

Pheasant News and Notes

August 2019



Trivia Question

In what 1963 movie does John Wayne shoot a pair of pheasants?

Farm Bill and USDA News

Not much news on the 2018 Farm Bill implementation front, as USDA continues to be extraordinarily tight-lipped as they develop implementation rules. According to Dave Nomsen (Management Board – Pheasants Forever, Inc.), a meeting was scheduled between USDA staff and conservation interests to discuss implementation earlier this summer, but USDA pulled out two hours before the meeting was set to begin, citing legal concerns. This after some participants had travelled to D.C. from across the country specifically for the discussion. Not a great lesson in partnership-building.

Some soil health-related rule-making is progressing, though. Jeff Prendergast (Technical Committee, Kansas) sent a heads-up about [new rules](#) that should make it easier for producers to use cover crops. [U.S. cover crop use has increased 50%](#) since 2012, and the new rules should accelerate that trend. Time will tell if this will have any significant effect on pheasant numbers or not; keep your fingers crossed.

Notes from Around the Pheasant Range

Speaking of cover crops, I recently attended a field day sponsored by the South Dakota Soil Health Coalition in the northeast part of the state. The field we visited was a comparison of standard-planted corn (30" rows; right side of photo below) with corn planted in 60" rows and interseeded with an 11-species grass/forb/legume cover crop mix (left side of photo).



The corn in the 60" rows was planted at double the normal rate, meaning the per-acre corn plant population was theoretically the same in the two treatments. The corn was planted on May 4th, and the cover crop on June 5th when the drill could still easily maneuver over the growing corn. We examined the treatments on July 30th.

Structurally, it certainly appeared that the corn/cover crop plot provided suitable pheasant habitat. It was textbook brood cover, although based on some quick sweep net samples (photo at right), insect abundance did not appear to be up to the level of forb-rich CRP. The main problem was the timing – the between-row cover (below right) was just coming on in late July, which is well past the critical survival period for most young chicks. That said, any habitat value offered by growing cornfields beyond just sterile escape cover is a bonus, and an increase in understory structure could benefit the survival of adults and older chicks through late summer and early fall.

The producer was obviously eager to find out if the two treatments differed in corn yield. The ears in the 60" rows were maturing much faster than those in the 30" side, but that may not translate into higher per-plant or per-acre yields. Those results and return-on-investment calculations will help determine how viable this approach might be to a broader cross section of farmers.

Our holy grail remains finding a way to get some nesting and early brood-rearing value out of annual row crop systems. Besides trying to work more winter wheat into rotations, I don't see an overly promising way forward on that goal unless there is some agronomic benefit to developing fall-planted varieties of corn and soybeans accompanied by concurrently planted cover crops.

In other news, "here's your sign" – states can affect how pheasant hunters use public areas by choosing where to place the signage. Check out the details from Nebraska [here](#).

You might also take note of the links below regarding new research from the U.K. that claims releasing pen-raised game birds may affect native prey species by subsidizing their predators. Activists have seized on these results to petition the government to perform environmental assessments on the releases. Might be a subject we hear more about in the States at some point.



Finally, data are starting to roll in on the multi-state brood survey project. The smart phone-based data collection app developed by the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks team seems to be working well so far – thanks to Travis Runia and his colleagues for their work on this. Thanks also to Todd Bogenschutz and the Iowa DNR crew for testing, constructing and distributing the dew blocks.

Pheasant-relevant Media

[Release of non-native game birds in UK to be challenged in court](#)
[Study: rise in UK population of crows and avian predators linked to game bird releases](#)
[Recent drought, habitat decline impacting odds of North Dakota pheasant hunting success](#)
[Better agricultural practices could mean more pheasants in the heartland](#)
[New Minnesota duck and pheasant plans emphasize benefits beyond hunting](#)
[90 days until Minnesota Governor's pheasant opener in Austin](#)
[South Dakota governor touts Second Century Initiative for pheasants](#)
[Editorial: South Dakota predator bounty money should be spent elsewhere](#)
[Pheasant hits race car driver in head at 105 mph](#)
[Just a man and his pheasant friend](#)
[From butterflies to birds, pollinator plantings benefit all wildlife](#)

Recent Literature

[Wszola, L. S., E. F. Stuber, C. J. Chizinski, J. J. Lusk, and J. J. Fontaine. 2019. Prey availability and accessibility drive hunter movement. *Wildlife Biology* 1.](#)

[Pringle, H., M. Wilson, J. Calladine, and G. Siriwarena. 2019. Associations between gamebird releases and generalist predators. *Journal of Applied Ecology*.](#)

[Harmange, C., V. Bretagnolle, M. Sarasa, and O. Pays. 2019. Changes in habitat selection patterns of the gray partridge *Perdix perdix* in relation to agricultural landscape dynamics over the past two decades. *Ecology and Evolution* 9.](#)

[Holko, I., M. Dolezalova, S. Pavlickova, R. Gal, T. Valenta, and T. Holkova. 2019. Antimicrobial resistance in *Escherichia coli* isolated from wild pheasants \(*Phasianus colchicus*\). *Veterinaria Italiana* 55\(2\).](#)

Trivia Answer

The 1963 western *McClintock!* features John Wayne as a pheasant hunting conservationist-rancher (see the [scene from about 1:16:35 to 1:21:45](#)). Pheasants were released around Denver in 1894, but it's obviously questionable whether they were running around the Four Corners area at the time the movie is set (around 1896 or so). Also questionable are the apparently suicidal pheasants that find the nearest hungry person with a shotgun and spontaneously fly straight towards them, but hey, it's Hollywood. Thanks to Jeff Prendergast for the movie info!

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>.