

# Pheasant News and Notes

December 2017



## Trivia Question:

Where do the scientific names of the common pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*) and gray partridge (*Perdix perdix*) come from? (Answer below)

## Farm Bill Update

House Agriculture Committee Chairman Mike Conaway has said the House's version of a proposed Farm Bill is [not likely to be introduced until after the new year](#), given that tax reform, the debt ceiling, and the expiring appropriations bills will be front and center for a while. The outcome of those efforts will certainly help define spending limits for the Farm Bill, with some in the agriculture community worried those sideboards [could wipe out several key farm subsidies entirely](#).

Our Management Board recently worked on a letter to be sent to House and Senate Ag Committee members emphasizing the need for a higher CRP acreage cap. The final version is available on [our website's policy page](#).

[The USDA just published an analysis](#) of how much commodity and conservation payments have gone to producers of different income levels through time. Since 1991, commodity-related payments and federal crop insurance indemnities have increasingly flowed to larger (and higher income) producers, whereas land-retirement conservation payments (e.g., CRP) showed a much slower trend in that direction. This would seem to be good news to those of us arguing for a higher CRP cap, given that those payments are more likely to go to producers of more moderate means (and those most likely to need financial help accomplishing their conservation goals).

Andrew Schmidt, AFWA's Agriculture Policy Program Manager, compiled the following list of links to the Farm Bill positions of several key conservation and agricultural groups, which might be useful to some of you as deliberations progress. Andrew says several other important groups (e.g., DU, NWF, TNC) are obviously working on Farm Bill issues but don't have platforms readily accessible online.

First, to save you a lot of clicking, here's where various groups are on the CRP acreage cap (plus their acreage target, if any):

- Supporting an increase in CRP acreage cap:
  - National Wild Pheasant Conservation Plan and Partnerships (40M ac)
  - Pheasants Forever/Quail Forever (40M ac)
  - AFWA (36-40M ac)
  - Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership (at least 35M ac)
  - National Association of Conservation Districts (but not at the expense of other conservation programs)
  - National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (but make program more cost-effective as well)
  - American Soybean Association
  - National Association of Wheat Growers (they don't support an outright increase, but rather support "managing the CRP acreage cap through market-based approaches such as rental rates and flexibility of use, allowing contracts to expire on schedule.")
- Not supporting an increase in CRP acreage cap:
  - American Farm Bureau Federation

- National Association of Wheat Growers (they don't support an outright decrease, but rather support "managing the CRP acreage cap through market-based approaches such as rental rates and flexibility of use, allowing contracts to expire on schedule.")
- No comment on CRP acreage cap
  - Audubon
  - National Corn Growers Association
  - USA Rice
  - National Cattlemen's Beef Association

For other priorities and recommendations, see:

- [National Wild Pheasant Conservation Plan and Partnerships](#)
- [AFWA](#)
- [TRCP](#)
- [Audubon](#)
- [Pheasants Forever/Quail Forever](#)
- [American Farm Bureau Federation](#)
- [National Association of Conservation Districts](#)
- [National Sustainable Ag Coalition](#)
- [American Soybean Association](#)
- [USA Rice](#) (via Senate hearing testimony)
- [National Corn Growers Assoc.](#) (policy book)
- [National Cattlemen's Beef Assoc.](#) (policy book)
- [National Assoc. of Wheat Growers](#) (policy book)

Andrew also sent along two sets of coalition recommendations. The first is the [Forests in the Farm Bill coalition](#), and the second is a [coalition of environmental and sustainable agriculture groups](#).

Finally, I did some analyses with the Breeding Bird Survey's historic pheasant data using the U.S. Geological Survey's online trend tool. I was specifically looking for CRP effects, and I think they are fairly obvious. You can check out [the graphical results on our website's policy page](#). If you would like higher quality versions of these graphics to share, let me know and I can send them to you.

### **Notes from Around the Pheasant Range**

I had a chance to spend some time with Director Wayne Rosenthal, our Board member from the Illinois DNR, at a Pheasants Forever event in Iowa a few weeks ago. To say the least, Wayne is an interesting guy – former state legislator, retired Air National Guard Brigadier General, current farmer, hunting preserve operator, and DNR director. Listening to him I learned about the importance of the Farm Bill's Voluntary Public Access-Habitat Improvement Program (VPA-HIP) to Illinois' public access program; how he uses hunting preserve outings to educate elected officials of all political persuasions and backgrounds about hunting, conservation, and firearms; his personal observations about pheasant use of cover crops on his farm; and what it's like to eject out of a F-4 fighter jet at low altitude. I highly recommend striking up a conversation with Wayne the next chance you get – you won't be bored.

The Technical Committee talked in Utah about cooperatively studying factors affecting detectability of pheasants during summer roadside surveys, with the goal of producing results that better predict fall harvest. Jeff Prendergast (KS) is currently shopping this idea around to a few researchers who could help with study design and analysis. Once he finds a taker, we'll come up with a

proposed study protocol (centered on making repeated route runs under a variety of environmental conditions) and see which states have an interest in participating, so stay tuned.

