

Pheasant News and Notes

November 2020



Trivia Question

True or false: In the United Kingdom, it is considered unethical to hunt pen-raised pheasants until a month has passed from their release date.

Farm Bill and USDA News

Now that the 2020 federal fiscal year is over, folks are doing the math on what our net CRP enrollment looks like after subtracting the 2020 contract expirations. As we expected, it does not look good. Although USDA-FSA has not published the exact tally yet, our current national enrollment stands at about 20 million acres, the lowest figure since 1988. As a silver lining, that figure is so low that it is attracting some media attention and bipartisan concern. A couple of months ago, Senators Ernst (R-IA), Grassley (R-IA), Casey (D-PA), and Brown (D-OH) requested several policy changes to increase enrollments in [a letter](#) to USDA Secretary Perdue, and [a similar letter](#) was penned recently by Senators Smith (D-MN), Durbin (D-IL), Merkley (D-OR), Murray (D-WA), and Booker (D-NJ). Hopefully this will attract more attention after the election.

I had an interesting conversation with Jenny Prenosil of Nebraska PF recently. Jenny is a Conservation Ag Coordinating Wildlife Biologist who works almost exclusively with the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) in partnership with Nebraska Game and Parks and USDA-NRCS. CSP pays landowners to incorporate a series of conservation measures (“enhancements”) on their properties, with a goal of comprehensively addressing resource concerns on a whole-farm basis. She has been working on adding several pheasant- and quail-friendly enhancements within CSP including edge feathering, managing existing shrub thickets, and providing tall crop stubble. Beginning with the FY21 CSP signups, these enhancements can now be employed as a “bundle,” with higher payments paid to those choosing several of the practices concurrently. These options have now been approved by NRCS and will be available nationally as soon as USDA posts their enrollment requirements. If you have questions, let me know and I can get Jenny’s contact information to you.

