.

## Notes from Around the Pheasant Range

We start with a picturesque view from a Pennsylvania crow count route, courtesy of the Tech Committee's Tom Keller. It's the time of year when even in marginal range you can hear an occasional rooster and be reminded of what we're working for. Hopefully everyone got the chance to experience that sound recently, but if not, it's not too late.

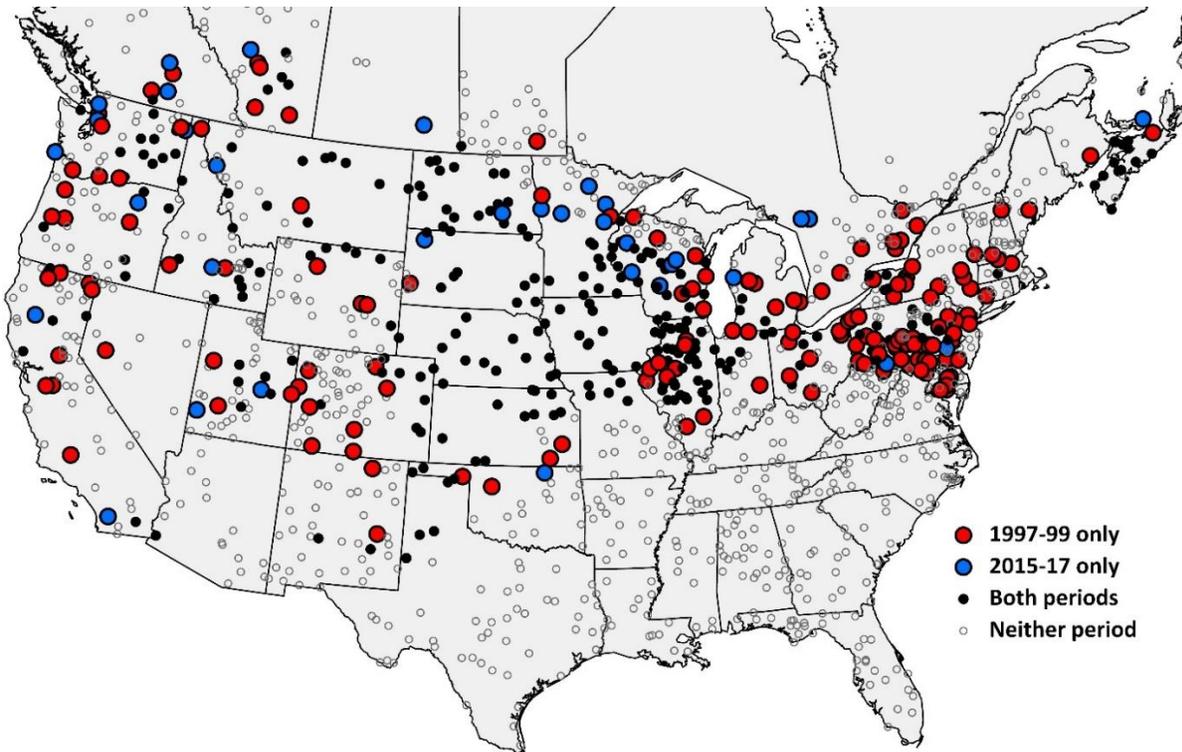
Nicole Davros (Technical Committee, Minnesota) kindly passed along [this link](#) to a newly available report about landowner needs and motivations related to CRP by researchers at Virginia Tech and elsewhere. The landowners in question were from Kansas and Colorado. And staying on the human dimensions theme, [a paper](#) detailing hunter perceptions of Nebraska public access sites hit the internet recently. The authors obtained field interviews with over 3,000(!) parties using public hunting sites. I'm probably a little biased but I think it's worth your time to check out.



I spent a few days last month at Pheasants Forever's biennial all-staff meeting in Iowa. The organization (including Quail Forever and Habitat Forever) now has over 300 employees, with 20-30% of them hired in the last 18 months. The talent and energy in the room every day was inspiring but there's nothing like

spending a few days surrounded by 20-somethings to make you feel kind of old. Also, PF is ramping up an ambitious, multi-year fund-raising campaign and goal (think nine figures) that will be pushed out more publicly in the next year or two. More on that later, I'm sure.

