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1955

Why doesn't such-and-such a game bird do well in Nebraska?

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? - Why doesn't such-and-such a game bird do well in NEBRASKA?

Nebr. Gm., Frstatn, & Prks. Com. 3-page crbn cpy

Why doesn't such-and-such a game bird do well in Nebraska? This is a question which is often asked field workers for the game department. The answer to such an inquiry varies with the bird in question, but in general the following applies: Since climate, topography, and natural foods vary so much from place to place, and since most individual species are not highly adaptable, nature has through the centuries evolved many species, or kinds, of birds, each species adapted to meet certain conditions. Some of these have extensive ranges; others are limited in their distribution. The conditions suited to one species of bird are complicated, and usually not readily evident to man, but nevertheless they definitely limit the distribution of the species.

Birds do not have the power to change their surroundings and simply do not live where the necessary conditions are lacking. Thus it may be seen that a bird, placed in an area different from that to which nature has fitted it to live, has a poor chance of surviving. In general, if a bird is not native to a particular set of conditions it is not likely to thrive under those conditions.

There have been, however, noteable examples of exotic, or introduced, birds doing well. Our common pheasant is such an example. But for every case of this kind there are many cases in which the attempt to introduce game birds has ended in failure. In New York state, for example, at least twenty-one kinds of birds have been introduced, yet the pheasant is the only one which has met any great degree of success. Nature seemingly resents meddling with her system of biological distribution which has taken centuries to perfect, and obvious failure

in stocking non-native species are but evidence that natural production of native species is, after all, the simpler method of producing game birds.

To complicate matters still further man himself changes conditions to such an extent that native species may be reduced in numbers, or even evicted entirely. The grouse family in Nebraska, which includes the prairie chicken or pinnated grouse and the prairie sharp-tailed grouse, provides an excellent example of how man may change conditions to such an extent as to make large areas unattractive to even the native species. The original range of both the prairie chicken and the sharp-tailed grouse included essentially all of Nebraska. Today both are found in the northern and western parts of the state where cultivation has disturbed a relatively small part of the land, while southern and eastern Nebraska, largely under cultivation and with no extensive undisturbed areas, have practically no prairie chickens and grouse.

The grouse family in the United States shows very clearly the geographic limitations of various species and sub-species, and Nebraskans will find in a review of the species of grouse that Nebraska's two species are simply a part of a large family, whose many species and sub-species are suited to a great variety of natural conditions.

To the west, on the arid plains where sagebrush grows, as in Wyoming, northwestern Colorado, Utah and Idaho, the sage grouse or sage hen is found. It was formerly present, but rare, in Nebraska, and is probably absent now. Reports in Nebraska for this species usually have confused it with the sharp-tailed grouse, and somstimes even the prairie chicken.

Southwest, in the southern Great Plains from Kansas and Colorado to Texas and New Mexico, is the lesser prairie chicken, a near relative of the Nebraska prairie chicken. Farther south, in southwestern Louisiana and eastern Texas, small numbers of Attwater's prairie chicken remain.

Another member of this family present in Colorado and other mountainous sections is the white-tailed ptarmigan. This is the bird sometimes seen above timberline by Nebraskans on vacations in the mountains. Colorado also has another grouse which mountain visitors sometimes see. This is the dusky grouse, which lives mostly in the dense evergreen forests. Farther west, in the coast mountain ranges from California north, is the sooty grouse.

Going east from Nebraska's prairie chicken and grouse country the ruffed grouse is found in the timber country of the northeast and lake states, where it is an important game bird. It is also called partridge, or "patridge", and is to the wooded parts of the country what our prairie chicken is to the prairie. The ruffed grouse was formerly found in Nebraska, in the timber along the Missouri river. The timber country of northeastern Iowa is still populated by ruffed grouse.

Still another timber grouse is the spruce grouse, or "fool hen", of the New England states and northern parts of the lake states. The western counterpart of the eastern spruce grouse is Franklin's grouse, which occurs in the four northwestern states of Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana.

When the ranges of these several species of grouse are mapped it may be seen that the southern part of the United States is practically without grouse. However, in this "grouseless" southern area there are quail, and in some states wild turkeys. Both of these last two belong to bird families most closely related to the grouse family. Thus nature has given the country complete coverage of related birds, each with its own peculiarities and requirements,- a nationwide distribution of native game birds.