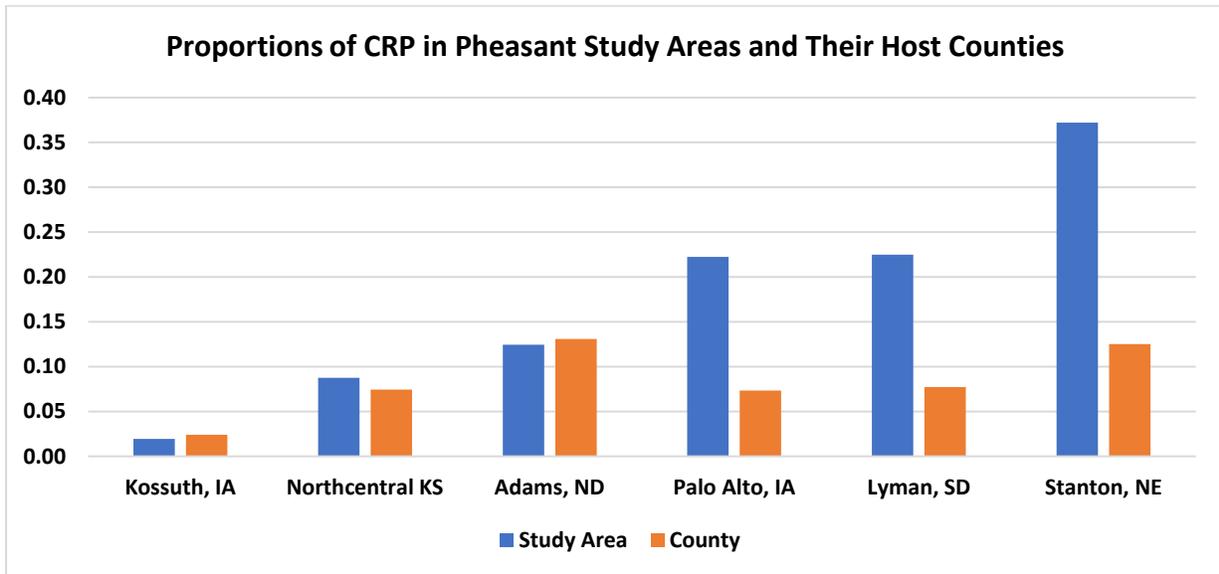
Notes from Around the Pheasant Range

Although this is usually a happy time of year for pheasant hunters, occasionally things happen that give us pause. During Nebraska’s youth pheasant season, a nine-year-old boy accidentally shot and killed himself while hunting with his father on a public area where pheasants had been released by the state. For the agencies that are working hard to introduce kids to the multiple benefits of being outdoors, tragedies like this are a sober reminder that all our outdoor pursuits carry small but non-zero risks of personal harm that are impossible to completely eliminate. Our condolences to the boy’s family as well as our friends at Nebraska Game and Parks.

I have continued to work with some of the members of the Technical Committee on interpreting several CRP-era (i.e., post-1986) pheasant nesting studies in relating state-scale habitat acres to pheasant numbers. One fundamental question is how well these studies characterize habitat-specific pheasant productivity across the wide variety of conditions across their range.

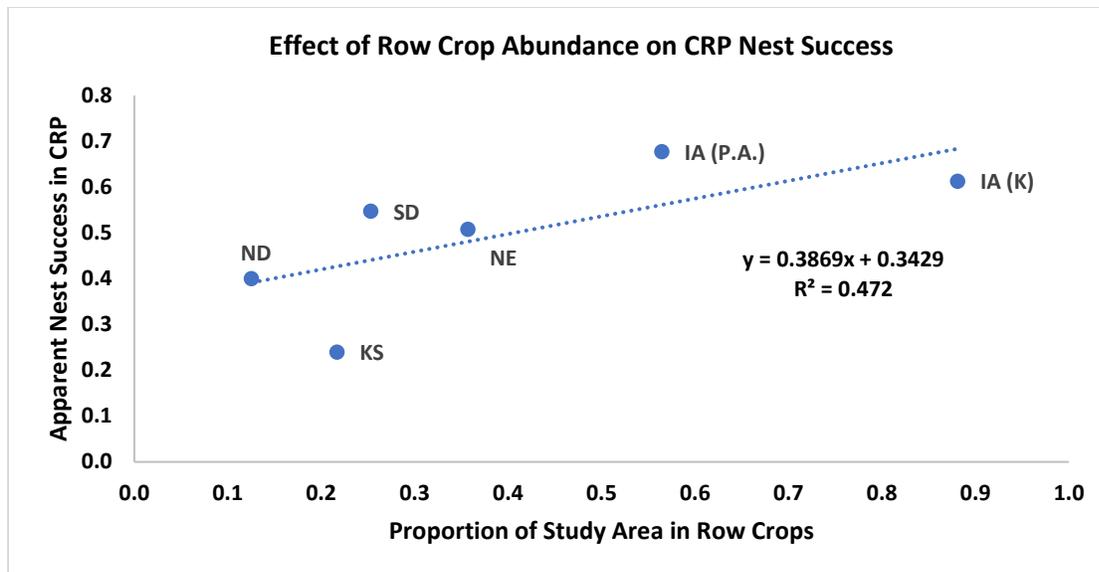
These studies were conducted in North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, Nebraska, and Kansas, so states outside the central portion of the range are not well represented from the outset. None of the studies was designed to measure nesting behavior in “average” habitat conditions; all study areas were chosen to examine the impact of a specific land use type or characteristic [i.e., the relative importance of grazed post-CRP grassland (North Dakota), small grains (South Dakota), different amounts and configurations of grasslands (Iowa), mid-contract management of CRP (Nebraska), and cover crops (Kansas)].