I'm still poking around with the 1997-2017 Breeding Bird Survey data to see what relevant questions they might credibly answer. Range expansions and contractions came to mind, so I looked at differences in pheasant detections between the early and late ends of the data set. Of 4,903 routes, 1,364 were run each year during 1997-99 and 2015-17. Of those, pheasants were not detected at all on 901 routes, detected during both periods on 268, detected only during 1997-99 on 160, and detected only during 2015-17 on 35. The map of those results is below – not a particularly happy picture.

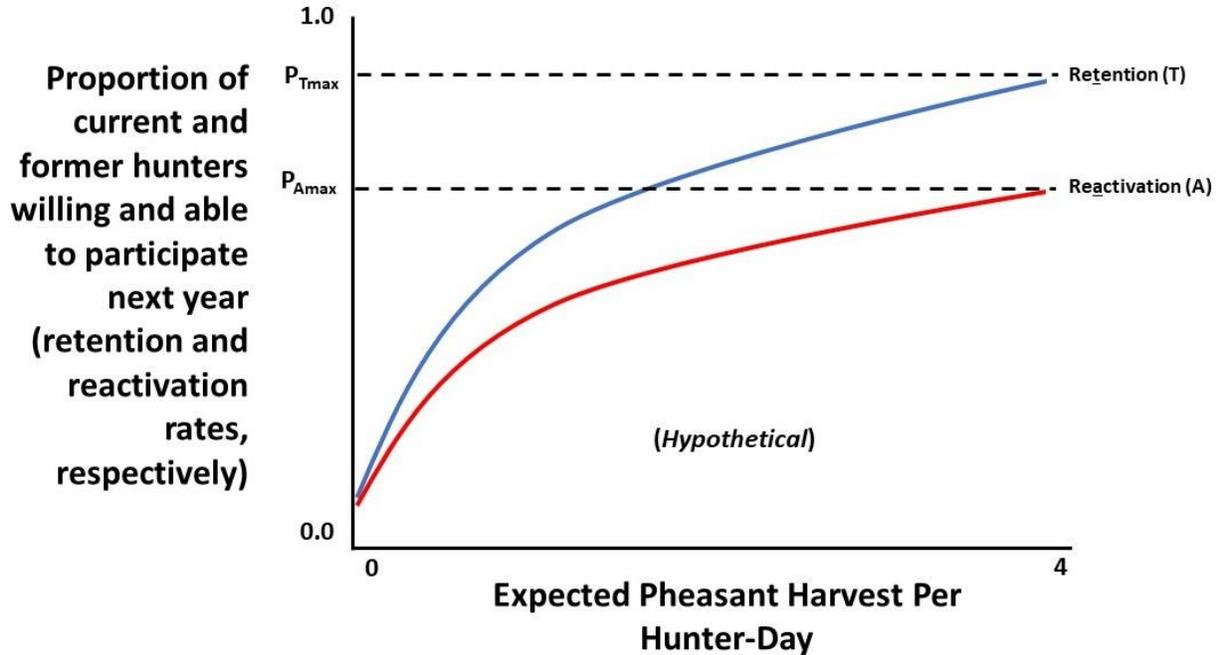


Finally, I've been thinking about how to meld the population management and R3 branches of pheasant conservation into a more cohesive framework in preparation for our upcoming discussions about revising the National Plan. Suppose an agency's pheasant habitat, access, and other R3 programs are geared towards one primary objective: to stabilize pheasant hunter numbers. Which of these programs should they invest the most in? I don't think we have a good science-based answer to that question yet.

