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G. L. Shan

Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences, China

Zhu Xu

Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences, China

David R. Kemp

Charles Sturt University, Australia

F. Ning

Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences, China

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Influence of enclosure year on community structure and species diversity on typical steppe

G . L . Shan¹ , Z . Xu^{1*} , D . R . Kemp² , F . Ning¹

¹Grassland Research Institute of CAAS , Hohhot , Inner Mongolia , 010010 , P . R . of China ; ² School of Agriculture and Wine Science , Charles Sturt University , Orange NSW Australia 2800 . * E-mail : yxuzhu@yahoo . com

Key words : typical steppe , seasonal enclosure , community structure , species diversity

Introduction Enclosure is the most common method for the restoration of degraded grassland , but in China complete enclosure of livestock from grassland is often difficult because of the poor economic status of pastoral areas . One of the measures to resolve conflict is seasonal enclosure (Katoh , 1998) . In this study , we investigated the influence of years of seasonal enclosure on typical steppe grassland to provide guidance for grassland management .

Materials and methods The study was done in Taipusi banner on typical steppe , Inner Mongolian Plateau (41°35' to 42°10' N , 114°51' to 115°49' E) , a semi-arid continent climate , average annual precipitation 407 mm , average temperature 1 .6°C and chestnut soil . Four previously severely degraded ecological sites , based on historical documents and investigation , were chosen , where different enclosure periods applied (0 , 5 , 14 and 25 years of summer enclosure for hay cuts) . A field survey done in August 2007 (10-20 , 0 .5m×0 .5m , random quadrats per site) recorded all species in each quadrat , measuring total coverage and the height , coverage , density and yield of each species . Richness , evenness and diversity indices were calculated .

Results With increased periods of enclosure , coverage reached a maximum after year 14 , the year that density reached a maximum , though density then declined . Community yield and height continued to increase up to year 25 (Figure 1) . Plant species diversity (Margalef index Ma , Shannon-Weaver index H) initially increased then remained relatively constant after year 5 . The transformation tendency of evenness (Pielou index , Epi) showed little change . The community changed from *Potentilla acaulis*+*Artemisia frigida*+*Stipa krylovii* to *Leymus chinensis*+*Cleistogenes squarrosa*+*Serratula centauroides* .

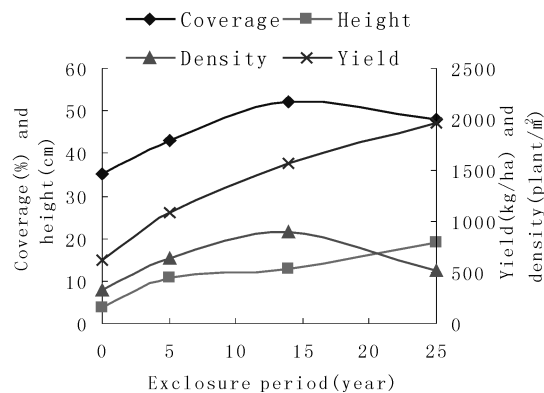


Figure 1 Community structure and yield in different enclosure period .

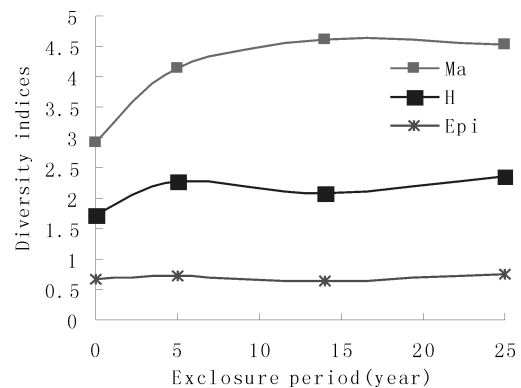


Figure 2 Diversity index in different enclosure period .

Conclusion Summer enclosure for hay production then grazing through the rest of the year did enable the grassland to recover to some extent . Fourteen years of seasonal enclosure appears a reasonable compromise , though the decline in density between years 14 and 25 warrants further study and maybe a change in management .

Reference

Katoh K . , Takeuchi K . , Jiang D , et al . 1998 . Vegetation restoration by seasonal enclosure in the Kerqin Sandy Land , Inner Mongolia [J] . *Plant Ecology* , 139 : 133-144 .