

LIVING WITH WILDLIFE

Humane, Effective Solutions to Human-Wildlife Conflicts

A Program of the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals



Pheasants

In cities, suburbs, and small towns across Massachusetts, people are noticing a change in their neighborhoods. Some think it's good. Some think it's bad. But everybody seems to be talking about it: more wild animals are making their homes in and around people's yards and houses, in parks and playgrounds, in business developments, even right on Main Street.

General Information

The ring-necked pheasant has been imported and released in Massachusetts since 1906. It is recognized by its long tail, rounded wings, small head and thin neck.

The adult male is highly ornate. He has a green head, a pale bill, facial skin around the eyes, a white ring around the neck, golden plumage with green and blue iridescence and black spots, a long pointed golden tail and spurred legs.

The adult female is more subtle. She has a brown head, under parts, and plumage, black spots around the head, neck and flanks, and a long brown pointed tail. She does not have spurs.

Pheasants are permanent residents of Massachusetts, meaning they do not migrate. They prefer to live in grassland, as they feed almost exclusively on seeds and plant matter, though they occasionally eat insects, worms and snails.

Females breed their first year between February and June, resulting in a clutch of 6-12 eggs. Males do not assist in rearing the young.

The pheasant is one of the world's most hunted birds. They have been introduced for this purpose, and are also common on game farms where they are commercially farmed for this purpose. Mass Wildlife annually stocks ring-necked pheasants statewide to provide opportunities for hunters. Each year, an average of 40,000 birds are brought in from out of state and more are raised at sportsmen's clubs and county correctional facilities in Massachusetts.

Stocked pheasants do not have the instinct to flee from hunters or predators, as they were raised in captivity. If not killed immediately by waiting hunters, the birds are almost always killed and eaten by predators, succumb to harsh weather conditions, or starve.

Possible Conflicts and Solutions

If a young pheasant is found, it should be assumed that it is the offspring of pheasants that somehow survived a winter or more after being released from the stocking farms. Having been born in the wild, unlike its farmed parents, it should be considered and treated as a wild bird.

If a healthy looking young pheasant is found alone in the springtime, know that during this season, a young pheasant would be temporarily left by its mother while she is out foraging. The mother will conceal it and only periodically return to the nesting site to feed and care for it, in an effort to avoid alerting predators to its location. In this instance, it is best to leave it alone, as the mother will most likely return shortly but will not approach when humans are present.

If a young pheasant is found and it appears to be facing imminent danger, without putting yourself in danger, you can either return the young pheasant to its nesting area, if that removes the pheasant from the danger, or carefully place the pheasant into a box and contact your local MSPCA immediately to locate a local wildlife rehabilitator.

If a young pheasant is found and it appears to be injured, without putting yourself in danger, carefully place the pheasant into a box and contact your local MSPCA immediately to locate a local wildlife veterinarian or rehabilitator.

Public Health Concern

Pheasants are not considered to be a significant source for any infectious disease that can be transmitted to humans.