

**Alberta Conservation Association**  
**2021/22 Project Summary Report**

**Project Name:** Upland Game Bird 4-H Initiative

**Wildlife Program Manager:** Doug Manzer

**Project Leader:** Amanda Rezansoff

**Primary ACA staff on project:** Mike Jokinen, Kris Kendell, Amanda Rezansoff, Layne Seward, Mike Uchikura, and Cailyn Wilson

**Partnerships**

4-H Alberta

Alberta Environment and Parks

ConocoPhillips Canada

MacFarlane Pheasants

Private donations

**Key Findings**

- In all, 53 4-H members participated in the 8<sup>th</sup> year of this program, successfully raising approximately 4,200 pheasants (mostly hens) and either releasing them into suitable upland habitat or marketing them for sale.
- In collaboration with 4-H, we held two webinars for participants. The first webinar was to provide information on pheasant husbandry and the second webinar was to provide information on pheasant habitat needs and general pheasant biology.

**Abstract**

Pheasants were first introduced into Alberta in 1908 by a group of recreational enthusiasts to provide enhanced upland hunting opportunities. Now, more than 100 years later, the tradition continues as we partner with stakeholders to improve the future of upland hunting in Alberta. Changes in agricultural practices and the conversion of native prairie into cropland have dramatically modified the landscape to the point where native game birds are nearly eliminated

from areas dedicated to cropland. Pheasants can adapt to areas predominately used for cropland, provided that a suite of habitat features are also available.

In 2014, we initiated a new partnership with 4-H Alberta, offering them the opportunity to raise day-old chicks to adults birds. This year, we had 53 4-H members who successfully raised approximately 4,200 pheasants (mostly hens) and either released them into suitable upland habitat or marketed them for sale.

In addition to the 4-H members, other interest groups including private landowners, Alberta Fish & Game Associations, and Boy Scout groups also received the opportunity to purchase day-old chicks to raise. We did not record how many birds were successfully raised and released or marketed for sale as they are free to do what they want with their birds.

## **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 seeing 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 game 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 8 years to reactivate the Upland Game Bird 4-H Initiative 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 or marketed for sale. Having 4-H members raise and release or market their birds offers them the opportunity to experience first-hand the recreational enjoyment pheasants can provide.

We also work with other special interest groups, such as Boy Scouts, Alberta 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. Having several interest groups raising pheasants and wanting them to survive 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 game birds and the habitat resources that are necessary for survival.

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 also 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 almost fully grown.

Since 2014, the Upland Game Bird 4-H Initiative Program has continued to evolve to meet the mandates of both ACA and 4-H Alberta. From 2014 to 2019, some of the hens raised by 4-H members were purchased back by ACA and then released into suitable habitat. However, we recognized that pheasant survival is limited because of Alberta's cold winters, especially for pheasants released in central and northern Alberta. As a result, some roosters raised by 4-H members north of the Red Deer River were purchased back by ACA in 2020 and then released onto designated ACA-titled conservation sites to create hunting opportunities. While, some of raised hens by 4-H members south of the the Red Deer River were purchased back and then released into suitable habitat. In collaboration with 4-H Alberta in 2021, we decided to move to a market-based system, which is more in line with the traditional livestock 4-H projects.

Rpheasants were no longer purchased back by ACA, and 4-H members were free to do want to they wanted with their raised pheasants including releasing them into suitable habitat of their choosing or marketing them for sale.

## **Results**

This past summer, we had 53 4-H members who successfully raised approximately 4,200 pheasants (mostly hens) and either released them into suitable upland habitat or marketed them for sale.

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 also had their pheasants evaluated by a 4-H representative to assess bird health and development prior to their pheasants being released or marketed.

## **Conclusions**

The Upland Game Bird 4-H Initiative Program has generated a lot of interest and continues to be a popular program throughout Alberta. Previously, almost all participants were from southern Alberta, but in the last 5 years, we have seen a large increase in participants from central Alberta. Most of the participants from previous years return the next year, suggesting satisfaction with the program.

## **Communications**

- In collaboration with 4-H, we held two webinars for participants. The first webinar was to provide information on pheasant husbandry and the second webinar was to provide information on pheasant habitat needs and general pheasant biology.
- Key sponsors were acknowledged on ACA Facebook and other social media outlets.

## **Literature Cited**

Not applicable

## Photos



Photo 1. Day-old pheasants chicks being delivered to 4-H members. Photo: Amanda Rezansoff



Photo 2. Day-old pheasant chicks. Photo: Amanda Rezansoff