Pheasant News and Notes

March 2025

Trivia Question

The 2025 Pheasant Fest and Quail Classic is being held this month in Kansas City, Missouri. When and where was the first Pheasant Fest?

USDA and Legislative News

Brooke Rollins was confirmed as Secretary of Agriculture last month upon a 72-28 vote in the Senate. The USDA press release announcing her confirmation said Secretary Rollins "is originally from Glen Rose, Texas. Most recently, Rollins served as the Founder, President, and Chief Executive Officer of the America First Policy Institute (AFPI). During President Trump's first administration, she was the Director of the Domestic Policy Council and Assistant to the President for Strategic Initiatives in the White House. She also previously served as Director of the Office of American Innovation. In these roles, she developed and managed the transformational domestic policy agenda of the Trump Administration, leading to historic achievements for the American people."

To state the obvious, the uncertainty for USDA's staff and partners caused by layoffs and funding freezes continues. It will likely be a while before the administration, Congress, and the courts decide where everything lands. In the meantime, we wish everyone caught up in these decisions well.

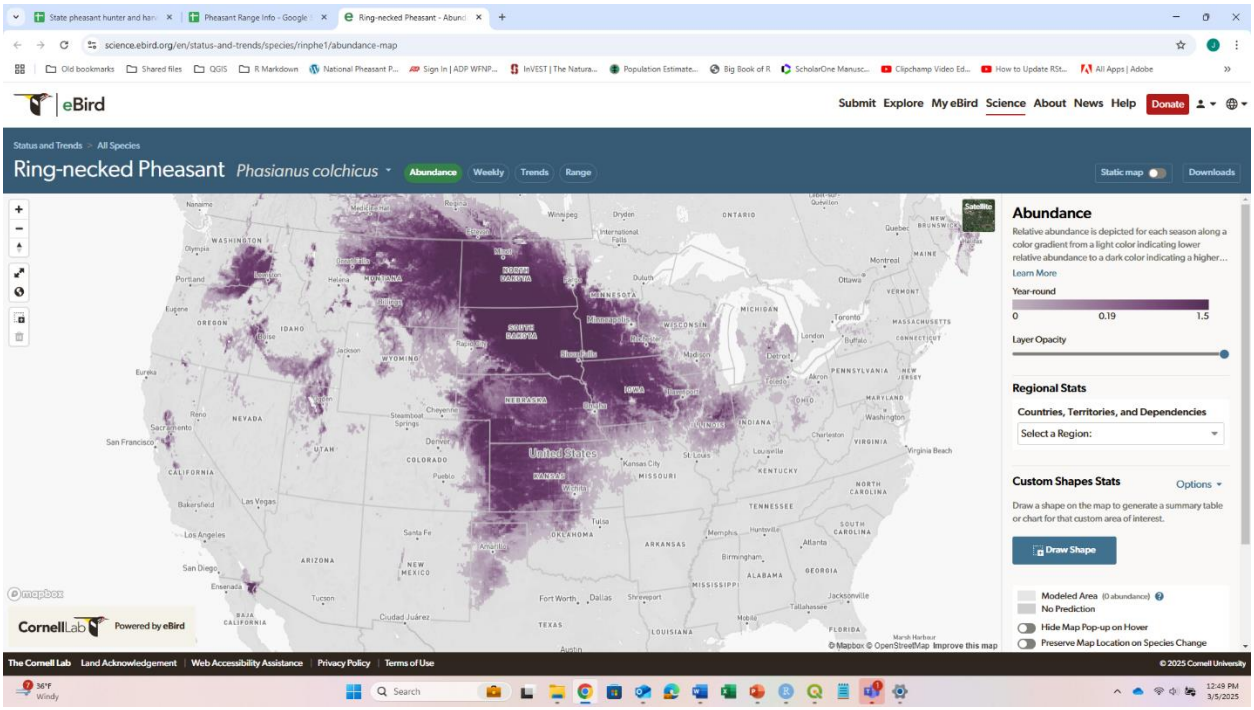
Todd Bogenschutz (Technical Committee, Iowa) reported that he took part in a Farm Bill fly-in event last month in Washington, D.C. sponsored by the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. It appears that the House is considering changes to CRP eligibility that could substantially reduce future enrollments, especially in the Corn Belt. The proposed restrictions would center around the presence of soils whose productivity was rated as Type 1 or Type 2. If you want to see where these soils occur (and you have an ESRI license), you can access the SSURGO data layers here, or here if you want the data straight from USDA. I hope to learn more about these proposals at the upcoming North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference later this month. Todd also said that folks were not overly optimistic about a new bill getting done before the September 30th extension expires.

