Dilemma of wildlife management and introductions in Hungary: Pheasant Phasianus colchicus as an example

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ABSTRACTS

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Abstract

Captive breeding and release of the ring-necked pheasant *Phasianus colchicus* became very intensive in Hungary in the 1960s. In the peak year of 1977 over one million birds were harvested which was a 4-fold increase compared to the late 1960s. In the late 1970s about one million birds were released annually. In the 1980s the number of harvested pheasants started to decrease in spite of the fact that more and more birds were released (about 1,8 million in 1990). The spring population size of the pheasant has decreased from nearly 2.5 million in the late 1970s to 700,000 in 1995. The most important factor responsible for the decline is the loss of favourable habitat due to large-scale agriculture. Moreover, the increased proportion of released birds into the female pheasant population lowers the number of recruits per adult hen as has been shown in England. The mortality of wild hens and their progeny might also increase because of increased predation pressure and diseases e.g. botulotoxicosis - which both result from the increased density due to the massive releases. It is now evident that improving habitat quality would be a better way to manage pheasant as well as other wildlife populations in Hungary, and a management program towards that end has been initiated.

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