

Borell, A.E. 1939. Telephone wires fatal to sage-grouse. *Condor* 41:85-86.

On October 20, 1938, Mr. W. S. Long and the writer found three Sage Grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) that, evidence indicated, had been killed as a result of striking telephone wires. One adult hen was found beneath a telephone line five miles north of Beaver, Beaver County, Utah; and four miles farther south under the same line a cock and a hen, both adults, were found. All three apparently had been dead about twenty-four hours, and were in excellent plumage which showed little evidence of external damage. The crops of the three birds and the skins of the two hens were preserved. While skinning the specimens they were examined carefully for signs of injury. There were no broken bones and the skulls were not damaged, but the throats of both hens were bruised and contained clots of blood, and the shoulders and fore part of the breast of one showed slight bruises. The position of the birds beneath the telephone line and the fact that the skins were not torn and no bones were broken would indicate that they had flown into the telephone wires rather than having been struck by automobiles. The skin of the male was intact and no bones were broken except the skull which was crushed; tracks indicated that the head of this bird had been stepped upon by a cow after the bird was dead. The situation along this stretch of highway is such as to be conducive to this type of avian accident. The west side of the highway is bordered by uncultivated flats which extend back to sagebrush-covered mesas. On the east side are pastures, grain fields and alfalfa patches. Along the edge of the fields that adjoin the road is a fence and the telephone line. The telephone poles support ten wires, eight of which are attached to the top cross-bar and are approximately eighteen feet above the ground; below these are two wires about a foot apart which are attached to the poles. Under these conditions it appears that the likelihood of Sage Grouse striking the wires as they fly back and forth between the sage flats and the alfalfa fields would be great. The greatest damage probably occurs when the birds are suddenly flushed from the alfalfa and strike the wires before they are able to gain sufficient altitude to clear them. The crop of one was distended with green forage which undoubtedly had been obtained in the alfalfa patch. Being heavy with food may also make the birds less agile at dodging obstacles. Of course, this is only one incident and may not be significant, but it does demonstrate one more obstacle that man has introduced into the environment of this fine game bird. Further observations may show that in certain areas this hazard is serious enough to warrant consideration of preventive measures.