

If You Want to Hunt Pheasant...

Haunt the Swale and

The gaudy ringneck, big and deceptive, provides great sport for hunters. First step:

By RAYMOND R. CAMP

ANY man who has tramped the meadows or the stubble fields behind his dog on a crisp October morning, and sighted a ringneck pheasant over the barrels of his gun, will understand why this big, gaudy creature has brought satisfaction to more hunters, and confusion to more good bird dogs, than any other game bird on this continent.

Of the many fish and game species imported to these shores to improve the lot of the American sportsman, only the pheasant and the brown trout have proved widely adaptable. To the hunter and the angler, these two have become so firmly rooted in the American wildlife scene that they constitute the major prizes for the game bag and fish creel throughout a large part of the country.

Springing from the first successful introduction of 28 Chinese ringnecks in Oregon 70 years ago, millions of plump pheasants now cackle from the fields and meadows of 39 states, in many of which the bird heads the upland game list. Call him Chink, ringneck, pheasant or longtail, the brightly plumaged, long-tailed cock pheasant has provided wing shooting for thousands of American gunners who, without him, would be relegated to beating the thickets for cottontails. The pheasant, long may he flourish, has made a sporting gentleman of many a one-gallus hunter.

You will find hunters who insist that the ruffed grouse is a more sporting bird, the quail more challenging, and the woodcock more interesting to hunt, but the pheasant enthusiast has a number of sound arguments to back his choice. For one thing—and in these days of great hunting pressures and reduced hunting areas it is important—the ringneck will thrive and multiply in areas where other game birds could not exist. Furthermore, through simple, inexpensive, artificial propagation, these birds can be reared for release on barren or depleted covers with better results than those provided by any other game bird.

Although there has always been some prejudice here against what is termed an "imported exotic," no one who has hunted this handsome bird will ever offer testimony for the banishment of the pheasant. And not every pull on the trigger is followed by the familiar command to the dog: "Fetch dead." The pheasant is a large bird, and not renowned for his great speed or length of flight, but the man who hunts it has no assurance that the odor of burned cordite will blend into the mouth-watering aroma of roasting pheasant. Many an experienced wing shot has been deceived by the Chink.

Not too long ago, I conducted a confirmed grouse shooter on his first pheasant hunt. I had a real respect for this man's ability to bring down his favorite bird under difficult conditions, but his somewhat patronizing air at the prospect of the pheasant hunt was a little overpowering. To make sure success would not come too easily, I switched from a pointer to a spaniel at the last moment. With the pointing dog, the pheasant normally can be flushed into flight from a known, even visible, position. With the spaniel, which springs the bird unheralded somewhere ahead of the hunter, I hoped to make the shooting more interesting.

For the initial excursion I had decided on a thicket-studded meadow which I knew held a half-dozen pheasants, at least two of them legal cockbirds. (The hen has been protected by law since the ringnecks first came to this country.) We arrived while the frost was still white on the ground, and after we had moved only 100 yards up-wind the springer's sawed-off tail began wagging furiously. I knew action was imminent. My guest, an experienced shooter, had interpreted the dog's actions as I did, but his gun still rested comfortably in the crook of his arm. He seemed convinced that there would be plenty of time to bring the gun up and knock one of these big, lumbering birds out of the air.

He was in mid-stride when the bird flushed, and if it had been a cock his self-assurance might have been justified. But it was a hen—as illegal as Ozark mountain dew. The bird towered almost straight up for about 30 feet, then scaled lazily down-wind. I shouted a warning as my guest swept his gun to his shoulder with practiced smoothness.

"Whoa, that's a hen!"

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JOSEPH DESIDERIO

Meadow

throw away the standard rule book

My friend lowered his gun with visible regret. "That one would have been money for old rope," he announced. "A grouse would have been out of range in the time it took that pheasant to level off."

I nodded and urged the springer forward.

The next bird was a big, brilliant cock, and he erupted from a thick clump of broomstraw with a roaring of stubby wings and a shrill cackle of alarm—almost in my companion's face. Although he recovered quickly, and pivoted, the footing was bad and the pheasant was really making time down and across the wind. The two shots the grouse expert sent after him did not loosen a feather on the ringneck. Aided by the wind, which was quite strong, the bird's speed was deceptive, and my friend had failed to lead his target enough.

After flapping vigorously for about 200 yards, the pheasant coasted down, swerved sharply into the wind and settled in another thicket.

"Let's go back and rout him out," my companion suggested, frowning. "He can't do that to me."

This time, apparently connecting the approach of the springer with danger, the pheasant flushed wild, a good 25 yards ahead of the shooter, who, misled by the earlier flight pattern, was disconcerted when the bird flew low and straight across the wind. The first shot was made just as the ringneck leveled off a few feet over the brush, and the next shot did not blast out until the bird was at extreme range. A second later, the pheasant passed almost straight over my head, an easy target, but I did not even raise the gun. It would have been like killing an old friend.

Hunter Makes Show of Remorse

When I called in the spaniel and joined my friend, he did not have a word to say. As I arrived, he ejected the empty shells and placed the gun carefully on the ground. He then raised the tails of his shooting coat above his hips, bent over, grasping his ankles with both hands, and looked up at me from this position.

"Go ahead," he suggested, "and make it a hard one. If ever a man had a good swift kick coming, you see him before you."

At this show of remorse I had to admit that the recent sample of pheasant technique was not routine, or even what might be termed "typical." It did, however, point up the unpredictable qualities of the bird. Ten pheasants, I explained, may flush straightaway, offering an easy shot. The eleventh may follow a flight pattern that would confound a veteran.

