**YVCipedia POULTRY**

Pheasant Care Sheet

## **Species Overview**

Pheasants are ground-dwelling birds known for their vibrant plumage and upright posture, with males often sporting dazzling colors and long tails. The most common kept in captivity is the **Ring-necked Pheasant**, originally native to Asia but now widely naturalized throughout North America.

At YVC, we find pheasants to be striking and active birds that require thoughtful housing and diet management to stay healthy. While they are not typically kept for companionship like parrots, they can be part of small farm flocks, aviaries, or conservation breeding programs. Pheasants are best suited for outdoor enclosures where they can forage and display natural behaviors.

## **Housing & Environment**

Pheasants are high-energy, flight-capable birds that need ample room to roam, scratch, and dust-bathe. Inadequate space or stimulation can lead to aggression, feather damage, or injury.

At YVC, we recommend housing pheasants in **secure outdoor aviaries or predator-proof runs**. These should include:

* A minimum of **20 square feet per bird**, with more space during breeding season
* Covered tops or netting to prevent escape, especially for lighter, flighty breeds
* Ground-level hiding spots like shrubs, brush piles, or low shelters to reduce stress

Natural substrates such as dirt or sand help support dust bathing, and low roosts can be provided for overnight use. Because pheasants are sensitive to cold, wind, and damp conditions, ensure that part of the enclosure is weatherproofed and insulated during Maine winters or cold snaps.

## **Diet & Nutrition**

Pheasants require a high-protein, low-fat diet rich in variety to maintain feather health and energy. At YVC, we emphasize the importance of seasonal adjustments—breeding, molting, and overwintering all come with slightly different dietary needs.

**Recommended breakdown**:

* **60–70%** high-quality gamebird crumble or pellet (20–28% protein, depending on age and season)
* **20–30%** grains (e.g., cracked corn, wheat, millet)
* **10–15%** greens, chopped vegetables, and occasional berries or fruits
* Occasional live insects (mealworms, crickets) or scrambled egg for enrichment and protein boost

Fresh water must always be available and should be protected from freezing in colder months.

Avoid medicated chick feeds long-term and do not rely on scratch grains alone—these are too low in protein for sustained health.

## **Behavior & Handling**

Pheasants are naturally shy and not typically amenable to frequent handling. They are observant, quick to startle, and prone to flighty behavior if they feel confined or threatened. Hand-raised birds may be calmer but still prefer space to interaction.

They are usually kept in small flocks, although male pheasants may become territorial during the breeding season and should be housed separately or monitored for aggression. Males display courtship behavior including tail fanning, calls, and wing drumming—impressive to watch but sometimes disruptive if housed near sensitive species.

Quiet observation and gentle routines help them feel secure and reduce unnecessary stress.

## **Enrichment**

Though not interactive like parrots, pheasants still benefit greatly from environmental enrichment that mimics wild foraging and exploration. At YVC, we suggest rotating items or features to keep them mentally stimulated.

This might include:

* Logs or natural stumps for climbing and pecking
* Leaf piles or hay bales to explore
* Hanging vegetables or scattered grains to promote foraging
* Changes in enclosure layout or safe plantings (grasses, shrubs) for visual interest

Simple enrichments make a big difference in reducing anxiety and preventing boredom-driven behaviors like pacing or feather damage.

## **Health & Veterinary Care**

Pheasants are hardy in appropriate conditions but can be vulnerable to a number of preventable conditions, particularly in confined or poorly ventilated settings.

At YVC, we recommend:

* **Annual wellness exams and fecal parasite checks** for at least one pheasant from the flock
* Occasional bloodwork if signs of illness or weight loss are noted
* Close monitoring during seasonal transitions and stressful periods

Health concerns to watch for include:

* **Respiratory infections**, especially in damp or ammonia-rich bedding
* **External parasites** (mites, lice) or internal parasites like coccidia and worms
* **Feather damage** from over-crowding or poor nutrition
* **Injuries** to legs or wings from flight panic or improper enclosures

Prevention is key—clean enclosures, good ventilation, balanced diet, and slow introductions to new birds all reduce the risk of disease.

## **Facts & FAQs**

* Pheasants are excellent runners and strong fliers in short bursts
* Males molt out of their vibrant plumage after breeding season each year
* Their calls and drumming can be surprisingly loud and may bother nearby neighbors
* Most pheasants can be sexed visually by 3–4 months of age
* They are monogamous or polygynous depending on species and environment

## **Supplies Checklist**

* Large outdoor aviary with predator-proof fencing and covered roof
* Gamebird-specific feed (adjust protein for age and season)
* Supplementary grains and safe produce
* Grit or oyster shell available free-choice
* Clean, freeze-proof water source
* Shelter with windbreak and dry bedding
* Dust bath area with fine dirt or sand
* Travel crate for transport or medical care
* Net or catch panel for safe handling if needed

*Yarmouth Veterinary Center*