# Songbirds, sage hen and shame

In times past I awoke to songbirds and doves. Now it is to the cawing of ravens.

At their June 22 and 23 meeting, Nevada Board of Wildlife Commissioners voted to eliminate funding predator control programs intended to protect sage grouse. They did fund research into Pine Nut Mountains vegetation and sage grouse. Apparently helpful, and conveniently near agency central offices.

Over the last four decades, the Nevada Department of Wildlife has de-emphasized predator control. Raven takings have ranged between zero and 1,500 while the population has increased 600 percent. The statewide raven population may exceed 952,000 at an average density of 8.7 per square mile. Thus, at its most intense effort, the agency takes less than two tenths of a percent of the predators which may outnumber the sage grouse nearly eleven to one. Meanwhile, agency personnel threaten county officials that they would list sage grouse as endangered because it needs agency protection.

Studies of sage grouse nest failure indicate that in areas of greater than 2.4 ravens per square mile only fifty percent of nests will survive. At 5.8, virtually all nests fail.

The agencies insist that removing territorial ravens simply provides the opportunity for transitory ravens to move in at twice the density. But territorials hunt at triple the efficiency of transitories, so the net depredation efficiency becomes two thirds. A fifty percent depredation may drop to thirty-three, meaning the survival rate rises from fifty to sixty-seven percent.

The scientific method, common sense, and common decency all cry for aggressive predator control on behalf of sage grouse. But these three concepts apparently are not in the lexicon of the Board, NDOW, nor other agencies and groups presuming to act on behalf of the bird. This despite historical records indicating the highest confirmed sage grouse populations were during the decades of extensive sheep and cattle grazing and aggressive predator control. Also, much lower wildfire incidence and intensity occurred during those years. Tellingly, agencies are reticent to discuss wildlife loss from firestorms on undergrazed range.

The bureau-scientific complex has substituted political science for the natural sciences. That does provide a certain efficiency in that all conclusions become uniform and rote. It has instituted a troika system whereby stakeholders outside the complex have no recourse beyond the agency troika which juries, judges, and executes all verdicts.

Agency officials declare sage grouse population counts don't matter, only habitat control matters. What they really are saying is they do not care that private sector grazing practices and private sector predator control may increase the bird's population by one-third or more. The

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agencies want the budgets which will come with increased control; they do not want ranchers and farmers doing well without bureaucrats.

Ravens prey on much more than sage grouse. Among the songbirds formerly serenading the neighborhood were Mountain Bluebirds. Since they sanction the raven's status by accepting its predation, will the Wildlife Board now move to adopt the raven as the state bird? Practicing political science does not require shame... .

Respectfully,

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June 30, 2012

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**Sage Grouse Nesting Success v. Raven Abundance**

| Sage Grouse Nest Success Percent | Raven Density | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Areal Conversion | |
| | per 10km Transect | per $km^2$ | per $mi^2$ |
| 73.0 | - | - | - |
| 60.0 | 3.8 | 0.48 | 1.2 |
| 50.0 | 7.3 | 0.91 | 2.4 |
| 40.0 | 10.0 | 1.25 | 3.2 |
| 30.0 | 13.8 | 1.73 | 4.5 |
| 20.0 | 18.0 | 2.25 | 5.8 |
| 10.0 | 24.0 | 3.00 | 7.8 |
| - | 30.0 | 3.75 | 9.7 |

The transects are reported in 10 km segments, 0.8 km wide.
The area of a transect is 8 $km^2$ or 3.09 $mi^2$.

$A_{tran}$ = 8.00 $km^2$

$A_{tran}$ = 3.09 $mi^2$

In annotations to the graph from which the above table was constructed, Coates & Casazza stated that at 18 ravens per 10km, all nests ultimately failed.

