

Pheasant News and Notes

February 2021



Trivia Question

Who wrote the following:

If Christmas came on the Fourth of July and it also happened to be your birthday, you might have some idea of what a first pheasant is like on a clear, crisp Maryland day, with the hills behind, and the tender-green meadows reaching out to black-green blotches of trees, and nothing very much to do but watch a couple of expert dogs work over the noblest stranger we have in our midst, while two mellowed old gentlemen do not interfere with a boy's passionate effort.

Farm Bill and USDA News

It does not appear that the current CRP general signup is going well. Reports from several states' Farm Bill coordinators suggest that at the current pace, new enrollment offers will fall short of scheduled September expirations. As a result, USDA-FSA [announced](#) an indefinite extension of the signup, which had been set to end on February 12th. The press release makes it clear that the agency now sees lagging enrollments as a problem and that increased incentives will be forthcoming.

That change is refreshing and is likely due to the incoming USDA leadership. Former Iowa governor and USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack had his confirmation hearing on February 2nd and his nomination passed unanimously; he will likely be confirmed by the full Senate soon. Governor Vilsack made it clear that incentivizing producers to participate in climate change mitigation will be among the administration's highest priorities.

AFWA is already gearing up to discuss changes to the Farm Bill, as their Agriculture Conservation Committee has formed an ad-hoc 2023 Farm Bill Working Group. According to Greg Pilchak of AFWA, "this [group] will be composed of ACC working group chairs, regional association representatives, and NGO representatives. It will serve as a vehicle for identifying reauthorization principles and consensus policy priorities, and will be charged with developing AFWA's Farm Bill policy platform and legislative solutions." We will of course be looking for opportunities to get the habitat goals identified in the upcoming revision of the National Pheasant Plan into those discussions.

Notes from Around the Pheasant Range

Management Board Chair Russ Mason reports that AFWA's Science and Research Committee has been tasked by the Directors to "develop clear national priorities for science-based management needs." To that end, the Committee is posing a series of questions to the regional AFWA affiliates and committees to help develop content. The last of those questions deals with interjurisdictional cooperation, and is worded: "What are your greatest needs for alignment between your agency and surrounding agencies for the management of fish and wildlife, and what management concerns would be better addressed through interagency science-based approaches?" I would ask that if you had the opportunity to provide input on that one, consider putting in a good word for multi-state assessments of factors involved in the national decline of small game hunters, referencing [AFWA Resolution 2019-05-10](#). Results of the

Committee's report will be used in formulating AFWA's National Conservation Needs and funding priorities, so support for the small game R3 topic would greatly benefit our partnership.

We had a great annual Technical Committee meeting last month. Well, who am I kidding – it was a videoconference, so it was nowhere near as good a meeting as we would normally have. Regardless, we did get some interesting research updates. Dr. Adam Janke of Iowa State and Taylor Shirley, his M.S. student, studied pheasant nesting in fall-seeded cover crops in southeast Iowa and found that although hens did occasionally nest in cover crop vegetation, they did so at a rate far below that for warm season grass fields (i.e., about 1 nest per 80 acres in cover crops, versus 1 nest per 4 acres in warm season native grass). None of the nests found in cover crops hatched. For those scoring at home, that's two pheasant studies conducted on cover crops (the other was in Kansas), and zero successful nests documented.

Taylor had trouble catching hens with bait traps and could not use a vehicle-mounted nightlighting system on her study fields, so they had to innovate. She used a drone-mounted thermal camera to find night-roosting pheasants, then directed a two-person capture crew into position to drop a mist net over the birds. They were able to capture 21 pheasants in 16 nights of work, with an average of 1 bird per 52 minutes of drone flight time. The equipment is not cheap (the drone and thermal camera were around \$12,000 total), but assuming you had other uses for those components, this appeared to be a very viable capture method.

Dr. Janke and M.S. student Zach Dienes continue to work on our multi-state brood survey project. This past year, 10 states ran a total of 344 surveys on 86 routes. We have one more year of data collection yet to come, but preliminary results suggest dew does not have a consistent effect on birds counted and detection probabilities are in the 20-40% range. Zach and Adam are also doing some interesting analyses on the trade-offs between route quantity and runs per route.

