

# Wisconsin "Chickens"

(*Tyumpanuchus cupido*)

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At the invitation of Dr. and Mrs. N. Hammerstrom, grouse project leaders, Ralph Stueck, Wolfram Nielsen and I visited a Pinnated Grouse Project Study Station on March 29-30, 1957, at Plainfield, Wisconsin. A unique study of this rare and vanishing species is being carried out at Plainfield by the Wisconsin Conservation Department; unique because of the extent to which the interested public is invited to participate.

Each spring, during the courtship period when the grouse are performing on their traditional dancing grounds, hundreds of university students, photographers, bird watchers and others interested in nature come to use the numerous blinds which have been set up right in the middle of established dancing grounds. The study benefits in this regard from the observations made by visitors, but the public benefits more. It is hoped that this publicity will help to interest people in the welfare of the species. For nesting this grouse requires natural grass areas. Recent purchases of suitable tracts as permanent nesting grounds by local natural history societies and interested individuals demonstrates the effectiveness of this program.

Unfortunately, this species of grouse, the "true" Prairie Chicken or "Squaretail," although once common in southern Saskatchewan, seems to be extirpated in this area.

Our last known report is a bird which was shot on October 31, 1945, at Carlyle, Saskatchewan, by Mr. R. J. Fyfe of Regina, while hunting sharp-tailed grouse. The habitat requirement studies in Wisconsin may well provide the clue to the re-establishment and management of the Pinnated Grouse in Saskatchewan.

If our personal experience is similar to that of others who have watched the "chickens" perform we can well understand the enthusiasm which has been aroused in Wisconsin. In the cold and utter darkness of 3:30 a.m. we crept out of our snug sleeping bags, did justice to piping hot coffee and scrambled eggs prepared by the brisk and energetic Hammerstroms—to whom this was an everyday affair—climbed into various cars and trucks and were ushered out to the blinds by 4:30 a.m.

At the first hint of dawn I could hear the booming of the grouse as they approached and soon, in the gathering light, I could see fourteen grouse before my blind, each busily engaged in maintaining its own territory, fighting other intruding cocks and displaying and booming and awaiting the arrival of the hens. When the light improved after sunrise I was able to secure a number of photographs of the birds. Photos alone can convey only a small part of our experience—but perhaps one day we'll see the real thing in Saskatchewan.



Photo by R. J. Fyle  
Pinnated Grouse taken at Carlyle,  
Oct. 31, 1945—Last known record for Sask.



Photo by F. W. Lahrman  
Pinnated Grouse. Wisconsin, March, 1957