The Iowa study was conducted on two markedly different study areas and Todd Bogenschutz was kind enough to provide raw data for both, so those are presented separately. The Kansas study was conducted across four counties, but I did not have raw data for each so those results are pooled. Here’s how the abundance of CRP on the study areas compared with that in the counties that surrounded them:



All the studies showed CRP was an important habitat for pheasant production, but some study areas did better than others in representing the “average” abundance of CRP within the counties in which they were performed. This does not mean that data collected in study areas that did not strictly resemble the county average are somehow invalid, but it is something to keep in mind when attempting to apply the results to other landscapes and scales (which is what we are doing with our state-scale habitat model).

I was curious about the productivity of CRP in different landscape types, so I looked at the relationship between row crop abundance and apparent nest success in CRP across the six study areas.



The relationship is not very strong (particularly with that Kansas data point in there, which seems unusually low), but it appears nest success in CRP increases slightly as the proportion of row crop in the landscape increases. An increase in the proportion of row crop generally comes at the expense of other land covers in which pheasants can nest (e.g., small grains, hay, and pasture), so it is a bit paradoxical that nest success should rise as nesting habitats in the aggregate become more scarce. [Clark and Bogenschutz](#) noted this paradox when comparing their two study areas, hypothesizing that landscapes with less nesting cover may also harbor fewer predators. Alternatively, landscapes supporting more intensive corn and soybean cultivation are likely to be in wetter climates, which in turn may produce CRP fields with greater visual obstruction (“structure”), which is also positively associated with nest success in most studies. More to chew on as we continue to develop a reliable way of relating habitat acres to population size using the available literature.

Pheasant-relevant Media

[Conservation Reserve shrinks to smallest size since 1988](#)

[Pheasant habitat loss shows administration's failure to sustain conservation](#)

[Hoping to protect pheasants: youth trappers excited to help SD bird population](#)

[Pheasant and partridge classified as species that imperil UK wildlife](#)

[Minnesota's Governor Walz: pheasant hunting tradition continues in a time of uncertainty](#)

[South Dakota's Governor Noem posts photos of pheasant hunt](#)

[What does a NDSU coach do on weekends? Go pheasant hunting with players](#)

[Hunter shoots, catches pheasant as it falls from the sky in South Dakota](#)

[Pheasant hunting: how to get started](#)

[Hunting numbers surge during COVID — but will the sport's popularity last?](#)

[Pandemic inspires new hunters to take to the woods](#)

[Soil health practices build soil and the bottom line](#)

[The problem with making nature pay for itself](#)

And finally, [an article](#) about the opening of Rhode Island's small game hunting seasons was inexplicably accompanied by a photo of cinema's most dangerous rabbit. If you want to re-watch its starring scene, [here you go](#).



Recent Literature

[Sage, R. B., A. H. Hoodless, M. I. A. Woodburn, R. A. H. Draycott, J. R. Madden, and N. W. Sotherton. 2020. Summary review and synthesis: effects on habitats and wildlife of the release and management of pheasants and red-legged partridges on UK lowland shoots. Wildlife Biology \(early online version\).](#)

[Reiley, B. M., and T. J. Benson. 2020. Does conservation practice and site age influence vegetation structure and avian abundance in restored fields? Wildlife Society Bulletin \(early online version\).](#)

[Yeiser, J. M., A. L. Jackson, D. C. Sisson, T. M. Terhune, and J. A. Martin. 2020. Predation management and spatial structure moderate extirpation risk and harvest of northern bobwhite. Journal of Wildlife Management \(early online version\).](#)

[Laney, R., and R. Moses. 2020. The adoption of wildlife practices through a payments-for-environmental-services \(PES\) agri-environment scheme. Human Dimensions of Wildlife \(early online version\).](#)

Trivia Answer

True. According to [The Code of Good Shooting Practice](#), "shooting must not commence until the birds are mature and fully adapted to the wild – a minimum of one month from release." This also means that no birds can be released after the shooting season starts. The Brits would be appalled at the lengths some of our agencies go to ensure birds are not shot on their first flight off the release truck. On the other hand, perhaps only the landed gentry can afford the luxury of losing many of their released birds to predators and other causes before they are hunted.

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>.