

Ski tourism stresses European capercaillie

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Swiss, German and Austrian scientists said ski tourism might be harming capercaillie -- an old world grouse -- by affecting their ability to breed.

The researchers said ski tourism is raising stress levels among capercaillie -- a species whose numbers are substantially declining across central Europe.

The scientists said they used a new technique to assess the impact of ski tourism on capercaillie. Working in the Southern Black Forest in Germany, they collected the birds' droppings before and after the start of the ski season and analyzed them for levels of the breakdown products of the stress hormone corticosterone.

The researchers found levels of the breakdown products of the stress hormone were significantly higher in birds living in areas with moderate or high levels of ski tourism.

"Ski tourism affects both habitat use and stress hormone levels in capercaillie and this could adversely affect their body condition and overall fitness," said Lukas Jenni of the Swiss Ornithological Institute, one of the study's authors. "Because of this, we recommend that managers keep forests inhabited by capercaillie free from tourism infrastructure and retain undisturbed forest patches within skiing areas."

The research is reported in the British Ecological Society's Journal of Applied Ecology.

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