

THEY GOTTA' HAVE COVER

With almost 97 percent of Iowa's land in private hands, landowners like you are the best hope to recover grasslands, and pheasant and other grassland bird populations. Both are declining. From 1960 to 2008, Iowa's hay acres and small grain crops declined from more than 7 million acres to 3.4 million. Pheasant, quail, gray partridge and songbird population trends have followed the land use trends.

- Providing the right habitat for grassland birds produces more wildlife. A DNR study showed 6.4 pheasant roosters per stop on managed farms vs. 2 roosters on unmanaged farms. Quail counts were similar.
- More than 90 percent of hens survive a mild winter, but only 20 percent live through snowfalls of 50 inches. No hens, no chicks.
- Pheasant hens' success at nesting varies from 60 percent in warm, dry springs to 23 percent in cool, wet springs. Populations decline when spring rains are 8 inches or more.
- Flowers produce insects—90 percent of a chick's diet during its first month. Tiny chicks can't push through dense grass, but a flower/grass mix is easy to navigate.



Provide a shelterbelt for winter habitat, a safe place to rest and eat.



Grass for the pheasants to nest, 10 to 12 inches is what hens like best.



Chicks need flowering plants to bring lots of bugs their way.



"We wanted to have a place to hunt pheasants, and that's why we bought the farm originally in 1998, but I've come to believe that the key out here is diversity; and the kind of diversity that will be long term for the pheasants and a multitude of nongame species is the native prairie, and so we're reconstructing prairie."

Steve Laughlin
LANDOWNER, NEAR BARNES CITY

"Right now, the pheasant recovery (SAFE) program is probably the best program out there. I think it is. If we can get more people into that pheasant recovery...it pays very good."

Larry Van Ervelde
LANDOWNER, NEAR GRINNELL

PHEASANT HABITAT RAP Lyrics by Jim Kacer
Music by Jeff Musel

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If you think a few acres of pasture or a stand of switchgrass is all that upland birds need to survive, "Gotta' Have Cover" is a catchy way to remember it takes a mix of shelter types, plus food and water to raise a quail or pheasant; a bobolink or meadowlark.

They gotta have cover! Yes they do, yes they do!
They gotta have cover! Yes, you know it's true!
They gotta have cover! Nesting cover!

Gotta have grass for the pheasants to nest, 10-12 inches is what the hens like best.
Gotta thin the grass when it gets too thick, every 3-5 years oughta do the trick.
To thin it, you can disc, you can burn, you can hay, it helps to maintain structure and plant diversit(a)y.

They gotta have cover! Yes they do, yes they do!
They gotta have cover! Brooding cover!

When the chicks are hatched, they'll need some room to move, and they'll need someplace that'll provide them lots of food.
They gotta have a place to hide, a place where they're concealed, so predators can't find them and make them their next meal.
A mix of grasses and forbs can provide a canopy, and leave some bare ground for chick activity.
They need flowering plants to bring lots of bugs their way, 'cuz each chick can eat hundreds of insects every day.*
Don't put the brooding cover in a wet locality, 'cuz rainy springs contribute to chick mortality.

They gotta have cover! Yes they do, yes they do!
They gotta have cover! Winter cover!

To provide a shelterbelt for winter habitat, Plant a line of shrubs and some grasses next to that.
Near the shelterbelt, leave some standing corn or sorghum, it provides extra cover and some winter food for 'em.
They need a safe place to rest near the food they consume, you can help by putting their kitchen near their bedroom.
Even more than knowing how to help pheasants just survive, now you know the secrets to helping them thrive!

They gotta have cover! Yes they do, yes they do!
They gotta have cover! Now you know it's true!
They gotta have cover! Cheep, cheep!

Technical and Financial Assistance — Whether you want to encourage pheasants, bring back meadowlarks, plant a woods for timber production or clean up the water in a stream, DNR biologists and foresters can help. They are familiar with federal and state programs like cost-share, helping eligible landowners afford improvements. www.iowadnr.gov or www.iowadnr.gov/Hunting/PheasantSmallGame.aspx

DNR biologists: www.iowadnr.gov/Environment/LandStewardship/WildlifeLandownerAssistance.aspx

DNR foresters: www.iowadnr.gov/Environment/Forestry/ForestryLandownerAssistance/DistrictForesterContacts.aspx