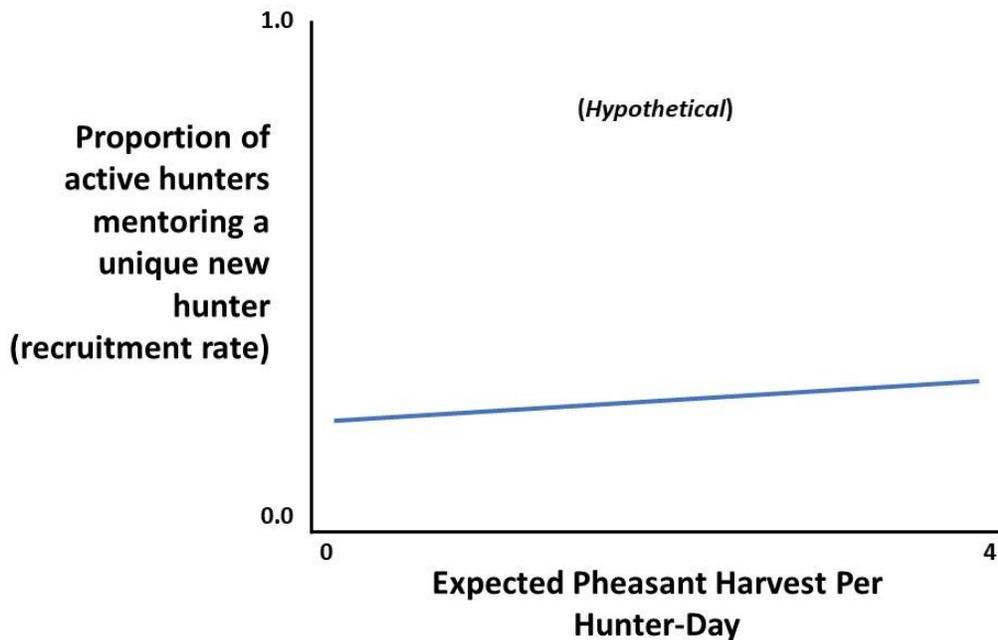
To start the conversation, below are five graphs I think we most need to populate with actual data to tie our primary pheasant management concerns together into a unified package.

First, we need to quantify the relationship between pheasant abundance and hunter retention and reactivation rates. We have long assumed a positive effect of bird numbers on participation, but there are undoubtedly limits to that effect (i.e., the dashed lines in the figure) and other factors at play. For example, as our hunting population ages, older folks may not be able to continue hunting no matter how many birds there are. We also usually assume it's easier to retain hunters than to reactivate them. And as a related sidebar, we don't really know what the best metric is to characterize how hunters

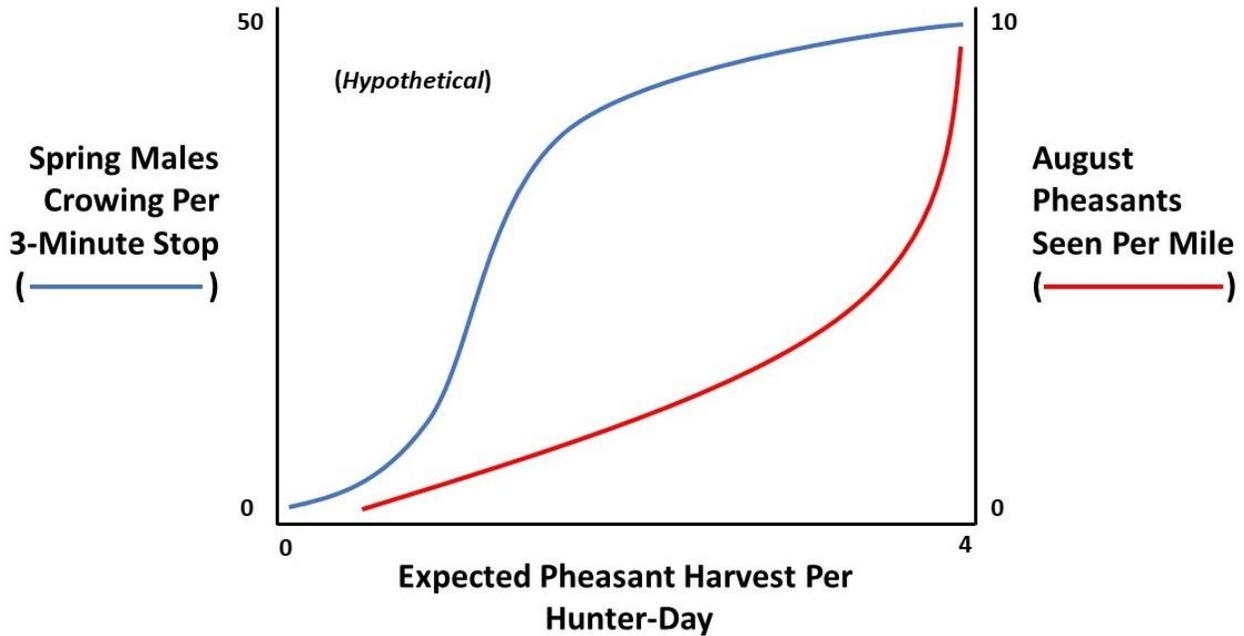
experience and evaluate abundance most directly – our standard measure is often birds harvested per hunter-day, but an alternative metric such as pheasant encounters per hunting hour might be more predictive of perceived bird abundance and future participation. I've used birds per hunter-day in these graphics, but alternatives should be explored. These are all obviously human dimensions questions, so specific HD approaches will be needed to answer them.