Notes from Around the Pheasant Range

On our Technical Committee call this month, we heard that several states were struggling with lower federal aid apportionments this year and are adjusting activities accordingly. States are also dealing with service interruptions with federal partners, including research contracts and wildlife damage control permitting. In happier news, Indiana is resuming their pheasant crow count surveys this spring after a four-year hiatus, and several states are gearing up to incorporate automated recording units (ARUs) in their upland bird monitoring activities.

Pheasants Forever administrators have asked me and some other PF&QF staff members to help them draft some initial guidelines for locating habitat projects more strategically. In turn, I've asked the Technical Committee to help me identify the counties within each state's pheasant range that are their

highest priorities for conservation. I am also trying to apply other sources of data to that question, including North American Breeding Bird Survey results and state pheasant monitoring data. Another data source I've recently come across is the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's pheasant range and relative abundance maps based on eBird citizen science data. The relative abundance map is below.



Cornell thankfully makes the range and relative abundance data available as spatial layers so they can be imported into GIS software for analyses. I've just started cross-referencing these data with the other data sources to see how well they agree with each other. It appears that the eBird data predicts state relative abundance very similarly to the BBS data, does a decent job estimating county-level abundance when compared to state agency crow count monitoring data, but doesn't perform well in predicting actual crow counts at the point scale. If I'm able to dig up anything else interesting regarding this data set, I'll pass it along.

Finally, Sprih Harsh has published another pheasant ecology paper from her dissertation at South Dakota State University – congratulations to her and her coauthors. The abstract is below.

*"Understanding habitat selection is critical in habitat prioritization for species of conservation and management concern. Information on habitat selection is particularly important for grassland bird species whose populations have suffered steep declines over the last few decades. We assessed ring-necked pheasants' (*Phasianus colchicus*) habitat selection in a dynamic agricultural landscape. The population dynamics of pheasants are partially related to nest survival, which may be influenced by the quality of nesting habitat. Consequently, knowledge of vegetation composition and structural characteristics associated with the selection and survival of nests would help inform management decisions to improve nest success. We monitored nests from 103 radio-collared pheasants inhabiting an agricultural landscape in South Dakota, USA, from 2017–2019 to determine the effect of landscape composition and configuration on nest-site selection and nest survival. We explored nesting behavior at 2 orders of selection: resource selection within the home range (third order) and selection of specific*

resource items from a resource patch (fourth order). Proportion of row crop and connectivity of row crop was negatively associated with nest-site selection at the third order. At the fourth order, pheasants tended to select for taller vegetation and greater percent grass cover than at paired random sites. Pheasants also selected areas with more grasslands. A 1% increase in grass cover and proportion of grassland increased the odds of nest-site selection by 1% and 2%, respectively. Connectivity of row crop patches was negatively associated with daily nest survival. We also evaluated factors affecting pheasant brood-site selection. A 1-unit increase in grass cover and Hemiptera biomass increased the odds of brood-site selection by 4%. The probability of brood-site selection also increased with fewer row crop patches. Weather played a crucial role in driving nest survival. The consideration of local weather trends and regional variation in habitat can inform habitat management for pheasants. Pheasant populations may benefit from research that identifies thermal landscapes and land management techniques that promote cooler microclimates for nesting and brood-rearing activities."

Pheasant-relevant Media

South Dakota faces pheasant population decline amid conservation debate
North Dakota Game and Fish offering free seed to landowners for pheasants
Voluntary Public Access Improvement Act introduced in the Senate and House
Does South Dakota track whether its nest predator bounty program improves pheasant numbers?
Two tracts, one big deal: Iowa farmland sells for $26,750 an acre
Private lands are the key to success in conservation
Former Wyoming Game and Fish Director nominated to lead U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Professional conservation societies issue joint statement on federal workforce
USDA ordered to reinstate 5,000+ probationary workers

Recent Literature

Harsh, S., R. C. Lonsinger, H. R. Kauth, and A. J. Gregory. 2025. Weather, habitat area, connectivity, and number of patches influence breeding ecology of ring-necked pheasants. Journal of Wildlife Management (early online version).

Meyerpeter, M. B., et al. 2025. Conservation translocation immediately reverses decline in imperiled sage-grouse populations. Biological Conservation 304:110986.

Ostrom, B. L., M. J. Harner, and A. J Caven. 2025. Monitoring grassland bird communities with acoustic indices. Birds 6:11.

Heinrich, R., et al. 2025. AudioProtoPNet: An interpretable deep learning model for bird sound classification. Ecological Informatics 87:103081.

Pittman, J., R. Ayambire, and K. O. Twum. 2025. The social fit of conservation policy on working landscapes. Rangeland Ecology and Management 100:56-62.

Spaeth, Jr., K. E., et al. 2025. Preferred nectar sources for the monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus plexippus*) along the Great Plains migration pathway. Ecosphere 16:e70085.

Trivia Answer

The first Pheasant Fest was held in Bloomington, Minnesota in 2003. Hope to see you soon in KC!

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.