

The White Pheasants of Saskatchewan

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During the past three or four years, range-looking pheasants have been showing up in various parts of the province. If you have had an opportunity to observe a group of pheasants recently released into the wild by some sportsmen's organization or the Department of Natural Resources, you may have noticed a few white, or almost white, pheasants along with normal ring-necked pheasants. These birds which are being released into new cover or to strengthen already established populations, have been raised at the Provincial Game Breeding Station at Saskatoon or are from stock that originated there.

This light-coloured pheasant is not a distinct species or sub-species, but is a variation of the ring-necked pheasant. This variation originated and has been developed at the Provincial Game Breeding Station at Saskatoon. The light strain of pheasants began with a single white-coloured chick hatched from a group of ring-necked pheasant eggs at the Provincial Game Breeding Station, Saskatoon, in 1948. This chick, a male, was successfully raised and subsequently mated to a normal ring-necked male in 1949. The first generation offspring of this mating were very similar to the normal ring-necked pheasant in colour pattern, but on close observation both sexes could be distinguished as being considerably lighter than the normal ring-necked pheasants. First generation males were then back crossed to the original light-coloured female

in 1950 and the resulting female chicks proved to be considerably lighter than the normal ring-necked female but not as light as the original "light hen." The males of this back-cross, however, were considerably darker than the first generation and exhibited more rusts and greens in the feather pattern found in the normal ring-necked males. In 1951, this second generation, the back-cross chicks, were again mated to the original "light hen." In addition, they were mated to one another and the results were quite variable. The third generation, or second back-cross, resulted in female

birds almost as white or whiter than the original "light hen" and male birds which were very dark in colour with no white neck ring. However, the results of the second generation to second generation matings were quite variable and gave results as follows: one group of birds were very light, almost indistinguishable from the second back-cross chicks; others were the same as the second generation birds and others were very close to normal ring-neck feather pattern both for males and females.

After several more years of selecting and breeding, the results now can be predicted with reasonable accuracy and the strain has been fairly well standardized. The females are quite light, but they are not a white bird; they exhibit some black ticking on the back and some buff colouration on the breast. The males are readily distinguished from the females as they are very dark, almost as dark as the normal ring-neck and in some respects even darker. They do not, however, have the white neck ring as exhibited by the normal ring-neck male.

Birds of this light strain, both males and females, have been released in many areas throughout the province and have proved themselves quite adaptable to Saskatchewan conditions, at least as adaptable as normal ring-necks. Natural reproduction has occurred in some areas and there has been both reproduction of the light strain as well as a blending of the light strain with normal ring-necks in the wild.

The casual observer should not find any difficulty in distinguishing the sexes of this light-coloured strain of pheasants. The males are very colourful, similar to the normal ring-neck male but darker. The females are drab like the normal ring-neck pheasant female, but lighter in colour—in fact, sometimes almost white. It is because of the ease with which the sexes can be distinguished that this light strain of pheasants was released into the wild, for it allows the hunter to recognize the male quickly and thus restrict his shooting to cock pheasants.