



RECENT CHANGES IN HABITATS OF CAPERCAILLIE (*TETRAO UROGALLUS*) IN MANAGED NORTHERN FINNISH FORESTS

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Capercaillie densities have declined considerably throughout its whole range. We studied changes in habitat selection of capercaillie in northern Finland during two time periods, 1989-1992 and 2000-2003 using wildlife triangle count data. Mean densities of the species did not differ between the study periods. Capercaillie densities and their changes were assessed in relation to forest landscape structure. At the local population scale the change in density between the study periods was associated positively with the proportion of young thinning stands. At home range scale capercaillie habitats were dominated by mature stands during 1989-1992 in relation to habitats available, but not during 2000-2003 when young thinning stands were more abundant.

Relatively young forests seem to be suitable for capercaillie, but mature managed forests as capercaillie habitats may have deteriorated between the study periods. The rapid change in habitats occupied by capercaillie is probably due to the fact that vast areas of northern Finland clear cut during the 1950s and 1960s have reached structure that is suitable for the species. Large, young thinning stands may at landscape scale best fulfill the spatial needs of capercaillie although at stand level mature stands might be more preferred habitats. Still, spatial planning may help to form suitable areas that are large enough for the species, but the highest potential may lay in the forest stand scale, where increased cover on the ground could promote the habitat quality.