I recently touched base with Tom Keller to see how Pennsylvania's new pheasant hunting regulations were working out so far. You might recall they instituted a new mandatory \$25 pheasant hunting stamp this year, as well as opening one of their long-closed pheasant restoration areas to mentored youth hunting. Tom said as of a week or two into the season they had sold about 39,500 stamps, or about half the number of pheasant hunters they estimated via general game harvest survey last year, but hadn't yet heard from officers how compliance rates were running. Given the temporary dip most states see when they raise permit fees, it will be interesting to see where hunter participation goes for them in the coming years.

Finally, "conservation in the age of precision agriculture" is an emerging theme for a number of states' partnership biologist positions. The most recent example is a [current job opening in Nebraska for a Conservation Ag Coordinating Wildlife Biologist](#) offered by Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever in partnership with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and NRCS. Several related positions have recently been created in Minnesota, Iowa, and North Dakota to help landowners use their precision ag data to inform conservation decision-making and program enrollment (Nebraska's position differs in that it mainly focused on improving CSP delivery at the state level rather than using farm-level precision ag data per se). The North Dakota Game and Fish Department put together [a nice video featuring their partnership position](#), but for more details about what the current biologists do and how things are working, contact the above states (I can help with contact info if you need it) or Ryan Heiniger, PF's Director of Ag and Conservation Innovations, at [rheiniger@pheasantsforever.org](mailto:rheiniger@pheasantsforever.org). Ryan also mentioned there will likely be a precision ag workshop at Pheasant Fest in Sioux Falls, with more details expected very soon out of [PF's media shop](#) (check for a news release after December 5<sup>th</sup>).

## **Recent Literature**

For those of you who aren't avid readers of the journal *American Ethnologist*, you probably joined me in missing this paper co-authored by Frederick Errington (yes, he's the son of Paul, Iowa State's renowned wildlife professor back in the days of Leopold). It's a detailed survey of the cultural impact pheasants have made on the Errington family's ancestral home state, and obviously written with a lot of first-hand affection for the species. (Bonus fact – in 2012, Fred and his brother donated the 293-acre family farm near Bruce, SD to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, where it is now a Waterfowl Production Area.)

[Pheasant capitalism: auditing South Dakota's state bird](#)

T.J. Fontaine's lab at the Nebraska Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit has a couple of new papers out – one on multi-scale modeling methods using pheasant data as an illustrative example (teaser: it purports to cut computing time by 90% from previous methods, saving hours or even days of processing), and another on landowner versus conservation practitioner perspectives on conservation programs. You can check out [advanced copies of both on T.J.'s website](#).

Some of you in the western states may be familiar with the Integrated Monitoring in Bird Conservation Regions (IMBCR) approach that a few of the joint ventures in that region are involved with (e.g., the Playa Lakes Joint Venture has used its IMBCR data to develop a prototype pheasant habitat prediction model). This new paper provides details and gives a peer-reviewed stamp of approval to the approach:

[A statistically rigorous sampling design to integrate avian monitoring and management within Bird Conservation Regions](#)

Think you know where the corn grown in your area ends up, what it's used for, and what environmental impacts it has? This paper doesn't provide the clearest answers, but it takes a decent shot at the questions:

[Subnational mobility and consumption-based environmental accounting of US corn in animal protein and ethanol supply chains](#)

And for those wondering, yes, the world is still going to hell in a handbasket:

[World scientists' warning to humanity: a second notice](#)

### **Pheasants in the News**

[Donald Trump Jr. bags pheasants with Rep. Steve King on opening day in northwest Iowa](#)

[Loaded for pheasant, Montana hunter kills charging grizzly bear with 12-gauge](#)

[Minnesota's Lt. Gov. Smith leads women pheasant hunters](#)

Okay, this isn't about pheasants, but it's in the ballpark... Do you like to hunt quail? Do you have an extra \$250 million lying around? If you said yes twice, I'd really like to be your friend, but also, why not buy yourself [the ranch with "the world's best quail hunting"](#) for Christmas?

Trivia answer:

Both have Greek origins. Pheasants (*Phasianus colchicus*) were taxonomically described by Linnaeus in 1758, with the type specimen locality fixed to the Rioni River – known as the Phasis River to the Ancient Greeks – in what is now western Georgia, the westernmost range of the native population. The species name *colchicus* is Latin for "of Colchis," which was the ancient kingdom on the Black Sea through which the Phasis ran.

Gray partridge (*Perdix perdix*) have a more entertaining backstory. According to Greek myth, the first partridge appeared when Daedalus (father of Icarus, inventor of the skydiving accident) threw his nephew Perdix off the sacred hill of the Acropolis in a fit of jealous rage (Perdix inspired this jealousy by inventing the saw, chisel, and potter's wheel, the little show-off). The goddess Athena caught Perdix before he hit the ground and turned him into a partridge, which supposedly explains why the species is reluctant to get too far off the ground. So the next time you see a Hun, you can thank it for your woodworking tools, and Athena for the nice hands.

Travel safe this month, and Merry Christmas!

*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 [www.nationalpheasantplan.org](http://www.nationalpheasantplan.org).*