As with other upland game shooting, there is considerable argument as to the type of dog most suited to the sport. Also, there is no little debate involving the proper method of training this dog. Most of this, of course, can be marked down to personal preference. The spaniel fancier will insist that the cocker or springer offers the highest degree of sport, a contention supported in principle by the owners of retrieving breeds such as the Chesapeake, Golden or Labrador. I even know a few beagle enthusiasts who have trained these hounds to work pheasants in addition to the rabbits which constitute their major purpose in life, and with amazing success. Needless to say, the pheasant is the only game bird that could be handled with any satisfactory results by one of these hounds.

Devotees of the pointing breeds contend that the man who enjoys watching real dog work will be satisfied by nothing but a pointer, setter or Brittany if he wants to get the ultimate pleasure from his pursuit of the ringneck. As for the Weimaraner owners, they will tell you at the first opportunity that this breed brings pheasant shooting to its real pinnacle of delight.

On the other hand, many a shooter with a "bragging" quail dog has been known to foam at the mouth at the mere mention of the word "pheasant." And not without justification.

"After three days on pheasants," one quail enthusiast complained, "I had to send my dog back to the trainer for two months, to break him of the bad habits he had picked up on those running ringnecks."

Many a shooter feels that if it had no legs, the pheasant would be a more satisfactory game bird. It is his tendency to run ahead of dog or hunter that has given the pheasant a bad name with some sportsmen. Other upland birds, such as grouse, quail, woodcock or Hungarian partridge, will "lie" to the average pointer. But not John Pheasant. He will wait until (Continued on page 52)



Pheasant "freezes" at author's approach, as pointer (left) and setter show the way



As the two dogs hold a perfect, tense point, the bird flushes, making fine target

The pheasant dog must be a good retriever, for wounded birds may hide, die later



A Town Takes Its Own Picture

THE houses of Levittown, Long Island, New York, mass-produced by superenergetic Levitt & Sons, Inc., contain 16,746 families nourished on national publicity. Welcoming every chance to make news with the enthusiasm of a starlet, the town got a whopping new opportunity some weeks ago, when photographer Leo Choplin asked it to help him take the biggest flash photograph ever attempted.

For his stunt, Choplin consulted with Sylvania Electric Products, Inc., and they let him have 1,500 of their largest flash bulbs, lighting engineers and a brace of walkie-talkies. Thus prepared, he climbed a 200-foot water tower near the west side of town and got set.

The suburbanites pitched in. Levittown's director of civil defense, Robert E. Lackey, a veteran blinded on Saipan, assigned a group of his auxiliary police

to alert the town to the huge flashes, block off the affected streets and handle the flash bulbs under the direction of Sylvania's engineers. Keeping in touch with Choplin via walkie-talkie, a 20-man crew set off the bulbs in batches of 20, some 70-odd times. As the bulbs flashed in area after area, Choplin simultaneously opened and closed shutters of three different cameras.

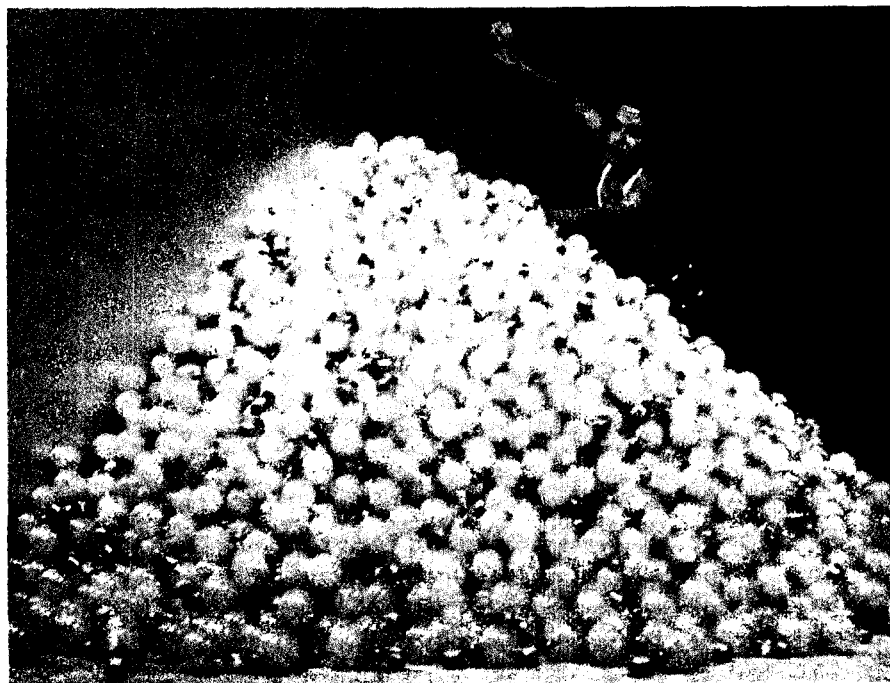
After four hours of blinding flashes, astounded couples and kids went to bed; Bob Lackey had proved that his civil defense team could give and take complicated orders, and Leo Choplin had the amazing color photograph on these pages. One question remained: What was the big idea? Well, next month is Levittown's birthday, and if this isn't the biggest, brightest, most ambitious birthday card ever presented to a four-year-old, what is? **SEY CHASSLER**



Engineer Dick Martensen instructs town civil defense boss Bob Lackey



Photographer worked three cameras at same time, got but one good shot



Photographer's aid counts 1,500 flash bulbs used for Levittown's snapshot



Biggest flash picture ever made celebrate