

Alberta Conservation Association (ACA)

Date: 2014-2015

Project Name: ACA/4-H Pheasant Raise and Release Program

Wildlife Program Manager: Doug Manzer

Project Leaders: Blair Seward and Layne Seward

Primary ACA staff on project:

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Partnerships

- 4-H
- ATB Financial
- Lethbridge Fish & Game Association
- Pheasants Forever – Lethbridge Chapter
- Red Deer Fish & Game Association
- Vulcan and District Fish & Game Association

Key Findings

- Twenty 4-H kids participated in the first year of this program and raised 1,525 pheasants from day-old chicks into 14-week-old hens and then released them into suitable habitat.
- We held a workshop for the kids to discuss how to raise pheasants and their needs once they are released into the wild.
- We visited many of the kids at their respective farms to discuss pen design, bird health, and habitat needs of pheasants.

Introduction

Upland hunting and pheasants have been important features of rural life across much of southern Alberta for more than a century. Many of Alberta's residents have fond memories of either viewing or hunting upland gamebirds. However, changes in agricultural practices and the conversion of prairie into cropland have dramatically modified the landscape to the point where native gamebirds are nearly eliminated from areas dominated by cropland. Pheasants can adapt to areas predominately used for cropland provided that a suite of habitat features are also available. The widespread loss of habitat coupled with a decline in upland bird numbers has led to a situation where younger generations no longer have a good understanding of the habitat needs of gamebirds, such as pheasants. We are partnering with 4-H Alberta to reactivate a raise and release program that was discontinued more than 20 years ago. This initiative aims to reconnect young, rural kids with the habitat needs of upland gamebirds and gives them practical experience with raising pheasants from day-old chicks into hens that are then released into

quality habitat. Having 4-H members raise and release birds offers them the opportunity to experience first-hand the recreational enjoyment pheasants are able to provide.

Methods

We developed the goals of this initiative in collaboration with 4-H Alberta. The 4-H network identified the clubs with kids who wanted to participate in the program. We provided advice on how to raise pheasants, while the kids were responsible for daily husbandry, including constructing a brood house and a flight pen. The kids effectively raised the golf-ball-sized chicks into nearly full-grown hens. When the pheasants were ready for release, their condition was verified and birds were purchased back by Alberta Conservation Association. We worked with the kids to select suitable habitat for the release locations.

Results

In summer 2014, twenty 4-H kids raised 1,525 pheasant chicks for release into quality habitat. Participants gained first-hand knowledge of the challenges faced by pheasants in those critical first days when they require near-constant warmth and high-protein food to survive. They also learned about the economics of raising pheasants and learned to identify the best habitat types to release their pheasants into to give them the greatest chance of survival. Each member kept updated records of pheasant development, food intake and mortality rates. Members from each club also completed “tour days” to visit each other’s pheasant raising pens and assess bird health and development.

Conclusions

The raise and release program has generated a lot of interest. All those involved in 2014 have indicated a desire to continue with the program, which we hope to expand to include 100 kids in 2015. Program expansion will enable us to raise up to 10,000 pheasants! Currently partner relations are being developed to reduce the cost of buying back birds.

Communications

- In collaboration with 4-H, our biologists delivered a presentation to participants on pheasant husbandry, pheasant habitat needs and general pheasant biology.
- Provided participants with pamphlets and resources for information on raising pheasants and their habitat needs.
- 4-H magazine highlighted the project.
- 4-H members delivered presentation at the Taber Pheasant Festival and Southern Regional 4-H Learning Day.

Literature Cited

N/A

Photos



Day-old pheasant chicks delivered to 4-H members. Photo: Kyle Prince



Shortgrass 4-H member Vickie Wehlage's pheasant pen. Photo: Blair Seward



Savanna Van der Wielen of the Hays 4-H Club poses with a pheasant chick that the club raised and released around the Hays area. Photo: Jaarno Van der Wielen