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Population monitoring and management

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## Distribution and population abundance of stone partridge (*Alectoris graeca*) in Croatia during the last decade

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Stone partridge (*Alectoris graeca* Meisner) is a widespread bird species in the mountainous region of Europe and Asia. It is native to Croatia inhabiting the coastal area of rocky terrain overgrown with the degradation stages of deciduous and coniferous forests. In Croatia, it is listed and managed as a game species. The study of population dynamics was carried out in seven counties which are part of the stone partridge distribution range. After the Second World War, the population in Croatia was estimated at 7,000 individuals with a growing trend. In the 1970s and 1980s, the population reached its peak and the number was estimated at 35,000 individuals. This was followed by a decline in numbers, and in 2010 the population was estimated at 11,000 individuals. For a more detailed analysis, this research processed data segmentally by county for the period 2010-2020. The data was available from hunting management plans including 211 hunting grounds. Data showed that the most suitable areas are in the central part of Dalmatia. In the northern and central part of Dalmatia, average density was 4-14 individuals/100 ha. However, further to the south the abundance of stone partridge increases reaching the average density of 1-19 individuals/100ha. In the area of the north-western coastal part of Croatia, stone partridge has a significantly lower average density of 0.1-6 individuals/100 ha. The situation is similar in the area below the Velebit mountain range where an average density of 4-10 individuals was recorded. During the research period (2010-2020), the population trend did not change significantly, so it can be concluded that the population is in stagnation. Possible factors for this could be increased abundance of predators (mustelids), loss of grasslands (pastures) due to abandonment of traditional animal husbandry as well as increased urbanization.