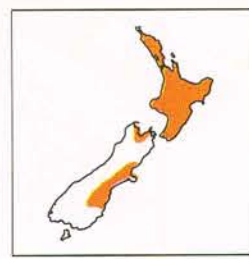


All gamebirds are introduced, often with great persistence and cost. Small to large plump birds that feed on the ground. Omnivorous but mainly take plant food, scratching and digging at the ground surface with legs and strong claws, and bill. When disturbed, they crouch, run to cover, or burst from cover with whirring wings and alarm notes, flying fast and low to pitch a short distance away. Sexes usually differ: females and immatures have subdued plumage that blends with the surroundings; males are sometimes brightly coloured, but even strongly patterned males blend with their surroundings. Immatures are usually seen with adults, so identity should not be a problem.

**PHEASANT** *Phasianus colchicus*

**Common European introduction**

♂ 80 cm, 1400 g; ♀ 60 cm, 1200 g. Long-tailed gamebird. Male colourful, mainly rich orange-reds, glossy dark green head, red facial wattles. Female smaller, pale brown heavily mottled dark brown, lacks facial wattles. Male territorial call a loud, abrupt crow: 'kok-kok', with emphasis on the second syllable. Explodes suddenly from undergrowth when disturbed, with noisy wingbeats and rapid calls, and glides back to cover. **Habitat:** Open scrubland, vegetated sand dunes, riverbanks, and agricultural land with plenty of cover. **Breeding:** Jul–Mar.



**GAMEBIRDS**

**Phasianidae**

213 species worldwide. The only native member of this family, the endemic New Zealand Quail *Coturnix novaezelandiae*, became extinct about 1875.

dig at the ground surface with stout legs and strong claws and bill. Most roost in trees.

Some 20 species of gamebirds have been introduced to New Zealand, but about half have failed to establish. All were introduced for domestic or hunting purposes, often with great persistence and at great cost. Some are still supplemented yearly by captive-reared stock raised by Fish and Game Councils (the former acclimatisation societies), paid for from hunters' licence fees.

The sexes often differ; females and immatures have subdued plumage that blends with the surroundings, males are often brightly coloured in the larger species or strongly patterned but cryptic in the smaller ones. Many species are polygamous, the male having a harem of females in the breeding period. Their nest is a shallow hollow scraped in the ground with little or no lining. Clutches are large, but, although most eggs hatch, few chicks reach independence. The chicks leave the nest soon after hatching and feed themselves, attended by the adults. Most young can fly within two or three weeks of hatching.

Most species favour farmland, swamp margins and open ground with plenty of coarse grass or scrub for cover. They feed on the ground and are omnivorous – grain, other seeds, berries, roots, together with whatever invertebrates are revealed as they scratch and

**Reading:** Delacour, J. 1977. *The Pheasants of the World*. Hindhead, UK: Spur Publications. Johnsgard, P.A. 1988. *The Quails, Partridges and Francolins of the World*. Oxford: OUP.

**152. PHEASANT** *Phasianus colchicus*

**Plate 34**

**Other names:** Common Pheasant, Ring-necked Pheasant

are shot each year and numbers are reinforced in many districts by captive-reared birds.

**Size:** Males 80 cm, 1400 g; females 60 cm, 1200 g

**Breeding:** The New Zealand season is extended, and nests with eggs have been found from late July to late March; most eggs, however, are laid in October–December. The nest is a hollow scantily lined with vegetation and usually in thick cover such as hayfields, under blackberry or bracken, roadside verges, rough pasture, and crops. The female lays 7–9–15 olive-brown eggs (46 x 36 mm) and incubates for 23–24 days. The oldest wild Pheasant recorded in New Zealand lived over 15 years.

**Geographical variation:** New Zealand stock is derived from several subspecies, although most birds resemble the Ring-necked Pheasant from China, *torquatus*, especially in having a broad white neck-ring.

**Feeding:** In their first weeks, chicks eat mainly small insects but gradually adopt the adult diet of green-leaf material, seeds, grain, berries and larger insects.

**Distribution:** Natural range is from Turkey east through central Asia to China. They have been repeatedly introduced to New Zealand from 1842 onwards, and local birds are still reinforced by releases of New Zealand-bred stock. In the North Island, they are most common in the northern and western districts; scattered elsewhere. In the South Island, they are sparse with small numbers in Nelson, Canterbury and Otago.

**Population:** c. 250,000. Up to 50,000 cocks

**Reading:** Barker, R.J. 1991. *Notornis* 38: 125–130.