Pheasants Take the BLITZ

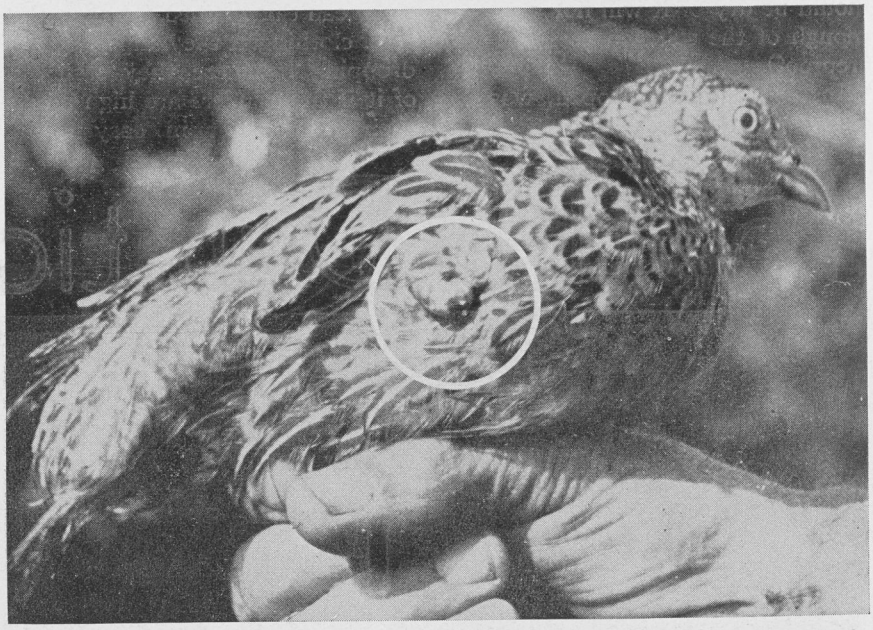
IF TWO out of every five of their nests are successful, pheasants have had an extremely favorable spring and summer. Only a third to a fourth of the nests customarily hatch. And out of the nests that succeed, an average of five of the little pheasants die before they reach shooting age.

These were facts we found in a study in Winnebago County in 1939, 1940 and 1941.

Why do so few nests hatch? Man is responsible for much of this loss, chiefly through farming operations. In this intensively-farmed area of northern Iowa, we found the nests distributed roughly as follows: In hayfields, one-third to one-half; fence rows, one-tenth to one-fourth; small grain fields, one-fifth; road ditches, one-tenth; in other areas, one fifth or less.

Nesting in all other types of cover except fence rows is affected directly by farming operations. Even in fence rows nests are sometimes destroyed by the turning farm machinery, or the female pheasant may desert the nest after being flushed by men, machinery or horses.

Many nests are plowed up or disked early in the spring, and some destroyed during the cutting of small grain. The principal damage, however, is during haying operations, we found. Mowing, raking and loading form a triple threat against pheasant nests, and many are destroyed.



She lost a leg because she was faithful to her nest and was caught by the mower.

In mowing, eggs are often broken, pheasant hens are injured or killed and chicks cut to pieces. Injuries to hens arise from their reluctance to flush while incubating. Often their legs or heads are clipped off.

Even if the hen isn't injured, a nest exposed by mowing has little chance for success. Desertion often follows if the hen is flushed, and the predation (stealing of eggs and young) rate on exposed nests is high. If the hen escapes injury during mowing, the nest may be trampled or crushed during the raking and loading of the hay.

Losses of nests in hayfields are of great importance to pheasant production, since hay land harbors such a high proportion of nests. Unfortunately, this waste is usually unavoidable, because the farmer doesn't know where the nests are before he mows. Means of preventing some destruction of pheasant nests are: Remove smashed eggs if there are few; cover the nest with a little hay to protect the eggs from sunlight and from easy view of predators—cats, skunks, wea-

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Picture at the extreme left (opposite page) shows pheasant hen nesting. In the scene next to it you see what happens when a nest is mowed over just after it has hatched out. All but three of the chicks were killed and the foot of the pheasant hen was amputated and fell into the nest.

sels, crows, etc.; and mark the nests carefully so that they will not be disturbed during other haying operations.

Nests whose locations are known before the mowing have a slightly better chance if "islands" of uncut hay are left around them. If the whereabouts of a brood of young chicks is known, raising the bar slightly in their vicinity may save them.

Predation causes failure of many pheasant nests, especially the earlier ones. In Winnebago County, the principal egg-eaters are crows, skunks, cats and weasels.

Crows commit the most robberies, but their activities are most pronounced on early nests in poor cover and nests exposed by mowing and harvesting. Thus, many of these nests would have little chance of success even if the crows left them alone.

Depredations by cats are not common, but cause serious losses, for the cats often kill the hens on their nests. Killing stray cats and known egg-eaters are sound measures.

Considering the heavy losses of nests, one might wonder how there can possibly be so many pheasants in northern Iowa. The answer is that it doesn't take very many successful nests to produce lots of young birds.

In 1939 an average of six chicks from each successful nest studied reached shooting age, and in 1940 this average was only slightly lower. Fifteen successful nests to a square mile produced about 90 shootable young to that square mile in 1939.

Another factor which has helped the pheasants stage a comeback since the hard winter of 1935-36 is the tendency for females to renest until they have brought off a successful brood. In a favorable year some 60 to 80 percent of the females, through repeated trials, are able to produce a brood. This habit accounts for most of the late nests and broods. It isn't likely that pheasants have second broods regularly.

Early clutches are larger than late ones, and chicks hatched early are likely to be heavier at hunting time than younger chicks. Thus, saving early nests has some advantages.

A method of providing nesting cover all through the spring and summer is to leave undisturbed areas of sweet clover which were planted with a small grain nurse crop the year before.

A few birds banded early in the fall in Winnebago County were shot, all within a half-mile of the place of banding. So it is likely that in northern Iowa a farmer has a chance to shoot at the pheasants which were produced on his farm.

A hatched pheasant nest in the margin of a slough in northern part of Iowa.

A mammalian predator, such as a weasel or skunk, ruined this pheasant nest.

LIGHT UP THE HEN HOUSE

(Continued from page 7)

The theory advanced when artificial lights were first used on hens was that the lights caused the hens to lay more eggs because it gave them a longer working day and they, therefore, ate more feed. Later, experiment station workers began to conclude that the reason lights stepped up fall and early winter egg production was because of the stimulating effect of the lights on the pituitary gland—which, in turn, stimulate the reproductive processes. With the reproductive processes stepped up, the layer eats more feed to keep in pace with her increased egg production.

General Rules

Here are some general rules for the use of artificial lights which may be helpful:

1. Group the birds in pens according to age—pullets together, older hens in another pen. If possible, some grouping should be done according to the condition of the birds.

2. *A MUST* is to keep an adequate supply of mash and water before the birds at all times that the lights are on.

3. Good body weight must be maintained if a winter molt and a consequent slump in production are to be avoided; feed grain liberally.

4. Be regular with the lights. You can't turn them on at 4 one