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CONVENTION RELATIVE À LA CONSERVATION DE LA VIE SAUVAGE
ET DU MILIEU NATUREL DE L'EUROPE

Comité permanent
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17-18 juin 2026
Strasbourg

Complaint on Stand-by: 2021/6

Conservation of the Western hazel grouse (*Tetrastes bonasia rhenana*) (France)

- REPORT BY THE COMPLAINANT -

*Document prepared by
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Naturschutz und Umweltbildung e. V. gegründet
1840

Nach § 60 Bundesnaturschutzgesetz anerkannte Landespflegeorganisation in
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Complaint n° 2021/6: France: conservation de la Gélinotte des bois (*Tetrastes bonasia rhenana*) Update
for the T-PVS Bureau meeting, spring 2026

Luxembourg, 20 April 2026

Dear Madam or Sir,

during the year passed since the last COE decision on 14th May 2025 the complainants experienced no progress on meaningful conservation activities in favour of hazel grouse in the Vosges. To our knowledge, the regional authority DREAL has not taken any substantial action since the COE's decision of 14 May 2025, and has not met the requirements of the latter.

The molecular genetic study initiated by the French regional authorities and their supporters has not been accepted for publication. Instead, another paper appeared (Beiträge zur Jagd-und Wildforschung 50, 2025, 325-351)¹ comparing the morphology of hazel grouse along a transect from the north-eastern Alps (subspecies *T. b. styriaca*) into extra-Alpine Bavaria and the Czech Republic (subspecies *T. b. rupestris*). Although the hill-country stocks in Bavaria prove less sexually dimorphic than the western extra-Alpine *T. b. rhenana*, their autonomous evolutionary status, compared with the more gender-invariant Alpine hazel grouse, became apparent convincingly. This corresponds to the equivalent differentiation in the transect Alps-Jura-Vosges_Rhinelands further west in Europe published before by various authors, and is another clear indication of the uniqueness of the lowland and hill-country grouse of temperate Europe compared with those in the Alps (and the Alpine outlier in the Jura range). This new study received positive response in the grouse community, and was also made available to regional stakeholders in the Vosges and at the DREAL. No response was received from there.

1

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/398142508_Ausbreitung_eines_Haselhuhns_aus_den_Alpen_in_s_Vorland_Mit_kritischer_Erörterung_der_Geschlechtsunterschiede_in_dieser_Art

To ascertain the current situation on site we have recently learnt from the Groupe Tétrás Vosges that no further reports of Vosgian hazel grouse have been received since the winter of 2025/2026. For the whole year 2025 three records were received, one each in April, July and September, albeit from inexperienced observers. Given the very large numbers of erroneous reports of hazel grouse in neighbouring countries where the taxon is extinct, these three reports have to be considered with caution. The few supporters of active hazel grouse conservations in Vosges reported no hazel grouse to us, nor did they receive any reports from experienced third parties. Thus, Western Hazel Grouse *T. b. rhenana* may be extinct by now in the Vosges, and thus globally, although this is speculative.

Following the failed French attempt to challenge the international scientific consensus concerning hazel grouse taxonomy, by rapidly commissioning a counter study by a biologist without proven background in the required scientific skills (systematics, population genetics in evolution) the local authorities or stakeholders seem to have lost interest in saving the regional population and subspecies.

We have little hope that the subspecies can be saved, given that the authorities and decision-makers in charge remain inactive. The only conceivable hope would be a legally imposed search by external experts. But even this option would meet the continued lack of engagement from many local stakeholders.

Unfortunately, also the delaying strategy employed by the COE is to be criticized. COE joined in the spurious tactics of the French regional authorities, whose bold counter-claim that the regional subspecies would be “controversial” was the likely deathblow to this subspecies, although they lacked any acceptable argument for their doubt, which continues to conflict with the taxonomic assessment of the highest responsible and relevant taxonomic commission of the roof organization of ornithology in Germany, with IUCN circles and the international grouse community. If unwilling administrations can sit out unwelcome species conservation problems so easily, by boldly denying scientific consensus and setting up arbitrary counter-arguments out of nothing, only announcing future rebuttal of the available scientific assessment by a quickly planned study which has never delivered anything of academic quality - then any species or subspecies conservation issue can be bypassed by delaying rescue in time.

It is obvious that the French administration is unwilling and unable to prevent extinction. In this situation we must call for the COE to impose foreign experts be commissioned to carry out a final search in the Vosges.

Furthermore, we intend to publish the entire case in an appropriate journal. In times where organismic zoology tends to be more and more replaced by citizen science, rules and standards for such citizen science become inevitable. In the present case the entire, unified international expert community is being cold-set by an unwilling administration, aided by organized amateurs and a few field biologists not fully trained in the required discipline, but who are unified to fend off external influence. Of note, the international expert community had offered the best, altruistic motivation to help, and even to contribute to eventual costs, and the relevant authorities of Germany had approached France declaring to carry the load of the task if required.

We appeal to COE to proactively consider optimized decision-making processes for this and similar cases, where conservation issues of European or even global dimension are addressed adequately and at the appropriate level, which in this case is evidently the European level, without any local or regional or provincial administration supported by untrained or not fully trained amateurs having the same weight as the international community of scientific specialists.

For the above:

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