Pheasant News and Notes

December 2024

Trivia Question

What comedian said the following:
"Even with the stuff we preach about the sanctity of life, we don't practice it. Look at what we kill. Mosquitos and flies – 'cause they're pests. Lions and tigers – 'cause it's fun. Chickens and pigs – 'cause we're hungry. Pheasants and quail – 'cause it's fun and *we're hungry.*

USDA and Legislative News

The writing is on the wall for another one-year extension of the 2018 Farm Bill. House Republicans rejected the Senate Democrats' proposed bill language and both sides appear to have ended negotiations. An extension needs to pass before the end of the year to keep some key commodity title programs from expiring, and I've seen no suggestion that it will have any trouble meeting that timeline.

John Thune of South Dakota will be the Senate Majority Leader during the next congressional session. As his home state might suggest, Senator Thune has long had an interest in pheasant conservation and hunting, and his ascension to Majority Leader probably lowers the risk of overly harmful changes to the Farm Bill and to CRP in particular. On the downside he probably won't have as much time to ride herd on the nuts-and-bolts of key Farm Bill provisions, but hopefully other pheasant-friendly members and staff can pick up the slack there if necessary.

President-Elect Trump named Brooke Rollins as his nominee for Secretary of Agriculture. Ms. Rollins grew up on a farm in Texas and is currently the president and CEO of the nonprofit America First Policy Institute. No word yet on her views about conservation programs.

The USDA says it set a record for private lands conservation program delivery in 2024, spending more than $1.6 billion on climate-focused contracts with 23,000 landowners encompassing over 11 million acres. Funding for this push came from the Inflation Reduction Act – you can see how your state used IRA funding using their data visualization tool. They've also made available a 2024 RCPP projects map.

Finally, the Kansas USDA office announced it is now allowing winter grazing of CRP (between November 1st and March 1st) on a case-by-case basis. Applications are to be reviewed by NRCS to ensure that the proposed grazing "does not cause long term negative impact on the grass." A prominent proponent of the change claims winter grazing will create "more suitable habitats for wildlife," so that's reassuring. It's a good thing pheasants don't need residual nesting cover in the spring, otherwise… oh, wait. Just another in a growing list of new and imaginative ways to convert CRP into a "working lands" program – production of soil, water, and wildlife benefits alone are not enough anymore.

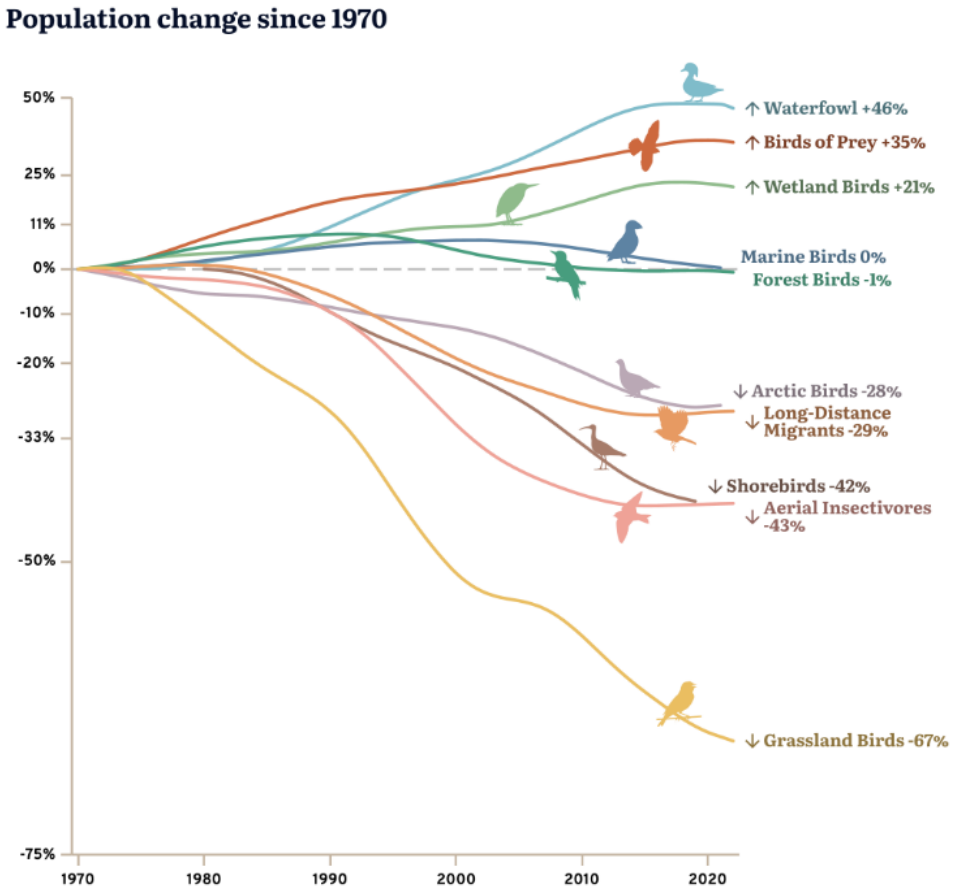
Notes from Around the Pheasant Range

Most of the buzz in the upland game world last month revolved around bobwhite parasites and the purported benefits of medicated feed. It started with the publication of two papers (this one and that

one) reporting the results of field experiments in Texas and Oklahoma. The work was done by members of the Wildlife Toxicology Laboratory at Texas Tech University, which 1) led development of the medicated feed assessed in the studies, and 2) have a financial interest in its sale. The second of the above papers contains the following two sentences: "The Northern bobwhite population receiving the medicated feed grew substantially from 2019 to 2022, while the neighboring site had no change in abundance," and "Both the treated and reference site showed increases in bobwhite and helminth abundance during the course of this study." Confused? Me, too.

