



# DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

## INFORMATION SERVICE

BUREAU OF BIOLOGICAL SURVEY

For Release SUNDAY, APRIL 28, 1940.

PHOTOS available from Biological Survey.

### TRANSPLANT 1,800 PHEASANTS FROM REFUGE TO STATE AREAS

More than 1,800 ring-necked pheasants from the Sand Lake National Wildlife Refuge, South Dakota, were trapped and liberated in 8 counties in the western part of that State where the pheasant populations had become depleted, it was announced today by the Bureau of Biological Survey, United States Department of the Interior. This is in keeping with the Survey's policy of permitting the trapping of surplus stocks of upland game birds on wildlife refuges to be used in restocking other areas.

About 18 traps were operated on the 21,100-acre refuge during a 9-weeks period by the South Dakota Department of Game and Fish, under a permit by the Biological Survey. According to Director J. W. Cluett, of the Game and Fish Department, the best record for any one day was 111 pheasants trapped. The average for the 75 days was 25 birds daily.

The ring-necked pheasants were liberated in the following counties: Campbell (150), Edmunds (125), Lawrence and Meade (423), Jones and Lyman (511), Hyde (243), and Potter (378). These counties will remain closed to hunting until a sufficient stock is available.

Mr. Cluett declared that next year his department would probably propose a Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration project to continue the restocking program.

Though the Sand Lake Refuge is primarily a waterfowl sanctuary, it has been developed so that it is also a natural hatchery for upland game birds. Survey officials estimated that at present there are some 15,000 ring-necked pheasants on the area. "Surplus stock of upland game birds on national wildlife refuges are frequently made available to State game departments for restocking purposes," Survey officials declared.

Depletion of pheasant populations is in part due to the environment becoming unfavorable, it was explained. Drought, resulting in poor stands of cover and food plants, has been contributory to the decrease in the number of birds. The recent transplantings in South Dakota were made to counties where considerable rainfall, recovery of good cover stands, and other conditions indicated that the birds can survive.

The ring-necked pheasant is an exotic, or alien, species that today is well-established in the United States. It is sometimes called the Chinese pheasant. The natural distribution of pheasants is confined to Asia and certain parts of the East India Islands. In some sections of the United States, the ruffed grouse is called a pheasant, but no true pheasants are native to this country. The ring-neck was first successfully introduced in this country in 1881, when Judge O. N. Denny, then United States General Consul at Shanghai, sent 30 ringnecks to Oregon, where they were freed in the Willamette Valley.

---

NOTE TO EDITORS: The following is a more detailed discussion of pheasants, prepared for those desiring a longer article.

---

### Many Kinds of Pheasants

About 100 different kinds of pheasants, in 19 groups, have been described by scientists. The ringneck, or Chinese, is classified as one of the true pheasants, but in the United States most of the pheasants are hybrids, or mixtures, of ring-necks, mongolian, and other subspecies.

These exotic upland game birds are readily distinguished from any native American species by their long, tapering tails and relatively large size. An adult male is about 35 inches long, including the tail, and weighs about 2-3/4 pounds, while an adult female is about 24 inches long and weighs about 2-1/3 pounds. The male is highly colored, with a white ring on the neck, a greenish-blue head, red patches around the eyes, and with body plumage that is a motley of gaudy colors. The female is dull in hue, having various browns and buffs mottled with black. The neck ring is not present in the female.

In the eastern United States pheasants were brought from England about 1790 by Governor Wentworth of New Hampshire. The stock, however, died out. The first successful introduction of the birds into the East was made in 1887 by Rutherford Stuyvesant, who brought a number of pheasants from England and liberated them in New Jersey. In the nineties, pheasants from England were introduced also into Massachusetts and other Atlantic Coast States.

The birds proved hardy and prolific. Spreading rapidly by natural and artificial means, pheasants are now scattered throughout the northern half of the United States and in the southern part of Canada. They are found as far south as Maryland, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Kentucky, Missouri, Kansas, Colorado, Utah, Nevada, and northern California.

These long-tailed birds are reared for game and for the aviary and fancy food markets. They have been introduced almost throughout the world and have thrived in every temperate climate. The early Greeks and Romans propagated pheasants.

### Popular Game Birds

As objects of sport, pheasants are almost as popular with Americans as are bobwhites and ruffed grouse. When motionless, the pheasant is so difficult to see that it often is not detected until flushed, even though it is within a few feet of a hunter. When suddenly startled, pheasants flush with a loud whir of the wings. They can take off with amazing speed, estimated at times to reach 38 miles an hour. If hemmed in by trees, pheasants fly up almost vertically.

Because they are prolific and easily reared on game farms, pheasants have been stocked on a large scale and have provided considerable sport ever since the birds were first well-established in the United States. Ten years after they were liberated in Oregon, pheasants were so numerous that when an open season was declared in 1892, some 50,000 birds were killed on the opening day. In South Dakota, the total bag in 1927 was estimated to be between 1-1/2 and 2 million pheasants, a record said to be scarcely approached in all American history for a single species of game bird in a single State.

How many pheasants there are in the country today is not known.

Pheasants usually prefer grassy and weedy types of cover adjacent to standing cornfields. The birds sometimes frequent cultivated fields and bushy pastures and may also be found in marshes, moist thickets, and among sand dunes. In Asia, William Beebe has reported various types of pheasants from sea level in Java to altitudes of 16,000 feet in the Himalayas. In general, he states, the birds there live in mountainous areas rather than at lower elevations. In the United States the birds seem to thrive in agricultural areas.

### Habits Described

Late in March or early in April, the approach of the breeding season is heralded by the crowing and strutting of the male. It is said that the cock crows

to attract the female's attention and to advertise his territorial claims. During the courtship, the male parades up and down before the female, strutting and showing his fine feathers with all their dazzling colors.

After the middle of April, the female prepares her nest, which is usually in a slight hollow in the ground along some bushy fence row, near a haystack, or in the outer edges of a grain or hay field. Sometimes, farmers unwittingly destroy setting birds and their nests during the mowing season.

A nest may contain 8 to 12 eggs, each about half the size of a common chicken egg. Within 23 to 25 days, the brood is hatched. Incubation is normally the duty of the female.

The pheasant seldom wanders more than a few miles from its birthplace. With plenty of food available, it can withstand rather severe winters. The bird feeds regularly in cultivated fields and meadows. Its diet consists of weed seeds, insects, wild fruits, and berries, tender grasses, and cultivated crops. In winter in the United States, it subsists largely upon waste grains in farm fields.

- C -