

## NATURE NOW Pheasants Among Most Successful Transplant

By LYDIA KING FREHSE  
Special Writer for The Birmingham Eccentric  
One day in late April crossing an old and overgrown field, I came upon the nest of a ring-necked pheasant. Had I not flushed the mother bird I should have passed it by unnoticed. I stooped to bend aside the protecting grasses and counted 17 earth-colored eggs laid in a shallow depression with only a sparse lining of dried plant materials.

Satisfied with my observation, I took careful note of the location of the nest. But when I returned several days later I found it ravished by some marauder, probably a roving skunk. This potential pheasant family met a fate common to its kind. However, ground nesting birds, because they do have so many potential enemies, lay larger clutches of eggs.

HAD THE MOTHER bird been allowed to finish her brooding, her little flock would have been beset with many hazards including the farmer's sharp-bladed mowing machine, his disturbing plow or the killing strike of a predatory bird or rodent. It is probable that from an average clutch of 8-12 eggs, no more than six chicks will grow to maturity.

Spring finds the grassy meadows, roadsides and bushy pastures of southern Michigan dotted with such pheasant nests. The eggs vary from deep cream through various shades of brown. In another nest, found in late May, they were pale bluish-green. It would make an interesting study to determine whether or not there is any relationship between the color of the eggs and the gradual greening of the grasses which protect the nest. Nature's first law is to insure the species and she is ever at work with many and curious experiments.

been proven that once an introduced species has been established the number of birds released has little or no effect upon the total population. Although pen-reared birds were originally released all over the state the species itself has selected the areas best suited to its living needs and has colonized them up to the numbers they are able to support.

THE PROCESS of adaptation of an introduced species is long and hazardous. Sometimes it fails completely or if successful, upsets the balance of nature so that other species suffer.

THIS HAS BEEN the result in the attempt to introduce the moose, reindeer, prairie chickens and Hungarian partridge. Because the pheasant is hardy and resourceful he has survived. Originally at home in the bamboo thickets of China, he has most difficulty in adjusting himself to the prolonged ice and snow of our northern winters.

Even in the southern portions of the state, the snow sifts into his nostrils and throat causing many birds to suffocate. All this because he has not learned to hide his head under his wing.

Thus man can introduce a species but nature, calling on every factor in a given environment, decides whether or not it will remain.

IN THE LAST 35 years the state has spent an approximate million dollars on behalf of the ring-neck. It has been a smart investment for without this brilliant target the upland bird hunter would find little with which to fill his game bag.

The chances are that the ring-necked pheasant has now reached a stabilized population level. The game and less crafty cocks land in the hunter's bag, the wily older birds are left to breed a smarter and more adaptable line. The ring-neck has added much to the enrichment of our Michigan out-of-doors. This holds whether you view him as a likely target, a delicious morsel at dinner time or as a brilliant flash of whirring wings rising from the frosty stubble on a late autumn morning.

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