



Game Bird Management

Industry wide, there has been little feed research done with game birds. That's why ADM Animal Nutrition has conducted feeding trials at our Research Farm. However, most producers have their own unique management program. The management guidelines presented here are general and applicable under most conditions, modifiable to the individual producer.

Brooding

Ideally, the brooder house should be isolated so young birds have no contact with older birds. Since this is not always possible, good management becomes even more important. The brooder house, or area, and all equipment should be thoroughly cleaned, disinfected, and completely dried before housing the young birds.

Game birds can be floor brooded or battery brooded (on wire). Up to 500 birds can be placed in a floor brooder, while the number per unit in a battery brooder is usually less than 100. General guidelines for both brooding systems are the same with a few minor differences.

The brooder should be turned on one day before the birds are housed. Temperature should be 95°F at bird height for the first week, and decreased 5°F per week until the outside temperature is reached. Careful observation will indicate whether the birds are too cold or too hot. When too cold they will huddle under the brooder or in a corner and some may smother. If too hot, the birds will stay away from the brooder and will look drowsy. When the temperature is proper, the young birds will be evenly dispersed around, and out of, the edge of the brooder.

Place water jars before the birds are brought to the brooders. Clean and disinfect the jars daily with a tamed iodine disinfectant. As young birds learn where the automatic waterers or large water founts are, remove the chick jars a few at a time. When floor brooding, place the water jars on a square of wood or wire to keep litter out of the waterers. Ideally, feed should not be provided until the birds have been in the brooders about three hours and have had a chance to drink. For battery brooders, place feed on egg flats the first few days. For floor brooders, use chick box lids with feed in them until the birds learn to eat from the feeders. As with the chick jars, remove the feeder lids a few at a time.

When battery brooding, use the proper sized wire mesh: ¼" x ¼" for quail and chukar, ⅜" x ⅜" or less for pheasant and guineas, and ½" x ½" or less for chicks, geese, and turkeys. Locate the brooder in a draft-free area, and empty dropping pans frequently.

When floor brooding, use proper litter material and a brooder guard. Fine shavings make the best litter, but these are sometimes hard to find. Other absorbent materials such as chopped straw (2" to 3" long), ground corncobs about pea size, dried chopped sugarcane, or other materials also work.

However, avoid using sawdust. Birds tend to eat it, causing impacted gizzards. Whatever litter used, be sure it is clean, dry, and free of dust.

A brooder guard is usually an 18-inch high roll of cardboard or hardware cloth circling the brooder which eliminates corners where young birds can pile up. Use hardware cloth in the summer to improve ventilation and cardboard in the winter to prevent drafts.

Rearing

Good management and sanitation practices are critical during the brooding and rearing phases to help prevent diseases. It is important to provide growing birds adequate feeder, waterer, and floor space. If being raised for release, or if the finishing pens are outside, birds should be gradually acclimated to the outdoors during the rearing period. Remember that birds which are being raised for release should not be tamed down and that they need to be conditioned for the habitat into which they will be released.

Cannibalism

Cannibalism is a serious problem which can cause considerable losses. It is best prevented by allowing the birds adequate room and by maintaining a low-light intensity of 0.5 foot-candles. However, if that fails, an effective way to treat it is by trimming the front ¼ of the beak with a nail clipper or an electric debeaker. Also, "peepers" or eye blinders can be used on pheasants to reduce pecking.

Breeding

For a successful breeding program, it is essential to begin with top quality birds. No matter how good the management, it is impossible to exceed the genetic potential of the bird. After acquiring the best breeders, proper management is necessary to obtaining maximum quality offspring.

Proper management begins prior to the breeding season. Adequate space, fresh water, and proper feed are essential to healthy birds. Where possible, use breeder feed 3 to 4 weeks prior to lay. Early introduction to breeder improves performance for the entire lay cycle, increasing egg production. Breeders should be switched to a breeder feed by the time they reach 10% production. Provide and maintain appropriate nests of clean, dry material.

Lighting is a very important aspect of any successful breeding program. Breeders kept in natural daylight will perform adequately. These breeders will come into production in the spring when daylight hours are increasing. Light-tight housing and artificial lighting can be used to alter egg production and to recycle birds successfully. Numerous lighting programs can be used.

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