

Pheasant News and Notes

November 2019



Trivia Question

At our meeting last month, Technical Committee member Casey Cardinal talked about New Mexico's "white-winged" pheasants. From what country did the breeding stock for these birds likely originate?

Farm Bill and USDA News

As Dave Nomsen relayed at our North Dakota meeting, supporters of wildlife-focused CRP practices have been actively trying to persuade the USDA to open them for new enrollments. As you'll recall, almost every state was precluded from enrolling new acres in SAFE, CP-33, and similar practices during this summer's continuous sign-up. Senator Thune (R-SD) and colleagues recently sent [a letter](#) to Secretary Perdue in support of SAFE and other wildlife practices. States represented by Senate co-signers included South Dakota, Minnesota, Illinois, Kansas, Missouri, Ohio, Michigan, Colorado, Arkansas, Washington, North Dakota, and Montana. As Dave suggested, if you are in one of these states and your agency hasn't sent a thank you letter to your participating Senator, please do so. It is important that good deeds in this arena are acknowledged as publicly as possible.

AFWA's Greg Pilchak also relayed that they recently sent (or will send shortly) a memo to each state agency director encouraging them to write Secretary Perdue in support of SAFE. The memo provides an overview of CRP SAFE and its recent history, and includes a table showing each state's SAFE projects, allocations, enrollments, and expirations. The memo requests that the states' letters mirror the points made in the Senate letter and the American Wildlife Conservation Partners ([AWCP](#)) letter, to which AFWA is a signatory. You might check and see if your agency plans to respond to that call.

The comment period recently closed on the new [CRP Programmatic Environmental Assessment](#). In North Dakota, you might recall Dave expressed some frustration with this document ("the worst EA I've ever seen" was the standout phrase, I think), and AFWA was moved to submit some critical comments as well. Greg wrote, "the Association took issue with the PEA's lack of analysis on the impacts of reducing Soil Rental Rates and the variety of incentives traditionally offered to landowners, and the failure to emphasize the role of State Technical Committees in determining the proper conditions for emergency and non-emergency grazing and haying. The Association took this comment opportunity as another chance to register frustration about the program's administration while underlining the role fish and wildlife agencies have in its successful delivery." I haven't yet seen a reference about when USDA's responses to comments is expected.

Notes from Around the Pheasant Range

Aside from the pheasant openers in several states, the big happening last month was obviously our meeting in North Dakota. Eighteen of the original 23 states with full accounts in the National Plan were represented, which was great. The focus of the joint meeting of the Management Board and Technical Committee was identifying the most important decision problems and challenges facing pheasant managers. Once comprehensively listed, these will help guide the contents of the National Plan revision.

The other interactive portion of the meeting came at the request of Dr. Adam Janke, who is heading up our multi-state brood survey project. Adam attended with Zach Dienes, the graduate student on the project, who we were also happy to meet. Adam asked the Technical Committee to provide input on four questions: 1) how do you currently monitor pheasants in your state (harvest, populations, etc.); 2) what barriers to implementing fall monitoring do you have; 3) what do you *have* to have from a pheasant monitoring program, and what would be *nice* to have; and 4) what factors do you think affect reliability of fall roadside pheasant surveys? Adam and Zach will use the feedback they got to guide future analyses and presentation of results.



Other meeting highlights included Ryan Heiniger's presentation on new developments in precision and regenerative agriculture. Ryan, who is Pheasants Forever's Director of Agriculture, also reminded us that Pheasant Fest will be February 14-16, 2020 in Minneapolis, and will include a precision agriculture workshop on Friday. We saw some of PF's precision ag work in action during the field trip, courtesy of Melissa Shockman and some of the landowners she works with – it was very cool (literally and figuratively).

Thanks again to R.J. Gross (our point man and walleye chef), Jesse Kolar, and the rest of the North Dakota Game and Fish crew who helped run a great meeting! Texas will host the Technical Committee meeting in 2020.

In other news, do pheasant hunters know where to find pheasants in the fields they're hunting? The Nebraska research crew put GPS units (including heart rate monitors) and radio-tags on each, respectively, to find out. The results are detailed in [Wszola et al. \(2019\)](#). In summary, yes, hunters seem to know what they're doing, but generally avoid hunting cover that requires too much exertion or is too far from access points.

Also, hunting has no effect on pheasant populations, right? Another paper out of the UNL Fontaine lab suggests we shouldn't take that statement as unqualified gospel. Take a look at [Messinger et al. \(2019\)](#) for details. Nice work, Lindsey!

Finally, if you are stressed out and need to take a few minutes, parts of this [Pennsylvania video about pheasant propagation](#) are oddly soothing.

Pheasant-relevant Media

Lots of media stories this month about opening day hunting prospects and reports; I chose not to include all of those.

[Michigan Pheasant Hunting Initiative aims to recruit, retain youth hunters](#)

[Senators call for USDA to re-establish wildlife program in CRP](#)

[SDSU checking out state's ring-necked pheasants for neonicotinoid pesticides](#)

[Fifteen hunters complete 2019 Upland Slam in Nebraska](#)

[A vision for the future: Pheasants Forever opens prime wildlife habitat to the public](#)

[60 Minutes profiles Land O' Lakes and precision agriculture](#)

[Irrigation for farming could leave many of the world's streams and rivers dry](#)

[Drainers versus Sustainers: the consequences of cropland tiling](#)

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* \(1\).](#)

[Messinger, L. N., E. F. Stuber, C. J. Chizinski, and J. J. Fontaine. 2019. Mortality, perception, and scale: understanding how predation shapes space use in a wild prey population. *PLoS ONE* 14\(9\):e0222272.](#)

[Yang Liu, Simin Liu, Nan Zhang, De Chen, Pinjia Que, Naijia Liu, Jacob Höglund, Zhengwang Zhang, and Biao Wang. 2019. Genome assembly of the common pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*, a model for speciation and ecological genomics. *bioRxiv* \(pre-print\).](#)

Trivia Answer

Primarily Afghanistan (the birds were commonly known as “Afghan white-wings”), but some could have originated from the former USSR (present day Uzbekistan and Tajikistan). It was thought that this subspecies (*P. c. bianchii*) was better suited to the Southwest’s arid conditions than the ring-necked forms thriving in the northern states. According to Wayne Bohl of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, “breeding stock of the Afghan white-winged pheasant was sent by the (Service’s) Foreign Game Investigations Program to southwestern states in 1958, 1959, and 1962. Following intensive game farm production and liberations, in New Mexico they began hunting this bird in 1964 and Nevada in 1966. Trial releases of the Afghan white-winged pheasant were made in Arizona, California, Oklahoma, Nevada, Texas and Utah after 1963.” For a critique of the FGIP by a respected game bird biologist, see [Gullion \(1965\)](#). Photo by J. N. Stuart.



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>.