

Birds need nesting cover

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There are a few important types of habitats that pheasants need in order to have an abundant population in an area. Nesting cover, brood-rearing habitat, and winter cover are probably the most important.

Pheasants are a very short-lived species. If you want to have an abundant population come hunting season, you need a lot of young birds, and that starts with nesting. If you have green wheat on your farm, you may already have a very good nesting cover. Pheasants nesting in a vigorous, healthy stand of wheat usually have good nesting success. Years with poor wheat stands usually result in poor pheasant chick production. Having some areas in a warm-season grass cover, such as conservation reserve program (CRP) fields, or better yet, continuous conservation reserve program borders, grassed terraces, or wet areas, can provide needed secure nesting cover during those years of poor wheat stands.

Brood habitat is often the habitat that is in shortest supply. Good brood habitat consists of areas containing lots of broadleaf plants, such as perennial legumes or annual weeds. Broadleaf plants provide habitat for the insects that young pheasants need, and are open enough at ground level that the chicks can easily catch this protein-rich food that the fast-growing chicks absolutely must have.

Areas of annual weeds in odd areas and conservation reserve program that have forbs or alfalfa planted or interseeded into it, are good brood habitat, as long as the conservation reserve program grass stand is not so dense at ground level that the chicks cannot easily move through the vegetation. Grass plants by themselves simply do not provide nearly as many insects as do forbs or weeds. Alfalfa fields would be very good brood habitat, but haying

operations are often very detrimental to birds that cannot evade the haying equipment.

Winter cover needs to provide dense enough vegetation that it helps protect birds from body-heat robbing cold temperatures, but also needs to be near a food source, such as waste grain left after harvest. Good winter cover can be good warm-season grass stands such as conservation reserve program, shrub thickets, or heavy weed patches.

The conservation reserve program acres in western Kansas have been providing some important pheasant habitats. As whole field conservation reserve program contracts expire and are destined to be put back into crop production, how would this affect pheasants on your farm? If there are areas in the conservation reserve program fields that are poor soil, highly erosive, or would not fit as well into the farming operation (such as pivot corners), or for some other reason you feel should stay in the existing grass cover, then look seriously at the continuous conservation reserve program. Pheasants obviously would not be the deciding factor on whether a continuous conservation reserve program contract is signed for these acres, but they may well benefit from keeping some areas in grass.

If the continuous conservation reserve program does not fit your operation and you still want to improve habitat for pheasants or any other wildlife, then the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program may be able to help

you with cost-share in establishing habitat practices. Both of these programs can help you change the expression from "Got Pheasants" to "I Got Pheasants?"

For more information about types of habitats that pheasants need, please contact your local Natural Resources Conservation Service office

or conservation district office located at your local county USDA Service Center. To learn more about Natural Resources Conservation Service, visit web site at www.ks.nrcs.usda.gov.



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