



THE GAME BIRD FOUNDATION

Promoting habitat protection and responsible wildlife management

Raising pheasant chicks

Idaho Fish and Game purchases day-old pheasant chicks and makes them available for Idaho residents to raise at no charge. The Gamebird Foundation helps residents gain access to these chicks by picking up chicks from the hatchery, providing the high-quality food, and consulting on how to successfully raise and releasing the birds. The Gamebird Foundation also helps with the paperwork necessary to release the birds into the wild.

Please note: All pheasants you raise remain the property of the State of Idaho, managed by Idaho Fish and Game. They are not intended for show or domestic agricultural purposes.

Residents can place a chick order through the Gamebird Foundation starting in January and running through July, or as long as supplies are available. Chicks begin hatching and are available beginning in mid-April and will be delivered every Tuesday to a drop point in Troy, Idaho. New chick orders can be placed weekly and must be reserved by Sunday to be included in the following Tuesday's delivery.

Chick orders should be made for quantities of 25 chicks or more, but 100 chicks per order is ideal, as that is the optimal amount to fit in our custom brooders.

Preparation for chick arrival

BROODERS:

A brooder is an confinement area that is fully enclosed and temperature controlled. This is where the day-old chicks will live for several weeks. The brooding area can be a small room, a circle of cardboard 14 to 18 inches high in a heated room, or a commercial brooder. The Gamebird Foundation has developed a custom pheasant brooder that can hold up to 150 chicks safely, but is most successful when used to raise up 100 chicks at a time. The Gamebird Foundation provides free plans for our brooders so people can build their own. Materials for the brooder and pen will cost around \$350.00. Alternatively, the Game Bird Foundation loans out ready-built brooders to members for use in raising birds. These brooders are returned as soon as the birds have been released so other members can use them in the future. There is a \$50 deposit required, that will be refunded to the member as soon as the brooder is returned to the Foundation in good condition.

FOOD AND WATERING SYSTEMS:

Your chicks will need constant access to food and water. While you can pick up standard poultry feeders and waterers at your local farm/ranch supply store, these require constant attention to ensure the birds have sufficient food and water available. Experience shows that the less exposure the chicks have to humans, the more wild they will remain and wild birds will have a far better ability to survive following release than birds that have become used to humans feeding and watering them daily. For that reason, the Gamebird Foundation has developed custom feeding and watering systems for their brooders. Once again the plans for these feeding and watering systems are available for free from the Gamebird Foundation so you can build your own. Materials will range in cost, but it's reasonable to build our watering system for under \$30. The Gamebird Foundation members may have access to these custom-built feeding and watering systems included with their brooders.

HEAT:

It is essential for the chicks to stay warm for their first few weeks of life. If the chicks get cold, they will often huddle together for warmth (called piling) which can result in chicks getting crushed or suffocated. To achieve the temperatures they need to survive, use a 250 watt heat lamp hanging from the roof. We have found a cord

with a thermostat control that works well and much less expensive. Keep the heater 18 to 20 inches from the bedding kind of depending on the weather. The heater has a thermostat to control heat. You want to control the heat at 95 to 100 degrees at the floor for the first week, then lower about 5 degrees a week till the chicks are feathered. Purchase a cheap indoor/outdoor thermometer and place it on the straw or shavings under the heater for a week before the chicks arrive. You can then remove it as you should have a good idea of the heat at the floor. If the birds get too warm they will move away from under the heat and vice versa when they get cold. Another heating option is a propane system which comes from back east, but we are happy to help you contact suppliers.

LITTER/BEDDING:

We like to prepare the brooder by placing about 2 to 3 inches of chopped straw on the bottom of the brooder. Large wood shavings are my second choice. To avoid piling, we recommend mounding the corners of the brooder and the center of the heat source with bedding.

FOOD:

Baby pheasants have special food needs that cannot be met by commercial feeds. Do not purchase wild bird or chicken food for your baby pheasants. Feed the birds a high protein feed (28-30 %) for the 3 to 4 weeks you have them in the brooder and pen. The Gamebird Foundation can provide 40 pound sacks of the ideal pheasant food to members, or you can purchase the correct food directly from Little Canyon.