Coates, P.S. & Casazza, M.L. 2012
Effects of Energy Development on Avian Populations (Greater Sage-Grouse), presentation to Elko County Wildlife Advisory Board, Elko NV; US Geological Survey, Western Ecological Research Center, Dixon Station, Dixon, CA, March 21, 2012

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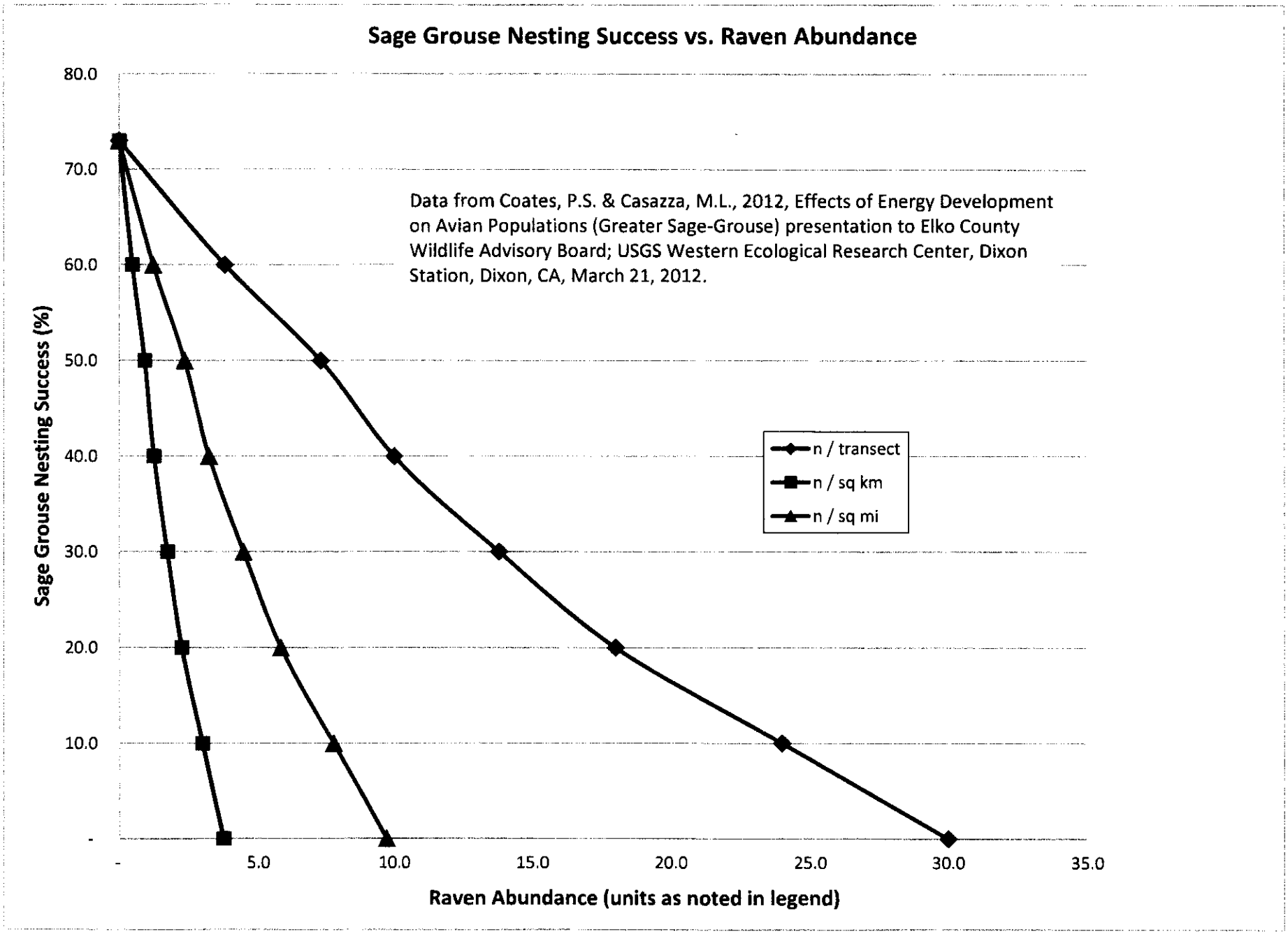
Sage Grouse Nesting Success vs. Raven Abundance
Data from Coates, P.S. & Casazza, M.L., 2012, Effects of Energy Development on Avian Populations (Greater Sage-Grouse) presentation to Elko County Wildlife Advisory Board; USGS Western Ecological Research Center, Dixon Station, Dixon, CA, March 21, 2012.
Sage Grouse Nesting Success (%)
80.0
70.0
60.0
50.0
40.0
30.0
20.0
10.0
-
n / transect
n / sq km
n / sq mi
-
5.0
10.0
15.0
20.0
25.0
30.0
35.0
Raven Abundance (units as noted in legend)