

Keokuk County Conservation Board News WINTER 2015

Serving through education, recreation, and conservation of our natural resources



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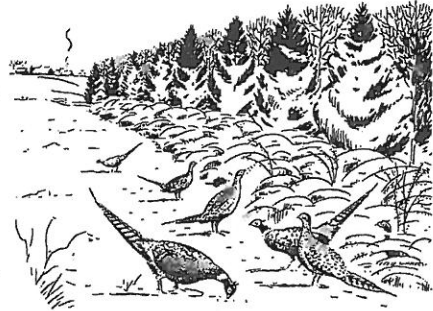


From the Director's desk....

In past newsletters I have mentioned some of the projects we do to enhance the abundance of wildlife found in areas we manage. In fact not to many issues ago I explained how we were converting short, cool season grass fields to native prairie to create winter roosting habitat for the vanishing pheasants in our area of the state. This past fall we converted another eight acres of brome to native prairie to help out our feathered friend. Most people agree that they are seeing many more pheasants this year than the past four years and the only thing that has changed to explain this was the ideal spring nesting season. Warm spring temperatures with average rainfall combined with good nesting habitat was obviously what the pheasants needed to improve their numbers in Keokuk County.

Winter can be hard on pheasant populations under the right circumstances. Blowing snow and extremely cold temperatures are the greatest threats. Without adequate shelter, pheasants find it difficult to survive blizzards. They ordinarily face into the wind to keep the cold from penetrating their feathers. In blizzard conditions, the snow will actually plug their nasal passages, forcing them to hold their beaks open in order to breath. Ice balls may form, block the mouth, and the birds will suffocate. Wind can force snow under their feathers where it is melted by body heat. If their feathers get wet, the insulating value of the plumage

decreases,
and the moist
feathers
quickly
radiate the
body heat. In
these



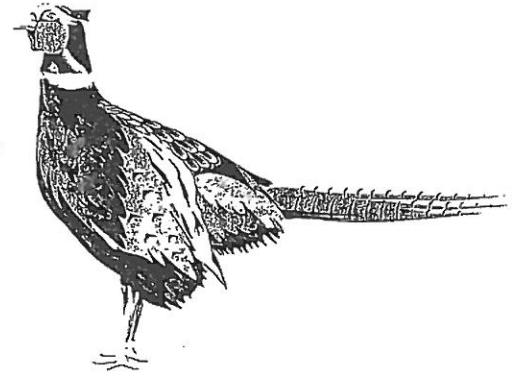
circumstances the birds rapidly lose body heat and will die. Contrary to what some people believe, pheasants rarely succumb to starvation. Deep snow can be a problem for pheasants trying to find waste grain in the fields. If there is no ice layer on the snow, they are able to use their wings and feet to dig through a foot or more of snow to get to the grain. If the snow is too deep, they rely on weed seeds, berries, and other plant material.

Pheasants build up their fat reserves during the summer and will use those reserves during the extremely low temperatures and heavy snow cover. When the weather gets nasty cold the pheasant will move to the winter cover if it is available. The areas they prefer are marshes, plum thickets, unmowed ditches, shelter belts, and brushy cover with weedy understory. If those areas are mowed flat every fall, then the pheasants that were raised during the summer are probably not going to make it through the winter. In fact, North Dakota did an extensive study on how good winter habitat is critical for pheasant survival in severe winters. They found in severe winters with poor habitat 80 percent of the pheasants die. That fact makes a person think when you see all the ditches, waterways, and terraces mowed every fall before the harvest begins.

RING-NECKED PHEASANT

Phasianus Colchicus

Dramatic in appearance and with his rooster like crowing audible from a mile away, the Ring-necked Pheasant strides across the open fields and weedy roadsides of most of the United States. Although a common sight, like many Americans, the pheasant is an immigrant to North America. The first successful introduction took place in 1881 when the U.S. consul to China, Judge Owen Nickerson Denny, shipped 30 of the birds back to his home in the Willamette Valley of Oregon. And even though only 26 of the original pheasants shipped survived the journey, within eleven years Oregon opened a 75 day hunting season with hunters bagging in excess of 50,000 birds! They were subsequently released in 40 of the 50 states, becoming a truly remarkable conservation success story. They even went on to become the state bird of South Dakota, one of only three U.S. state birds that is a species not native to the United States.



The male or rooster pheasant is a gaudy fellow, adorned with iridescent gold and brown plumage with green, purple and white markings. His head is bottle green with a bright red waddle on his face and a bold white ring around his neck. His long, coppery tail is crossed with black bars and stretches his length to almost three feet. The female or hen pheasant is drab by comparison with her brown mottled plumage and much shorter tail.

