

**Alberta Conservation Association  
2023/24 Project Summary Report**

**Project Name:** Pheasant Releases to Enhance Hunting Opportunities

**Wildlife Program Manager:** Doug Manzer

**Project Leader:** Jalen Hulit

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**Partnerships**

Capital Power

Cardston Fish & Game Association

Ducks Unlimited Canada

Farnum Pheasant Farm

Fort Macleod Fish & Game Association

Government of Alberta

Lethbridge Fish & Game Association

MacFarlane Pheasants

Medicine Hat Fish & Game Association

Peace River Fish & Game Association

Picture Butte Fish & Game Association

## **Key Findings**

- Release sites are an excellent opportunity to get someone new into upland hunting.
- We released male pheasants on 41 release sites across Alberta during fall 2023.
- We occasionally receive feedback from a minority of hunters who appear to have unrealistic expectations for harvesting a bird. They may do well to temper their expectations, especially as the popularity of release sites grow along with license sales. This program is not intended to provide all license holders with high probabilities of success every time out.
- We partnered with five Fish & Game clubs south of the Red Deer River who played key roles in the release of pheasants at 22 southern Alberta sites throughout the season.
- Local growers in the Peace River area raised several hundred male pheasants that were released at the Lac Cardinal Point Uplands and Whitetail North sites in northwestern Alberta.
- We worked with two new growers in central and southern Alberta to provide the opportunity for locally raised pheasant operations to participate at a few select sites.
- We contracted MacFarlane Pheasants to delivery birds three times per week at 17 of the 41 sites.

## **Details**

Upland game bird hunting is a long-standing tradition in Alberta. Following the introduction of pheasants in the early 1900s, wild populations became established in select areas of southern Alberta. Even so, the Government of Alberta started a hatchery in 1945 and created a Provincial Pheasant Release Program to help address the demand beyond that which the natural population could provide. The hatchery was closed in 2013, and Alberta Conservation Association took over the purchase and release of pheasants in 2014. The overall goal of the program is to provide hunting opportunities, and especially to encourage those new to upland hunting.

Early on we developed a web page with detailed maps and directions to enable all license holders to easily find the 41 sites, from Lac Cardinal near Peace River in the northwest to several sites south and east of Medicine Hat. We also increased the number of pheasants released annually to more than 25,000 birds in 2023. MacFarlane Pheasants facilitated the delivery of pheasants at 17

sites, while volunteer participation from five Fish & Game clubs played key roles in the weekly releases at 22 sites from Medicine Hat to Cardston. We also partnered with several local growers within Alberta who raised male pheasants. The more northern sites began releases September 1 and ran for nine weeks, while releases further south corresponded with the opening day of pheasant season beginning October 15.

Release sites provide hunting opportunities for license holders, but they are especially important for encouraging those that are new to upland hunting. These sites are easy to find and, the chance of moving a pheasant is always there during the release period. Even so, we receive feedback from those who appear to have expectations beyond that which an open and widely accessible program can provide. Those that expect to harvest a bird during every hunt will do well to temper their expectations, especially as the popularity of these sites grow. This program is not intended to provide all license holders with high probabilities of success every time out. Some may find that commercial-based pheasant hunt operations are a better fit for them. We encourage experienced hunters to consider using release sites as a supplement to their upland hunting year.

Release sites are an excellent opportunity to get someone new into upland hunting.

## Photos



Photo 1. Wildlife technician, Dave Jackson, releasing pheasants on the Whitetail North pheasant release site. Photo: Ed Kolodychuk



Photo 2. The entrance to the Whitetail North release site, showing the signage displayed at parking area. Photo: Dave Jackson