

Much Ado About Releases

By Lori Jo Mundstock

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It seems with the announcement of the Pheasantennial everyone wants the credit for the first release of the pheasants to South Dakota. While it is true that many releases were done, the end result was either not recorded or not enough information is available, or the list goes on.

Here are some of the releases that we found in our research:

Museum News by William H. Over

Credit for the earliest attempts to propagate the ringneck in South Dakota is quite generally given to Dr. A. Zitlitz, a former Sioux Falls resident. He is said to have brought two male and four female ringnecks to Sioux Falls from Illinois in 1898. He was successful in raising about two dozen young the first year and 10 were liberated in Minnehaha County.

The Sturgis Weekly Record on July 10, 1891 reported that the first of the month N.L. Witcher will receive an invoice of Chinese Pheasants. There is no further mention of the pheasants after that.

The next recorded attempts to introduce the pheasants are by A.R. Cooper and E.L. Ebbert, both farmers south of Doland. It was said that they purchased several pairs from a Pennsylvania game farm and released them in 1908 but they failed to survive the winter. The next year 1909, the men tried again and released a few dozen birds that were said to have survived.

Then we have H.P. Packard, H.J. Shackle, and H.A. Hagman who released the birds on Hagman's farm. These pheasants survived and were seen the following year along the river. In 1919 these same men along with J.D. Fargo, bought twenty-four pairs from a bird farm in Illinois and released these as well at Hagman's Grove (So named for Christian Hagman who homesteaded there in 1881).

A.C. Johnson of Frankfort also purchased 25 birds in 1908 and released them on his ranch south of Frankfort. No further information was given.

The Saint Bernard's Catholic Church History Book, A Century Of Faith, talks of Father MacConnachie who was a nature lover. In April of 1927 he was said to have taken a trip to Chicago for the Izaak Walton League for whom he was State President. He said upon return that he had scanned the countryside and saw hardly any wildlife in Minnesota or Wisconsin but in South Dakota it was everywhere in abundance. He was said to have helped introduce the now famed ring-neck pheasant to the State of South Dakota.

The Redfield Chamber of Commerce did the first large planting of pheasants in this area. In 1911 the State Game Department purchased 48 pairs of birds and released them near Redfield.

So, while a number of individuals both private and public have been credited with releasing pheasants in the area, however, those first birds in Hagman's Grove are the ones we shall remember and celebrate in our 100 years of pheasants in South Dakota.