Pheasants are omnivores with a diet that varies with the seasons. Winter finds them feeding primarily on seeds, grains and berries. During the warmer months they will also take advantage of the abundant insects and invertebrates to be found along with the tender green shoots of newly emerging plants. Breeding hens and chicks eat a larger proportion of animal matter than the rest of the population and while laying eggs hens will feed heavily on calcium rich snail shells.

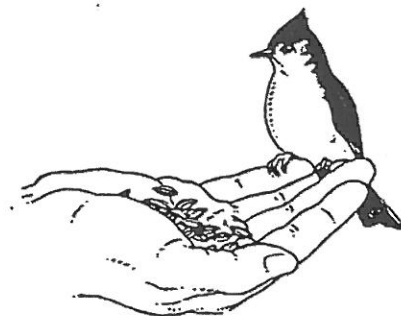
In the spring, roosters gather small harems of hens and set up territories in which to raise their young. The hens build nests in areas of heavy cover or border habitat and produce a clutch of 8 to 12 eggs over an approximate two week period during April to June. The hen bears sole responsibility of the incubation duties with the eggs hatching in 23 to 26 days. The chicks can fly by two weeks of age and will remain with the hen for about six or seven weeks. By 15 weeks of age, they will look almost identical to the adults, which is unusual amongst most birds.

Pheasants thrive in areas of agriculture provided some cover is left in place for them to seek shelter from the elements and predators. Their annual survival rate is very low, about 30%, with only 2 to 3% living to the age of three, regardless of hunting pressure. If you then figure in loss of habitat you see that the surviving population is very hard pressed. Their survival through a mild winter with poor habitat will run about 80% but throw a hard winter with that same poor habitat at them and survival drops to a mere 20%. Brushy areas with some trees for roosting are essential.

In his home land of China, the Ring-necked Pheasant has long been regarded as a symbol of light, virtue, prosperity and good fortune. Good fortune did indeed shine upon a hunter in Burma who took notice upon the discovery of a precious stone in the gizzard of a recent kill. Inspired by the find, he retraced his steps through the rooster's old stomping grounds and discovered an emerald mine!

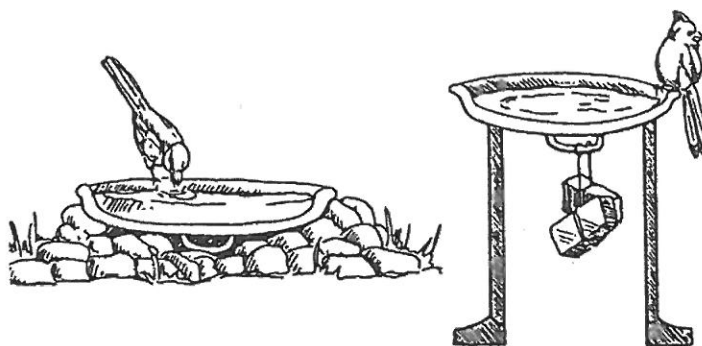
Notes from the Ranger.....

It's been a long time since our newsletter has touched on the subject of winter bird feeding, fifteen years to be exact. We the staff were just having a conversation on where each of us purchases' our bird feed and thought it would be nice to include some information in this winter's newsletter. So here is some brief info on the when, where, and what of bird feeding. **When?** The best time to start feeding is in October or November, before the really nasty weather comes. By the time harsh winter sets in, birds will have accepted your feeding and will have come to rely on your feeder for a portion of their diet. **Where?** Remember, you are feeding birds to help them and to enjoy them yourself. With this in mind you will want to place the feeder in a spot that is easily viewed from a comfortable place indoors. Also put it somewhere that will be easily reached to maintain (cleaned, filled). Birds need three basic things during the winter months that you can provide – food, water, and shelter. Satisfying the food requirement is easy. Try to supply a variety of different foods to allow more birds choices of their favorite foods. Not all birds like to eat the same things. The next requirement, water, is a little harder to manage. During the cold months it will freeze if not heated. You can purchase small birdbath heaters or you can use a dog water heater. You may also want to place the water next to the house in a protected spot and check on it regularly, replacing if frozen. To fulfill the need for shelter, consider placing your feeder next to shrubs, pine or cedar trees, out of the the wind and/or in the sun, to help the birds maximize the calories they are taking in. Old Christmas trees placed by feeding stations make for some excellent shelter at a low cost. It is important that you check your feeders regularly and keep them full. Birds will rely on you throughout the winter for their food and would be harmed if you stopped feeding mid-winter. **What?** There are many types of feeders that you can buy or make from things around the house. The pictures show you a few kinds available. Most birds like to eat suet as a part of their winter diet. Suet can be found at meat lockers and some meat counters in supermarkets. Suet can be hung in an onion sack from a tree or wedged between branches in a tree. Special suet feeders may also be purchased.



