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August 15, 2014

Improve Ring-necked Pheasant Habitat
Submitted by Susan Henning

It is always a treat for an Eastern Kansas girl like Susan Henning, District Manager for the Kay County Conservation District to see the iridescently-colored cock pheasants scurrying across the road as she drives around the county. “Where I grew up we had lots of quail, but pheasants were rare,” comments Henning.

Want to see more pheasants on your land? Give them better habitat! Consider their food, cover, and space needs. Ring-necked pheasants rely most heavily on waste grain from crop fields, wild and cultivated grass and forb seeds, fruits, and leaves. Crop field seeds include corn, wheat, grain sorghum, barley, oats, and sunflowers. Non-grain seeds include legumes, ragweed, smartweed, and burdock. They also like acorns, pine seeds, and berries. In their first five weeks after hatching, chicks eat insects almost exclusively. Adults also eat insects, including grasshoppers, crickets, beetles, and caterpillars through spring and summer months. The foods pheasants eat supply them with the water they need.

Dense ground cover with good overhead growth is the key for nesting cover in April-June. Alfalfa, wheat stubble, cool season grasses, and native and Bermuda pastures work well. Grassy field corners and odd areas, shelterbelts, field borders and fencerows are also used.

Pheasants want vegetation that is somewhat open near the ground for easy chick travel, with overhead concealment. Native bunch grasses like big and little bluestem, switchgrass, sideoats grama, wheat grasses and Indiangrass offer this structure. That’s why native grass plantings through the Conservation Reserve Program have so successfully increased the pheasant population in Oklahoma. Mixed cool season grasses with forbs and other vegetation that supports insects are also used. Pheasants roost in small trees and tall shrubs, or on the ground in weedy ditches, cattail swales, brush piles, and briar patches. Weedy field borders and fencerows, dense, upright grasslands, abandoned farmsteads, and evergreen and hardwood windbreaks are good protection in winter.

A good mixture of differing habitat types, located next to one another, is part of the habitat package pheasants need. To attract pheasants and maintain their populations, offer foraging, nesting, brood-rearing, roosting, winter and escape cover in close proximity. A complex of corn, sorghum, and small grain crops, unmowed haylands, native prairie grasses, windbreaks, and cattail marshes should do well. Food plots can consist of field excess or planted plots in blocks rather than linear designs comprised of high energy grain based crops like sorghum, corn, and millet.

For more information about improving wildlife habitat or other conservation needs stop by the Kay County Conservation District/NRCS Office at 5501 N Pleasant View Ave in Newkirk or call 580-362-2438 or 580-362-3362.

Photo caption: (copy of Pheasant3.jpg) The ring-necked pheasant, native to Manchuria, Japan, Korea, and other Asian countries, has one of the widest introduced distributions among birds on earth. It was successfully introduced into the Americas in 1881. People have attempted to introduce pheasants in nearly 50 countries, on every continent except Antarctica.

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