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# Experiment in Raising of Prairie Chicken

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## Experiment in Raising of Prairie Chicken

by Harold Malicky, Burwell, Nebraska

Gathered sixteen prairie chicken eggs on May 14, 1958.

Set in forced air incubator with temperature of 99.5° and humidity of 92%. Eggs hatched June 1 - 3, 100% hatch.

First week -

Young birds put in box brooder on grass. Fed finely mashed hard boil egg. All birds eating readily from shallow containers. Tried feeding moist chick starter but birds would not eat the feed. Started feeding live grasshoppers from fourth day on. Each bird eats about 20 grasshoppers per day.

Second week -

Added 20% chick starter to hard boiled eggs. On tenth day started adding cottage cheese to eggs, and also started feeding finely chopped lettuce. Noticed leg weakness in one bird at ten days of age. Started putting Vit-A-Cin in water at ten days, also added  $\frac{1}{16}$ th teaspoon of steamed bone meal to each feed. Fed birds each hour during day.

Third week -

Fed same feed of hard boiled egg, cottage cheese, lettuce and steamed bone meal. Leg weakness starting in four more birds. Used 28% turkey starter instead of chick starter. Doubled vitamins in water, also added Enheptin to water as a preventative for blackhead.

Fourth week -

Feeding same feed but using 30% game bird starter instead of turkey starter. Noticeable improvement in leg weakness in all but one bird. Quit feeding grasshoppers at beginning of fourth week. All birds eating well and very active at end of fourth week. Leg weakness entirely gone on all but one bird. The bird's leg started turning to the side and is completely turned out now. Walks on knee joint. Put dish of dry feed (starter) in pen at beginning of fourth week. Birds starting to eat some dry feed. End of fourth week started mixing feed dry. No cottage cheese.

Fifth week -

Mixing feed dry. No cottage cheese. Some birds have droopy wings so started mixing egg, cottage cheese and vitamins as before.

Sixth week -

Some birds have droopy wings and look sleepy. Not as active as before. Not eating as much feed.

July 11 -

One bird droopy, feathers ruffled all day.

July 12 -

Bird died in evening after being droopy all day. Post-mortem showed round sunken spots on liver about 1/8 to 1/4 inch across. Caecum was filled with yellow cheesy material, blind end of caecum filled with reddish black substance looking like partially coagulated blood, and caecum enlarged to size of a lead pencil. Cause of death - BLACKHEAD.

July 13 -

One bird down but lived five days after being treated with Furazolidone. Drank water. Death undetermined.

July 14 -

Gave nine birds that looked droopy one-half tablet of NF180 Furazolidone each day for three days. Banded these nine birds with bands 16 thru 24. Four birds down after giving first treatment. Started putting double dose of Enheptin - = teaspoon in one quart of water. The downed birds lived from three to four days. Tried feeding them water but didn't drink much.

Seventh week -

Examination of dead birds showed no spots or anything wrong with caecum or liver. Gizzard contained some grass. Birds that were down acted as if they had no control over muscles -- shaky head, acted sleepy and droopy, wings hung down and feathers were ruffled. Usually only lived one or two days. Legs were stiff or more as if they had no control of them, neck would bend back, except when they tried to eat it would curve in an arc and they were unable to pick anything up. Droppings were very strong in odor. They had a discharge from the mouth after the third or fourth day that was equally strong. When giving them a drink their mouth or throat made a crackling sound. Birds that died were banded with band numbers 17, 18, 20, 21, and 24. Birds with band numbers 19, 22, 23 never were sick after treatment. Bird with band number 16 was very sick and down, not much control over muscles for two days.

On third day the bird was up and ate nothing but grass that day. Next day it ate prepared feed and kept improving. It is still alive and seems to feel well.

- July 19 -

One of the five unbanded birds droopy with ruffled appearance and sleepy. (These birds were not treated to serve as a check.) Gave all unbanded birds (five) one-half tablet of NF180. Will continue for three days. Banded these birds with bands 17, 18, 20, 21 and 25 which we wish we now hadn't done.

Birds eating good after being sick and droopy.

- July 22 -

One bird died after treatment.

Eighth week -

Three more birds sick and droopy.

- July 23 -

One bird died - sent to Lincoln with Lloyd Vance. Report from Pathology Department showed nothing to indicate cause of death. More tests to be conducted.