Once your chicks arrive

1. Make sure your the temperature on the floor of your brooder must be at 98 to 100 degrees. Measure this by putting a thermometer on the floor near your heat source.
2. Prepare a tray of food and a shallow pan of water, no more than ½ inch deep
3. When the chicks arrive, remove them from the box and if possible, dip each chick's beak in the water and put them under the heat lamp. Most losses occur in the first few days because the chicks never learn to drink or eat. Never let the chicks run out of food or water.
4. Check the chicks frequently in the first week, even at night, and especially in the first 48 hours. Some common causes of death in the first 5 days are shipping stress, not learning to eat or drink, and incorrect temp in the brooder.

Maintaining the chicks

Decrease the temperature of the brooder by 5 degrees each week until they are ready to go outside. If you are using one of the brooders designed by the Gamebird Foundation, it will have an outside pen that is attached to the brooder with a lift door that will let the birds outside. Depending on the weather the birds can have access to the outside pen as early as 10 days to 2 weeks old. Lock the chicks back in at night if the weather is cold. Continue to monitor the chicks for piling, which is a sign that they are too cold. If they are too warm they will be away from the heat, usually in a circle. You want the birds to move freely about the brooder.

Keep a tray of feed in the brooder that has an inch high side. As soon as the birds go out to the outside pen I move the feeder tray outside. Increase the height of the feeder tray as they grow to prevent the birds from getting in and scratching. I think this helps with the prevention of cannibalism. Continue to feed the high-protein feed for the first 3 to 4 weeks. It will take about 200 pounds of feed to raise 100 chicks to 5 weeks old. Once the birds are old enough to go outside, it is good to add some green grass or fresh baled green alfalfa. Putting a block of Styrofoam in the run when the birds get a couple weeks old is helpful for them to pick on and keeps them from picking on each other. We advise that you put peepers on the birds at 3 to 4 weeks old to prevent any cannibalism. The Gamebird Foundation can help you obtain peepers for your birds.

Releasing pheasants

When the birds are 5 weeks old they are ready to leave the brooder and run entirely. Before releasing your pheasants, you need to complete the required IDFG paperwork that authorizes you to release birds into the wild.

To increase your birds' chances of survival in the wild, we recommend releasing the birds into soft release pens and continuing to feed and water them for another 4 to 5 weeks (until they are 8-9 weeks old). The release pens we use are about 10 x 20 or larger for 50 to 75 roosters, or 100 hens or more.

You can switch to feeding cheap feed when the birds move to the soft release pens. We use wheat and that we just sprinkle on the ground, as the birds no longer need to eat out of a feed pan.

If you are going to release your birds into the wild, straight from the brooder without using a transitional soft release pen, it helps to have habitat close by with access to water. You can supply water on your own, and we have recommendations if you decide to go this route. For more specifics, please consult with us.

Special benefits of being a Gamebird Foundation member

The Gamebird Foundation members receive added resources, including access to brooders, waterers, heaters, supplies, peepers, and feed as its able. You must be a Gamebird Foundation member to receive the free help.

Membership is \$20.00 per family. Join online at www.thegamebirdfoundation.org or mail a check to PO Box 100, Viola, Idaho 83872.

If you can't raise chicks but want to help another member with the process, you can make a tax deductible, donation to The Gamebird Foundation, a non-profit 501c3 organization.

For more information and to order chicks, contact Jim Hagedorn at 208-883-3423 or jhag1008@gmail.com, or Joel Warner at 208-310-2674.

© The Gamebird Foundation, Inc. 2020. The information in this document has been compiled by Gamebird Foundation Founder and Executive Director, Jim Hagedorn. Known locally as "the Pheasant Guy," Jim and his friends Sonny Hairston of Little Canyon and Joseph Peterson have mastered the art and science of raising and releasing pheasants after decades of experience. They've made their experience available to the public for free in the hopes that future generations of game bird enthusiasts will be experience the joy of raising and releasing birds into the wild.