

Pheasant

General

Pheasants are one of the most exciting game birds to hunt in Canada. Often preferring to run, rather than fly, they can take dogs and hunters on a lively romp through upland habitat before finally flushing and presenting a shot for the hunter. Flushes often come so quickly and unexpectedly that hunters must really be on top of their game to bag a pheasant.

Wild populations exist in Southern Alberta, Southern Saskatchewan with a bit of an overflow into Manitoba. Most pheasant in other parts of Canada are pen raised and often hunted in conservation areas or game farms. There are occasional reports of pheasant sightings, but these are likely birds that have escaped from conservation areas or game farms.

Habitat

Although thousands of pheasants continue to thrive in the wild throughout many regions of North America, they are not a native species. First introduced by Europeans in the mid 1800s pheasants adapted rapidly to the mixed farmlands found in many regions of Canada. They continued to thrive until the latter half of the 20th century when a combination of pesticide use and overstocking of pen raised birds lead to the decline of wild populations particularly in Ontario.

Pheasants are particularly vulnerable to the effects of pesticides. Because plants such as lambs quarters, a primary food source for pheasants, are often a principal target for pesticides, not only is their food source eliminated in a given area but the chemicals are often ingested by the birds before the plant dies.

The ring necked pheasant loves open spaces where food is plentiful and cover is easily reached. They are not migratory and over winter in the same habitat.

Feeding

The pheasant loves plants such as lambs quarters, but is also very opportunistic, feeding on corn, soybeans, and other feed crops. These plants also provide great cover as well as a ready food source.

Breeding

Courtship occurs in the early spring with displays of strutting and flapping put on by the male bird. Females are generally attracted to males with brighter plumage.

After mating the female builds a ground nest and lays between 8 and 14 eggs.

Hunting Considerations

- Because of the pheasants tendency to run when pursued, flushing breeds like Springer Spaniels and hunting Cockers, are well suited to pheasant hunting. Once on a bird these dogs are like a hound on a rabbit and, unless they are called off, don't give up until the bird flushes. After the bird is shot the happy dogs are sent to retrieve the bird and return it to the handler, resulting in a very low percentage of lost or crippled birds.
- Because of unpredictable flush, the speed of the bird, and the range of the shot, a double barreled shotgun is ideal for hunting pheasant. The preferred gun of most seasoned pheasant hunters is a 20 gauge over and under. Combine that with a load of #6 lead shot and you have a winning combination.

Other Points of Interest

Thanks to the efforts of many volunteer groups, wild pheasants are being selectively reintroduced to traditional habitats throughout Canada.

Reintroduction of the pheasant to Southwestern Ontario began in the winter of 2002 with a pilot project that saw nearly 50 wild birds relocated from Saskatchewan to a site in Lambton County.

All indications are that wild pheasant populations should make a comeback that will rival that of the wild turkey.