

**Alberta Conservation Association
2018/19 Project Summary Report**

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

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Partnerships

4-H Alberta

Alberta Environment and Parks

Calgary Fish & Game Association

ConocoPhillips Canada

Innisfree & District Fish and Game Association

Lethbridge Fish & Game Association

MacFarlane Pheasants

Private donations

Wheatland Conservation & Wildlife Association

Key Findings

- 115 4-H members participated in the fifth year of this program, successfully raising and releasing 5,950 hens (and a few roosters) into suitable habitat.
- We held a workshop for participants to discuss pheasant husbandry, and more importantly we discussed the habitat resources needed by pheasants to be successful in Alberta.

- We held a photo contest for 4-H members, 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. ACA has been partnering with 4-H Alberta over the last five years to reactivate the Pheasant Raise and Release Program that was discontinued more than 20 years ago. This initiative aims to reconnect 4-H members 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 suitable 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, Fish & Game associations, 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 to inspire an interest in gamebirds, and the habitat resources that are important for their success in Alberta. The 4-H network identifies clubs with members who would like to participate in the

program, and we provide day-old chicks and detailed advice on raising pheasants, and the habitat needs of pheasants in the wild. 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. We also visited some of the 4-H members at their farms to discuss pen design and bird health. When the pheasants are ready for release, a portion of the birds raised by each 4-H member are purchased back by ACA. We then work with the 4-H members to select suitable habitat for release locations. We held a workshop for participants to provide guidance on pheasant husbandry and habitat features needed by pheasants to be successful in Alberta. Participants were asked to complete a habitat map of their selected release location to identify the different habitat types needed for pheasants through the seasons, and what changes they could make on their farm to improve habitat conditions for pheasants and other upland birds without adversely affecting their farming operation.

Results

This past summer, 115 4-H members successfully raised and released 5,950 hens and roosters into suitable 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 the last two years, we have seen a large increase in participants from central and northern Alberta. The majority of participants from previous years are returning, providing a good indicator of project satisfaction.

Communications

- In collaboration with 4-H, we held a workshop for participants to discuss pheasant husbandry, pheasant habitat needs, and general pheasant biology.
- In collaboration with 4-H, we attended the 4-H Alberta Leaders' Conference in Edmonton and jointly presented on the raise and release program.
- We provided 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 ACA facebook and other social media outlets.

Photos



Day-old pheasant chicks. Photo: Jay Hopfe



Day-old pheasant chicks delivered to 4-H member, Shaylin Wegner. Photo: Sherri Wegner



Pheasants in flight pen. Photo: Hannah Saruk



4-H member, Julian Maayen, releasing pheasants. Photo: Annette Maayen