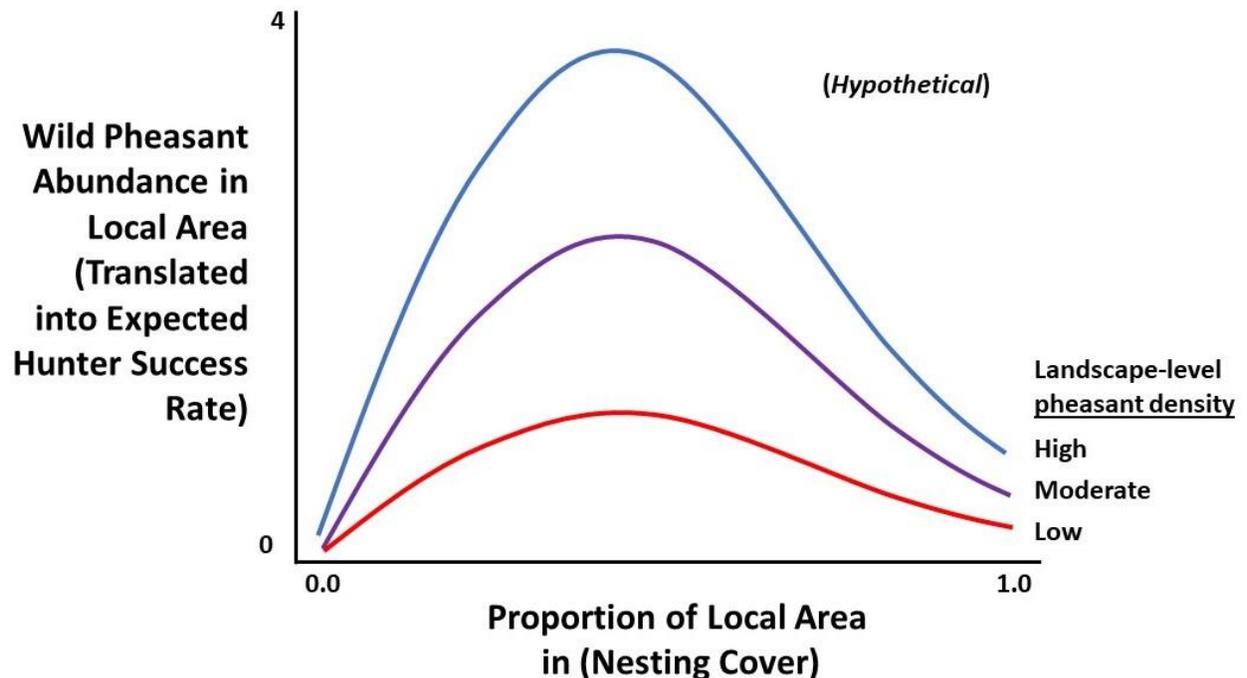
Second, we need to know the rate at which new hunters are likely to be recruited and how pheasant abundance influences that rate. Below I assumed the rate is only weakly related to abundance, but I could be wrong. Again, this is a HD question.