Regardless, the results are interesting, but most folks I've talked to do not consider them definitive without additional field trials, preferably by independent researchers without a direct financial interest in the outcome. Muddying the waters further, one of the authors appeared on the popular MeatEater podcast touting their results, which led to lots of calls and emails from members of the public to biologists across the country (the parasites in question are known to infect a number upland birds, not just bobwhites). The National Wild Pheasant Technical Committee will be sharing information about the issue at their meeting next week.

Jess McGuire (Senior Working Lands for Wildlife Bobwhite Program Manager, PF&QF) passed along The State of Canada's Birds 2024 report. Not surprisingly, its trends by bird group below look a lot like those for the U.S., with the grassland group declining the most. Results suggest Canada's pheasant population declined about 1.6% per year during 1970-2022, compared with -0.6% in the U.S.



Finally, PF&QF's Elite Membership Week promotion kicks off December 7-14, with a goal of raising $500,000 by the end of the year. If you are looking to make some end-of-the-year charitable donations, please consider a membership for yourself or a friend, "elite" (life membership level or higher) or otherwise. The deal is even sweeter for PF&QF employees – those that upgrade or refer an Elite Member signup during the promotion will be entered to win a $500 Scheels gift card. You can check out the general details about life memberships here, or contact PF&QF's Brian Essling with questions about the employee drawing.

Pheasant-relevant Media

How DNA could help save California's historic pheasants
Wild pheasant genetics study underway at state-operated public hunt areas
Pheasant die-off leads to permit cuts for some northern Illinois hunting sites
A North Dakota pheasant spotted in a very unusual place
America's Conservation Enhancement Reauthorization Act passes the U.S. House
Farm Bill extension likely as GOP rejects Stabenow's bill
Get to know Brooke Rollins, nominee for Agriculture Secretary
Federal sage grouse plans panned by Wyoming and environmentalists, praised by others
If you build it, will sage grouse come? Wyoming is about to find out
New prairie project aims to transform 40,000 acres while producing cleaner energy
Regional Conservation Partnership Program 2024 Projects Map
King Charles menu for dinner with Qatar Emir and Beckhams includes pheasant and quail

Recent Literature

Henry, C., et al. 2024. Northern bobwhite (*Colinus virginianus*) population response to anthelminthic treatment in the Rolling Plains ecoregion of Texas, 2014–2016. International Journal for Parasitology: Parasites and Wildlife 25:101006.

Leach, J., et al. 2024. Response of Northern bobwhite (*Colinus virginianus*) and two parasitic nematode populations in western Oklahoma to anthelmintic supplemental feed. International Journal for Parasitology: Parasites and Wildlife 25:101001.

Kubecka, B. W., and T. M. Terhune. 2024. Cause-specific mortality and survival of northern bobwhite chicks. Journal of Wildlife Management (early online version).

Hernandez, F., et al. 2025. Diverse, native-plant communities as important nesting habitat for chestnut-bellied scaled quail. Rangeland Ecology and Management 98:184-191.

Helmsetter, N. A., et al. 2025. The influence of grazing on the spatiotemporal activity patterns of a primary sage-grouse nest predator. Rangeland Ecology and Management 98:316-323.

Lechnar, C. V., et al. 2025. Postfire herbicide application reduces Macartney rose in Attwater's prairie-chicken habitat. Rangeland Ecology and Management 98:237-245.

Johnson, F. A., and O. K. Nielsen. 2024. Regional demography of Icelandic rock ptarmigan and its implications for harvest management. Ecological Solutions and Evidence 5:e12390.

Henden, J. A., R. A. Ims, and M. A. Stromeng. 2024. Trail cameras can greatly inflate nest predation rates. Journal of Wildlife Management (early online version).

Del Valle, A., P. W. Guiden, and H. P. Jones. 2024. Grassland bird responses to bison and prescribed fire in restored tallgrass prairies. Journal of Wildlife Management (early online version).

Mingione, J. E., J. J. Coon, and J. R. Miller. 2025. Evaluating native plant community characteristics after restoration efforts in invaded tallgrass prairies. Rangeland Ecology and Management 98:134-135.

Leipold, E. A., et al. 2025. An inventory of rangeland wildlife in the western United States. Rangeland Ecology and Management 98:170-176.

Smith, A. C., V. I. Aponte, A. D. Binley, A. R. Cox, L. Daly, C. Donkersteeg, B. P. M. Edwards, W. English, M.-A. R. Hudson, K. M. Jefferys, B. G. Robinson, and C. Roy. 2024. Patterns and drivers of population trends on individual Breeding Bird Survey routes using spatially explicit models and route-level covariates. Avian Conservation and Ecology 19(2):23.

Geissler, C. H., et al. 2025. A multi-objective optimization model for cropland design considering profit, biodiversity, and ecosystem services. Ecological Modelling 500:110954.

Trivia Answer

George Carlin (1937-2008).

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 https://nationalpheasantplan.org.