

Ringneck Pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*)

Fact Sheet

- Ringneck Pheasants are Native to Asia and were first brought to the United States in 1881 and released to the Willamette Valley of Oregon
- Since that time Pheasants have been released throughout the United States and have become established where suitable habitat exists.
- In Rhode Island, Ringnecks became well established from releases in the early 1900's when open grasslands and much open farmland existed in the state. At that time pheasant were found statewide and were abundant primarily in Washington, Bristol and Newport counties.
- Stocking of pheasants was practiced by the state since the early 1950's as a way to supplement natural populations of the Gamebird for hunters using state gamelands. Today most hunted pheasant in Rhode Island are stocked birds.
- Loss of suitable habitats is the primary reason for the decline of native populations of pheasant in Rhode Island fueled by a decline in farmland and maturing of forest.

Natural History and Behavior

- Male or cock pheasant are a large gamebird weighing 2 1/2 to 3 pounds and have bright reddish brown feathers with a blue green head, red face and white neck ring. Female or hen pheasant are smaller and colored tan and drab brown.
- Pheasants are ground loving birds with strong legs and quite capable of running to escape predators. In hunting them, they will often avoid flight unless forced by the hunter or his dog.
- Pheasants have short rounded wings that enable them to fly in short powerful bursts but not for long flight. A pheasant will erupt in flight and then glide to a protected cover of grasses or shrubs.
- Habitats for the pheasant include tall overgrown fields and meadows of native grasses and herbs, hedgerows and shrubby old fields, which provide an abundance of concealment cover to protect them from predators.
- Pheasant eat a variety of plant foods consisting of small seeds, nuts and green leaves of grasses and other plants and insects. Young pheasant rely on insects to provide protein for the first few months of their lives.
- Pheasants are ground nesting birds that establish a simple ground nest at the edge of a field and hens lay a clutch of 11 eggs that will hatch in 22-23 days. Block Island is the only remaining location in Rhode Island believed to have a sustained nesting population of Ringneck Pheasant.
- Predation is the most common cause of natural mortality of pheasants. Common predators of pheasants, young or eggs include birds of prey, skunk, raccoon, squirrels, snakes, fox and coyote.

Hunting Pheasant

- To hunt pheasant you must be a proficient wing shooter
- Best hunting success will result if hunting with a bird dog, either pointer or flushing breed
- Be patient, thorough and walk slow in working a cover with dogs or on foot as birds will hide and run to escape rather than fly
- Be considerate when hunting near others not to crowd or encroach into the cover or bird that is being hunted
- Be aware of other hunters in the area when swinging to shoot at a bird. It is far better to avoid taking the shot than to accidentally fire in line with another hunter