

Notes on Banding Pheasants in Michigan

Michigan's Conservation Department began in 1916 the propagation of ringneck pheasants. In an effort to provide a substitute for the popular Ruffed Grouse or "Pat" which by that time was no longer plentiful in southern Michigan, the pheasant was selected for the reason that it bred readily in captivity and quickly reverted to the "wild" upon release from the rearing or breeding units. The pheasant lends itself readily to large-scale production programs because for some unknown reason, which no doubt spelled "success" for the species in the Orient centuries ago, it retains through successive generations a wariness and wildness which captivity does not eliminate. This characteristic differs in the case of ducks, geese, turkeys and ruffed grouse, wherein young hatched and reared by man seem to lose fear of mankind and do not readily acclimate themselves to wild conditions.

Not only birds themselves have been distributed by the Department, but pheasant eggs numbering in the thousands have been sent to nearly all of the 83 counties during the past 30 years. The very first year of egg distributing was 1917, when 500 were sent to interested individuals. Figures might be boring to you, so the years won't be tabulated separately at this time; however, you might be interested in knowing that from 1927 to 1947, a total of 284,504 pheasant eggs were distributed to 4-H Clubs, F.F.A. Groups, sportsmen's clubs and interested individuals. Once a species becomes established in suitable areas in the State by sheer thousands released and by closed seasons, it is our feeling that the actual releasing of more birds does little real good in providing hunter's meat or adding to the breeding population; we feel that the egg distribution program adds very little to the population figures but does a great deal of good when boys and girls themselves hatch and raise the birds. The work and pleasure experienced, and bringing Conservation closer to the youngsters, are the main benefits derived from such a program.

The actual release of game farm pheasants started in 1918 with about 1800 birds going out to mostly the southern half of the Lower Peninsula. By 1922 the number reached 5,500 annually and it remained right around this figure each year (excepting during the war years) until 1946. Each of the last three years around 24,000 birds have been released.

In 1935 the Department began to band the male pheasants that were shipped out for release purposes. Although the figures on banded birds returned by hunters is missing from the files for some years, from all indications the returns each year are discouragingly low. Just what the reason is we are not sure. Is it because survival of game farm stock is so low that the birds just aren't to be found? Or is it because the small game hunters do not know that we are anxious to have each and every band reported to us? Could it be that insufficient publicity has been given to banding the birds? Or, are the bands intentionally kept as souvenirs?

Following are a few years tabulated to show the number of banded pheasants released and the number of band returns:

Year	No. Banded Males	No. Band Returns	% Returns
1935	1837	84	4.6
1936	1685	48	2.8
1937	1167	69	5.9
1938	1376	136	9.8
1939	1352	63	4.6
1940	1068	70	6.5
1941	1002	66	6.5
1942	324	13	4.0
1943	169	0	0
1947	4749	553	7.0
1948	13860	1320	9.7

On the basis of experiments in areas where all hunter's are checked, we can conclude that about 30% of the birds released in September are shot in season. Normal returns of banded birds, based on the voluntary action of hunters all over the pheasantrange, are about 9% annually. This leads us to believe

that one in every three hunters reports the bands from banded birds shot.

Band record cards are made out for all banded released birds, and in the case of pheasants shot during the hunting season, the distance the bird has moved from the release site is estimated when the hunter gives us information on where he shot the bird. From a survey of 2,000 return records, it has been found that the average distance travelled is less than 3 miles. Some exceptions to this have been recorded.

In 1947, of 553 hunters returns, four unusual instances of movement are recorded: 16 miles, 10 miles, 9 miles and 15 miles. In 1948, there were 13 such records. Our cards show the following cases of excessive movement: 24, 23, 21, 17, 14, 13, 13, 13, 13, 12, 11, 11, and 9 miles. Just what causes these few pheasants to move so far away from the site of release is unknown. They certainly are not normal in this respect compared to the several thousand which are reported taken from one half to five miles away from where they were liberated. So far no logical reason has been advanced for this excessive travel.

That game farm released stock seldom survives over the first winter and on into the second hunting season after their release, is evidenced by the very few hunters returns submitted the year after the releases are made. For instance, of the 4749 banded males released in 1947, 12 (.2%) were turned in as having been shot in the 1948 season.

Several experiments have been undertaken which were aimed at determining the best age at which the birds should be released, and the best month in terms of survival to the hunting season. From indications based on band returns, it has been tentatively determined that 10 and 12 week old birds survive better than 6, 8, and 14 week old birds.