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There is really no wrong way to feed birds as long as you keep the supply constant throughout the winter months and enjoy the birds while they are close up and easy to see. For more information enter Iowa bird feeding in a search module and you will be able to find more than enough info to get you started. There are many places to purchase bird feed, so shop around but buying bulk is generally the cheapest way to go. Just remember all the beautiful songs we will hear in the spring if we do our part in the winter.

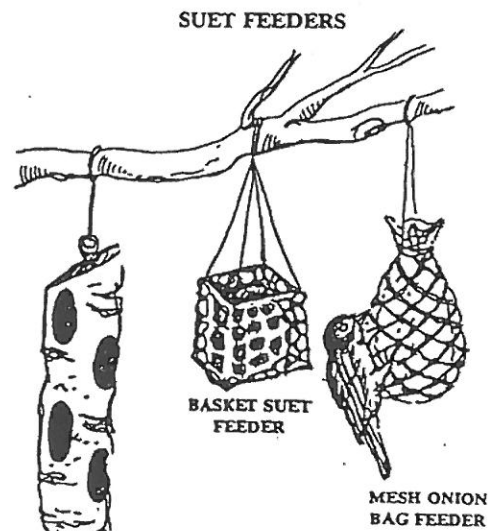
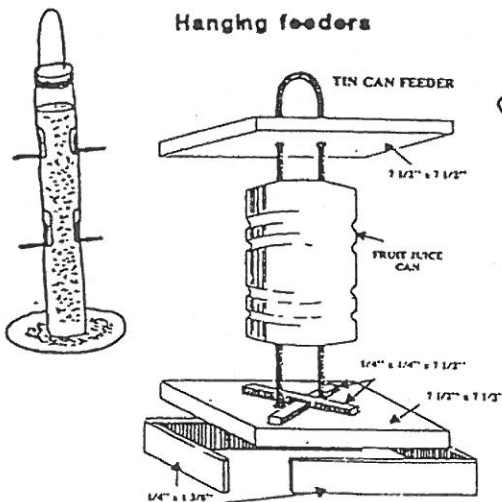
Ranger Pie Reighard



Birdfood Preferences

	Berries	Canary seed	Cheese	Cracked corn	Dried fruit	Millet, gold	Millet, red	Millet, white	Nuts	Peanuts	Peanut butter	Safflower seed	Sunflower, black	Sunflower, striped black	Table scraps	Thistle	Wheat
blackbirds	•			•						•							•
Blue Jay		•								•		•					
Carolina Wren	•		•														
chickadees										•	•						•
Evening Grosbeak				•						•							•
goldfinches	•	•															•
House Finch		•		•													•
House Sparrow		•		•		•	•	•				•	•				•
juncos		•		•		•	•	•									•
Mourning Dove		•								•		•	•				•
Northern Cardinal		•									•						•
Purple Finch	•	•															•
Pyrrhuloxia	•	•		•													•
Robin		•															•
Scrub Jay		•															•
Song Sparrow		•				•	•	•				•	•				•
Steller's Jay		•										•	•				•
thrushes		•															•
Tufted Titmouse		•								•							•
Verdin		•															•
White-crowned Sparrow		•				•	•	•									•
White-throated Sparrow		•															•
Wren-tit	•	•		•						•							•

Types of Feeders



Conservation Board accepts 40-acre Donation



Through a very generous donation by Marilyn Luers, the Keokuk County Conservation Board now owns 40-acres of river bottom timber on the North Skunk River. The name of the area is Genesis Timber and it can be found by driving 2 miles south of Highway 92 on 240th Avenue and then west on 240th Street ¼ mile and then south ¼ on the dirt road. Because of the dirt road access, park visitors should use caution and only attempt to visit the area during dry conditions. Like most river bottom timbers, the trees found in Genesis Timber consist of maple, cottonwood, ash, walnut, and other flood tolerant species. While the area provides excellent habitat for deer, squirrel, rabbits and turkey, the conservation board will abide by Marilyn's request for the area to be maintained as a Wildlife Refuge. No hunting or trapping will be allowed on the property. The property boundaries are clearly marked and a small parking lot has been constructed on the northeast corner of the property.

KIDS PAGE!