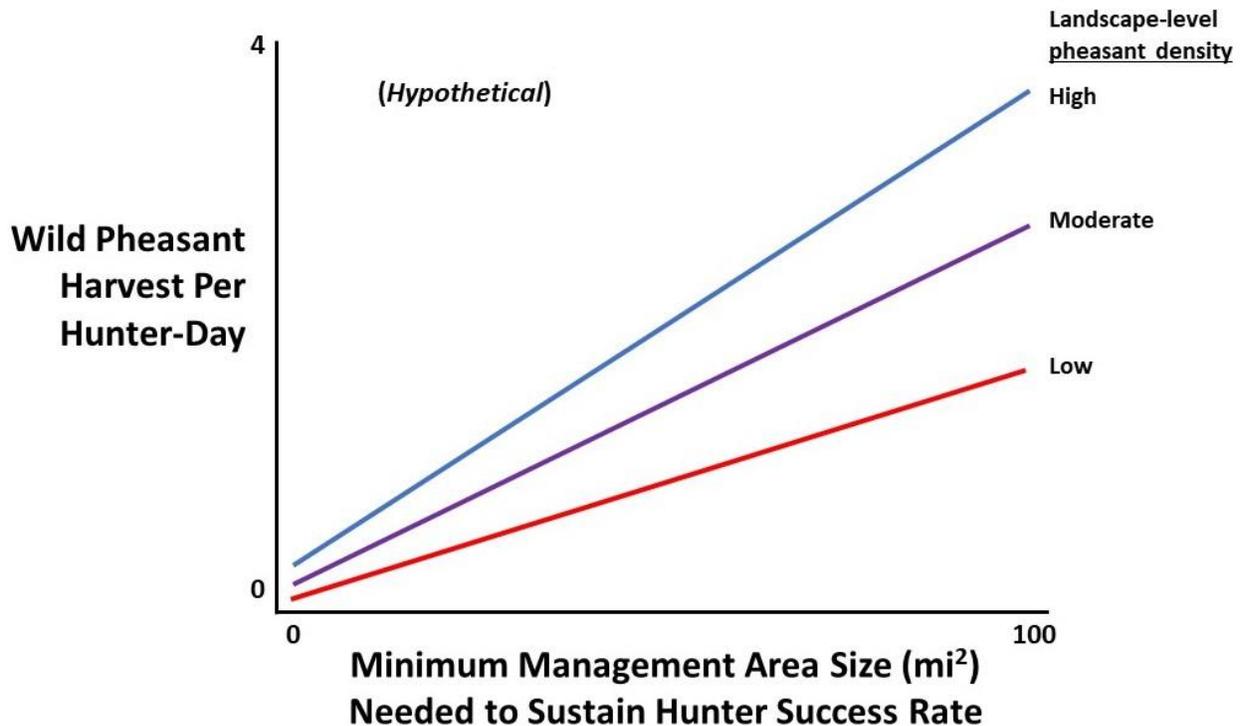
Third, we need to know how our usual survey-based measures of pheasant abundance relate to the relevant measure of hunter success. The multi-state project looking at August roadside counts should help with this one.



Fourth are our bread-and-butter relationships between habitat metrics and pheasant abundance. I used nesting cover in this graph, but actual relations are surely multi-factorial. Predictions of abundance based on land cover can take many forms, but the “Nebraska model” of [Jorgensen et al. \(2014\)](#) is a good example of what we can create with enough of the right types of data and analyses.



Lastly, we need to know how big a “local area” we need to manage to produce our desired level of pheasant abundance and hunter success. Since money is always limited, we mostly want to know how small an area we can get away with managing and still produce the desired effect. If we can’t afford to manage at a scale to keep some target number of hunters engaged, alternate strategies (e.g., managing somewhere else, augmenting with pen-raised birds, etc.) become more attractive.