Some experimenting has been done in the method of releasing the birds. The usual way to release birds is to unload the crates, set them on the ground, and open them. Whether the birds walk out or step out and flush, is up to the birds. This is called the "violent release" and contrasts to the "gentle release"

where pens are set up at the release site and the birds held in them. Here they are fed and watered for a few days before the pens are opened to allow the birds their freedom. No appreciable success in better survival resulted from the "gentle release" method.

Spring releases of hens has been tried on state-owned land with only about 5% of these females successful in rearing broods the following summer.

In the field work, experiments, and studies of birds of known ages, various banding techniques have been employed to make it possible for observers to identify individual birds.

We sometimes use colored celluloid numbered bands, welded together with acetone after they are on the bird's leg. This prevents their catching on sticks etc. and coming off.

Also used are pyrolin markers, stapled to feathers to identify some individuals. Dyed feathers fastened to tail feathers, and dyed tail feathers, have also been used. A new technique not yet used in Michigan is the use of a plastic tag secured to the skin of the neck by a silver plated safety pin.

Aluminum wing bands are sometimes used to mark young chicks. These tags can stay on for the birds lifetime, but can't be easily discovered until the bird is dressed out.

This business of research, studies, banding, and behavior is very interesting, but isn't it a common feeling that the more we do, and learn, the more we feel we don't know about any given subject? Pheasant studies based largely on banding has been going on in this state for fifteen years, but we feel we have barely scratched the surface of the wealth of information waiting for us!

Notes on Banding Pheasants in Michigan

Michigan's Conservation Department began in 1916 the propagation of ringneck pheasants. In an effort to provide a substitute for the popular Ruffed Grouse or "Tui" which by that time was no longer plentiful in southern Michigan, the pheasant was selected for the reason that it bred readily in captivity and quickly reverted to the "wild" upon release from the rearing or breeding units. The pheasant lends itself readily to large-scale production programs because for some unknown reason, which no doubt spelled "success" for the species in the Orient centuries ago, it retains through successive generations a variegated and wildness which captivity does not eliminate. This characteristic differs in the case of ducks, geese, turkeys and ruffed grouse, wherein young hatched and reared by man seem to lose fear of mankind and do not readily acclimate themselves to wild conditions.

Not only birds themselves have been distributed by the Department, but pheasant eggs numbering in the thousands have been sent to nearly all of the 83 counties during the past 30 years. The very first year of egg distributing was 1917, when 500 were sent to interested individuals. Figures might be boring to you, so the years won't be tabulated separately at this time; however, you might be interested in knowing that from 1927 to 1947, a total of 234,504 pheasant eggs were distributed to 4-H Clubs, F.F.A. Groups, sportsman's clubs and interested individuals. Once a species becomes established in suitable areas in the State by sheer thousands released and by closed seasons, it is our feeling that the actual releasing of more birds does little real good in providing hunter's meat or adding to the breeding population; we feel that the egg distribution program adds very little to the population figures but does a great deal of good when boys and girls themselves hatch and raise the birds. The work and pleasure experienced, and bringing Conservation closer to the youngsters, are the main benefits derived from such a program.

The actual release of game farm pheasants started in 1918 with about 1800 birds going out to mostly the southern half of the lower Peninsula. By 1922 the number reached 5,500 annually and it remained right around this figure each year (excepting during the war years) until 1946. Each of the last three years around 34,000 birds have been released.

In 1935 the Department began to band the male pheasants that were shipped out for release purposes. Although the figures on banded birds returned by hunters is missing from the files for some years, from all indications the returns each year are discouragingly low. Just what the reason is we are not sure. Is it because survival of game farm stock is so low that the birds just aren't to be found? Or is it because the small game hunters do not know that we are anxious to have each and every band reported to us? Could it be that insufficient publicity has been given to banding the birds? Or, are the bands intentionally kept as souvenirs?

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That game farm released stock seldom survives over the first winter and on into the second hunting season after their release, is evidenced by the very few hunters returns submitted the year after the releases are made. For instance, of the 4749 banded males released in 1947, 12 (.25%) were turned in as having been shot in the 1948 season.

Several experiments have been undertaken which were aimed at determining the best age at which the birds should be released, and the best month in terms of survival to the hunting season. From indications based on band returns, it has been tentatively determined that 10 and 12 week old birds survive better than 6, 8, and 14 week old birds.

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