Finally, we heard from Joseph Lautenbach (Technical Committee, Ohio), who looked at how well pheasants fit the definition of an umbrella species. He examined bird survey data from two multi-parcel state wildlife areas and found bird species richness and diversity were higher at points where pheasants were detected than where they were absent. This was also generally true when only bird species that were grassland specialists were considered. (Joseph is also the coauthor of [a new paper](#) on the use of grazing to manage lesser-prairie chicken habitats – well done!)

In other news, Travis Runia (Technical Committee – South Dakota) reports their new habitat stamp is paying dividends. Their James River Watershed CREP was stuck on an enrollment of 82,000 acres due to lack of funds, but thanks to the stamp revenues the SDGFP can now afford to enroll the remaining 18,000 acres left under their cap. Public access is a condition of all their enrolled acres, so that is a big benefit for pheasant hunters.

Nicole Davros of the Minnesota DNR advises they recently finished a cooperative study with the University of Minnesota looking at potential wildlife exposure to soybean aphid insecticides used adjacent to state-owned grasslands. Results suggested drift from private onto public lands was ubiquitous, and there was evidence that grassland arthropod abundance was affected, at least in the short term. Katelin Goebel was the M.S. student on the project and she has recently completed her thesis. It is not available online yet but Nicole or I could send it to you if you are interested.

Pheasant-relevant Media

[Youth pheasant hunting teen earn spotlight in Governor Noem's state address](#)

[Trapping nest predators bolsters pheasant populations and more](#)

[What will happen to the pheasant who strutted into Springfield City Hall?](#)

[Wisconsin pheasant farm launches pet food, treat brand](#)

[As payments dwindle, farmers drop out of USDA conservation program](#)

['There's a red flag here': how an ethanol plant is dangerously polluting a US village](#)

[America's biggest owner of farmland is now Bill Gates](#)

This doesn't have much to do with pheasants but is an interesting story:

[Feathers in Flight: The Bird Genoscape Project](#)

Finally, alert viewer Eric Zach noticed our favorite bird showed up in a *Saturday Night Live* Christmas special. Justin Timberlake gives Kristen Wiig an unwelcomed encounter with a pheasant feather in *SNL's* famous (and mildly not-suitable-for-work) music video skit about boxed gifts of certain body parts. It's got over 8 million views on YouTube, so I trust you can find it yourselves.



Recent Literature

[Blackburn, T. M., and K. J. Gaston. 2021. Contribution of non-native galliforms to annual variation in biomass of British birds. *Biological Invasions* \(online version\).](#)

[Kayvanfar, N., M. Aliabadian, S. S. H. Yousefkhani, K. Rabii, and M. Masoud. 2021. Ecological niche divergence between two groups of *Phasianus colchicus* \(Aves: Galliformes\), the *chrysomelas-principalis* group and the *colchicus* group, on the Iranian plateau. *Biologia* \(online version\).](#)

[Kraft, J. D., D. A. Haukos, M. R. Bain, M. B. Rice, S. Robinson, D. S. Sullins, C. A. Hagan, J. Pitman, J. Lautenbach, R. Plumb, and J. Lautenbach. 2021. Using grazing to manage herbaceous structure for a heterogeneity-dependent bird. *Journal of Wildlife Management* 85:354-368.](#)

[Yang, Y., D. Tilman, G. Furey, and C. Lehman. 2021. Soil carbon sequestration accelerated by restoration of grassland biodiversity. *Nature Communications* 10:718.](#)

[Middleton, E. G., I. V. MacRae, and C. R. Phillips. 2021. Floral plantings in large-scale commercial agroecosystems support both pollinators and arthropod predators. *Insects* 12:91.](#)

Trivia Answer

Robert Ruark, in the last chapter of *The Old Man and the Boy*. *Field & Stream* recently [re-ran the piece](#); the book is a collection of Ruark's columns that appeared in the magazine in the 1950s. If a kid has an interest in the outdoors and you want to get them fired up about hunting and fishing, I can't think of a better book to put in their hands. Worked for me, anyway – I was the fortunate kid. Set in the Depression-era South, it contains some language about race and gender that would not go over well today, but in more of a sadly dated than mean-spirited way. If a reader can negotiate *Huck Finn*, Ruark is a piece of cake.

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>.