



Flushing Bars for Wildlife

Simple device saves wildlife in hayfields



As our cold, seemingly never ending, winter wears on, the first thing on everyone's mind is the green-up that warmer spring temperatures and longer days bring. That exact thing is what wildlife prepare themselves for early. Along with storing enough fat reserves to get them through harsh winter conditions, it is equally important for wildlife to come out of winter in good physical condition to take on the stresses and challenges that the breeding season brings. This is very important to upland nesting birds, like pheasants, as a decrease in body condition leads to a decrease in clutch size as well as an increase in hen mortality.

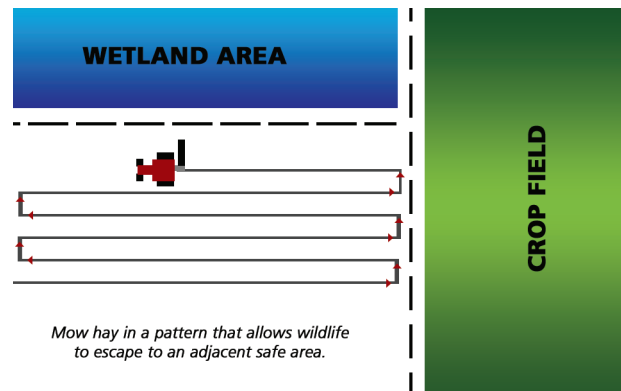


Photo by Mark Ludwig

If pheasants are fortunate enough to enter the breeding season in good physical condition, they are not out completely out of harm's way. As hayland begins to green-up in the spring, these areas provide a very attractive area for hens seeking a quality nest site. However, these same areas also provide farmers and ranchers with livestock forage. As a result, many hens are incidentally lost due to normal spring haying operations. But, there is a solution for incidental hen mortality, and the answer is the use of a flushing bar. A flushing bar is a device that typically is mounted on the front of a tractor that precedes the implement being used for haying. A flushing bar creates a disturbance in advance of the implement to allow extra time for the nesting bird to flush to avoid injury or death.



Although the nest is normally destroyed, pheasants are resilient nesters and the majority will re-nest in nearby undisturbed cover. By using a flushing bar, not only will more hens survive the breeding and nesting seasons but many will also go on to successfully hatch a clutch leading to a potential increase in annual bird populations which will possibly lead to subsequent population growth in later years.



In addition to using a flushing bar, simply modifying haying patterns may be an additional option to help save wildlife utilizing hay fields. Conventionally, hay fields are cut starting from the outside and working towards the opposite edge of the field or from the outside into the center of the field. Haying in this manner has a tendency to concentrate wildlife in a continually shrinking area of cover or forces wildlife into the open exposing them to predation. By starting in the center and working out, wildlife will have escape cover to decrease their susceptibility to haying operations and predation.

Incorporating one or both of these wildlife friendly methods will have a positive effect on game and non-game species of wildlife alike. For landowners interested in learning more about flushing bars, they are urged to contact their local Pheasants Forever Farm Bill Biologist through their local USDA Service Center.

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