



EVIDENCE FOR A LONG TERM DECREASE IN SCANDINAVIAN GROUSE POPULATIONS

O. Hjeljord

Norwegian University of Life Sciences, Ås, Norway

Among hunters and the public at large, there is a general opinion that Norwegian grouse populations have decreased dramatically from former numbers, and that the decrease continues even today. This opinion is evaluated on the basis of hunting statistics, density estimates and anecdotal evidence. Also trends in Norwegian grouse populations are compared to those of the other Nordic countries. There appears to be little doubt that there has been a strong decrease in Norwegian grouse populations over the last 100 years, but while the decrease may have stopped for the three species of forest grouse, the decrease seems to continue for willow grouse. Typically the strong cyclisity of all four grouse species is much reduced and particularly the forest grouse seems to be on a rather low and surprisingly stable level. This change in population dynamics resembles that of forest grouse in Finland, but the change in syclisity appears to have occurred later in the Finish populations. Statistics are less complete on grouse numbers in Sweden, but populations seems to be on a higher level in parts of northern Sweden. Denmark had a viable population of black grouse until the last world war, but since then the population has gone extinct. The decreases in Scandinavian grouse populations are compared to human caused landscape change, including forestry, hunting pressure and change in the predator fauna.

