

Alberta Conservation Association 2017/18 Project Summary Report

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

Wildlife Program Manager: Doug Manzer

Project Leader: Blair Seward

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Partnerships

4-H Alberta
Calgary Fish & Game Association
Dennis and Cheryl Meyer
Lethbridge Fish & Game Association
Southern Alberta Bow Hunters Association
Wheatland Conservation & Wildlife Association

Key Findings

- 107 kids from 4-H participated in the third year of this program, raising 11,353 pheasants from day-old chicks to 14-week-old hens and roosters that were released into suitable habitat.
- 6,587 pheasants were raised by Boy Scout groups, schools, Fish & Game Clubs, and private landowners throughout Alberta.
- We held a workshop for 4-H kids to discuss pheasant husbandry and habitat requirements of pheasants once released into the wild.
- We visited many of the participants at their farms to discuss pen design, bird health, and habitat needs of the birds.
- Held a photo contest for participants, fully sponsored by Calgary Fish & Game Association.

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 game birds. However, changes in agricultural practices and the conversion of prairie into cropland have dramatically modified the landscape to the point where native game birds are nearly eliminated from areas dominated by cropland. Pheasants can adapt to areas predominately used for cropland provided that a suite of habitat features is also available. The widespread loss of habitat coupled with a decline in upland bird numbers has led to a disconnect between younger generations and the habitat needed by game birds, such as pheasants. Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) has been partnering with 4-H Alberta over the last four years to reactivate the Pheasant Raise and Release Program that was discontinued more than 20 years ago. This initiative aims to reconnect young kids with the habitat needs of

upland game birds and gives them practical experience raising pheasants from day-old chicks into adults that can then be 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.

We also work with other special interest groups, such as Boy Scout groups, school divisions, Fish & Game Clubs, and private landowners who are interested in raising pheasants. This allows us to reach a larger audience and help spread interest in pheasants and the habitat they require to survive. By having a large number of interest groups raising pheasants and wanting them to survive, it helps us ensure the longevity of pheasants and their associated habitat.

Methods

We developed the goals of this initiative in collaboration with the leadership of 4-H Alberta. The 4-H network identifies clubs with kids who would like to participate in the program, and we provide day-old chicks and detailed advice on raising pheasants. After chicks are delivered to the 4-H participants, the members are responsible for the daily needs of the birds, including constructing a brood house and a flight pen, and for raising them until they are nearly full grown. When the pheasants are ready for release, their condition is vetted and they are purchased back by ACA. We then work with the members to select suitable habitat for release locations.

Results

This past summer, a total of 17,940 pheasant chicks were raised and released into quality habitat. Participants gained first-hand knowledge about the challenges experienced 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 how to identify habitat types that improved the odds for survival.

As part of the 4-H program, members kept updated records of pheasant development, food intake, and mortality rates. Participants from each club also completed “tour days” to visit each other’s pheasant pens and assess bird health and development.

Conclusions

The raise and release program has generated a lot of interest and is continuing to expand throughout Alberta. Previously, almost all participants were from southern Alberta, but in 2017/18, we saw a large increase in participants from central and northern Alberta. Almost all participants from previous years are returning, providing a good indicator of project satisfaction.

Communications

- In collaboration with 4-H, we delivered presentations to participants on pheasant husbandry, pheasant habitat needs, and general pheasant biology.
- We provided all participants with pamphlets, feedback, and an updated manual on pheasant husbandry.
- *4-H Magazine* highlighted the project in one of its editions.
- Key sponsors acknowledged on facebook and other social media outlets.
- Project was highlighted in several newspaper articles.

Photos



Day-old pheasant chicks delivered to 4-H members. Photo: Brooke McNalley



Participants with pheasant chick. Photo: Anita Unrau



Pheasant in flight pen. Photo: Leah Breitkreutz