THE FORECAST

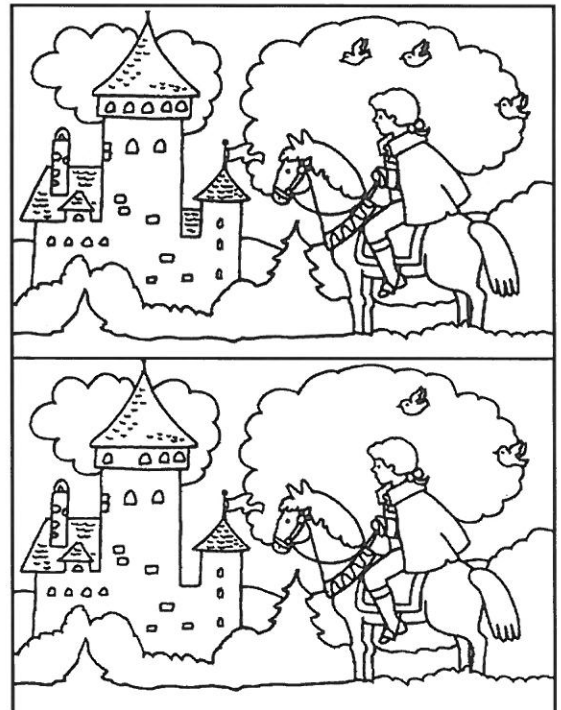
ARCTIC
ARID
AUTUMNS
BITTER
BLEAK
BLOWING
BREEZE
BRIGHT
BRISK
CALM
CHILL
CLEAR
COLD
CURRENT
DELUGE

DISMAL
DRIER
FAIR
FINE
FREEZE
FRONT
FROST
GALES
HAIL
INDEX
MISTY
MUGGY
NIMBUS
NORTHER
RADAR

RAIN
SHOWER
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TROUGH
TYPHOON
WAVES
WINDS
WINTER
ZONES

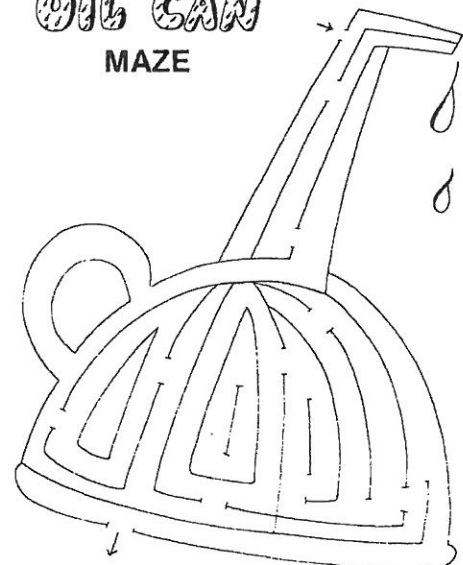
FIND THE DIFFERENCES

These 2 pictures look exactly alike, but look again. Can you find 3 places where they are different?



R	E	W	O	H	S	E	S	E	L	A	G	N	I	W	O	L	B
E	N	I	F	D	Z	G	C	O	L	D	J	S	M	P	S	V	I
H	Y	C	F	E	I	L	R	H	O	C	R	S	N	U	N	X	T
T	K	A	E	L	B	A	G	N	I	R	P	S	E	O	B	E	T
R	S	R	H	S	D	W	K	T	N	L	T	Q	O	N	W	N	E
O	F	O	T	A	I	W	C	Z	D	G	L	H	J	M	O	P	R
N	S	V	R	N	Y	R	C	Y	F	I	P	L	G	R	O	Z	E
I	R	U	D	F	A	X	N	B	E	Y	H	K	F	I	N	A	I
A	Q	S	T	E	S	N	M	U	T	U	A	W	W	Z	R	D	R
R	G	J	L	M	U	P	F	S	S	V	A	Y	C	I	F	B	D
I	E	C	L	S	L	I	A	H	O	V	R	E	D	U	X	H	L
B	E	L	H	K	T	N	I	K	E	X	Z	Q	G	T	G	W	A
Z	S	U	B	M	I	N	R	S	D	E	G	J	M	U	P	S	M
Y	V	Y	C	A	F	E	E	I	E	D	I	L	O	O	L	R	S
G	T	U	X	B	T	E	H	R	K	N	N	R	Q	M	T	E	I
G	W	S	Z	N	D	S	B	B	R	I	T	G	J	M	L	P	D
U	S	V	I	Y	C	F	I	L	O	O	R	U	X	B	E	A	H
M	K	W	N	M	G	N	I	W	A	H	T	N	E	R	R	U	C

OIL CAN MAZE



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Jay Peiffer South English
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Sharon Lyle Keota

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David Long.....Director
Pie ReighardRanger/Naturalist
Brian Ulin.....Maintenance/Ranger

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