If we were able to base each of these graphs on actual data, coupled with information about how much various habitat and R3 interventions cost, I think we could answer many of the questions about pheasant management trade-offs that currently stump us. It’s likely that some of these relationships will be difficult to measure and distressingly variable among states and years, but it’s also possible states may already have some data (e.g., license buyer data) that could get us started on a few of these questions without much expense.

Are there additional questions you think belong on this list? I imagine we’ll spend some time discussing how these and alternative ideas might fit into a National Plan revision, if at all, at our fall meetings, so it’s probably worth starting to think about the topic now. Any feedback between now and then is welcomed.

### **Pheasant-relevant Media**

- [In latest blow to Noem's pheasant habitat initiative, SD legislators reject two proposals](#)
- [What happens to tails of animals killed for SD bounty? Answers on Noem's pheasant initiative](#)
- [Food plots recommended by Iowa DNR to help pheasant population](#)
- [Can pollinator-friendly solar energy work for bees and farms?](#)
- [Ohio DOT creates pollinator habitat, saves money](#)
- [More than 140 million acres enrolled in federal farm conservation programs](#)
- [Cover crops and dryland wheat? Challenge accepted.](#)

[Kansans developing male-only eastern red cedar root stock](#)  
[Autonomous farm equipment available earlier than expected](#)  
[American farmland is increasingly foreign owned](#)  
[UK woman killed avoiding pheasant in road](#)

## Recent Literature

[Fontaine, J. J., A. D. Fedele, L. S. Wszola, L. N. Messinger, C. J. Chizinski, J. J. Lusk, K. L. Decker, J. S. Taylor, and E. F. Stuber. 2019. Hunters and their perceptions of public access: a view from afield. \*Journal of Fish and Wildlife Management\* X\(X\):xx-xx; e1944-687X. \(Early online edition\).](#)

[Gugala, D., M. Flis, and E. R. Grela. 2019. The effect of zinc, iron, calcium, and copper from organic sources in pheasant diet on the performance, hatching, minerals, and fatty acid composition of eggs. \*Poultry Science\*, pe2 162.](#)

[Barnes, J. C., A. A. Dayer, M. Sketch, A. Gramza, T. Nocera, A. Steinmetz, and M. G. Sorice. 2019. Landowners and the Conservation Reserve Program: understanding needs and motivations to cultivate participation, retention, and ongoing stewardship behavior. Virginia Tech Department of Fish and Wildlife Conservation final report. 105 pp.](#)

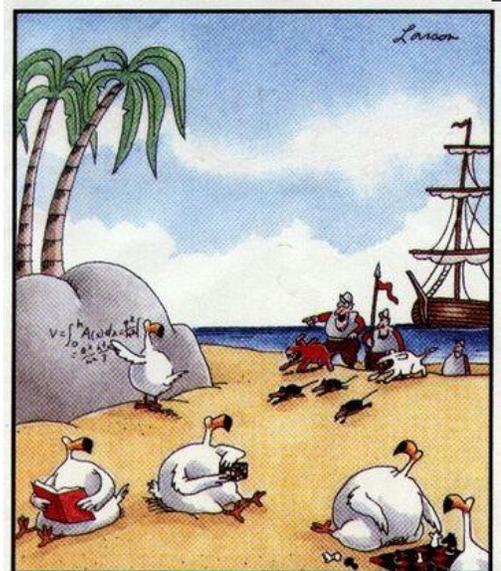
[Terhune, T. M., W. E. Palmer, and S. D. Wellendorf. 2019. Northern bobwhite chick survival and effects of weather. \*Journal of Wildlife Management\*.](#)

[Proett, M., S. B. Roberts, J. S. Horne, D. N. Koons, and T. A. Messmer. 2019. Columbian sharp-tailed grouse nesting ecology: wind energy and habitat. \*Journal of Wildlife Management\*.](#)

## Trivia Answer

The New Zealand quail (*Coturnix novaezelandiae*). It was presumed extinct by 1875 for the exact three reasons listed at right.

*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>.*



Unbeknownst to most ornithologists, the dodo was actually a very advanced species, living alone quite peacefully until, in the 17th century, it was annihilated by men, rats, and dogs. As usual.