Birds with band numbers 17, 20 and 25 were very sick for two days and we didn't expect them to live. On the third day these birds started eating grass and later in the day were eating prepared food. All three birds lived and showed complete recovery in four days. Still feeding egg, cottage cheese, vitamins mixed with game bird starter, plus lettuce. Also putting tsp. Enheptin in one quart of water. Birds left (eight) have band numbers 16, 19, 20, 25, 17, 22, and 23. Also have the one crippled bird left which never has been treated for blackhead except for the Enheptin he gets in the water.

Remarks - I believe the reason the Enheptin didn't keep the birds from getting blackhead was that from the fourth week on the birds would drink the dew from the grass. Their intake of treated water was not as much as it should have been. The crippled bird could not reach the dew, therefore had to drink the treated water. Possibly the addition of a drug in the feed would be the answer for the control of blackhead.

The birds that were sick were very cold after being treated with Furazolidone. When put in heated box it didn't help them any. The prairie chickens were out in the hot sunshine more than they were in the shade. Whenever the sun shone they acted livelier.

Ninth week - July 29, 1958 - Eight birds

Feeding same feed of hard boiled eggs and game bird starter. Birds are eating good. Eat a lot of grass. Gordon Heebner started measuring wing feathers.

Tenth week -

Same feed, noticeable change in feathering of birds each week. Birds are wild after measuring wing feathers.

Eleventh week -

Mixing feed drier now and only feeding birds four times a day. Started feeding game bird grower - 20%. Also started hand feeding grass and clover. Two birds starting to molt tail feathers. Keep dry feed before birds all the time.

Twelfth week -

Same feed as eleventh week. Birds are eating more dry feed now. Eat a lot of grass and clover. Birds are getting wilder each week after measuring wing feathers. Birds are very lively and healthy. Some of them are strutting and booming yeat. Birds are still drinking dew from grass.

End of twelfth week - August 25, 1958 - Changed bands because old bands too small -

Changed from	to
16	204
17	209
19	206
20	207
22	210
23	208
25	205

Thirteenth, fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth weeks - August 25 - September 23, 1958 -

Killed crippled bird September 5 (I finally relented). Started feeding all dry feed to birds on August 26. Equal amounts of cracked corn and game bird grower. This is 20% protein and is before them all the time. Quit putting Enheptin in the water all the time. Hand feeding green grass and clover twice a day. The birds are eating twice as much corn as they do game bird grower and only drink 3/4 pint of water a day for the seven birds. Some of the chickens are still strutting and drumming in the mornings and evenings. Birds are all active and look very healthy.

Seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth week September 24 - October 21 -

Feeding 20% game bird grower and cracked corn. Plain water and hand feeding grass twice a day. Birds all look healthy and are very active.

October 10 -

One bird dead.

October 11 -

One bird dead.

October 12 -

One bird dead. Had whitish green droppings which were very loose. Do not know what is wrong. Started adding i teaspoon of Vit-A-Cin to water of birds. October 12 - 21 -

The remaining birds are active and healthy looking. Quit adding Vit-A-Cin to water on October 19. Sent three birds to State Pathologist but have received no report as yet.

October 21 - twentieth week

Have four birds left.

Twenty-first, second, third and fourth week - October 21 - November 18 -

Feeding 20% game bird grower and cracked corn. Hand feeding grass twice daily. Plain water.

Received pathologist report on three birds sent in. No indications of cause of death. The four remaining birds look very healthy and active.

November 18 - end of twenty-fourth week -

Four birds left.

Twenty-fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth week - November 19 December 17 -

Feeding 20% game bird grower and cracked corn. Hand feeding alfalfa leaves and plain water. All four birds look very healthy and active. These birds eat twice as much cracked corn as game bird grower.

End of twenty-eighth week

- Four birds left.

Twenty-ninth, thirtieth, thirty-first and thirty-second weeks - December 18, 1958 - January 14, 1959 -

Feeding 20% game bird grower and cracked corn. Hand feeding alfalfa leaves and plain water. Birds are eating very good and all are active and healthy. Removed one bird and penned it up separately. Two of the chickens were fighting the bird.

33rd, 34th, 35th and 36th weeks - January 15 - February 12

Feeding 20% chicken breeder crumbles and cracked corn, mixed half and half. Hand feeding alfalfa leaves and plain water. Birds are still eating very good but eat very few alfalfa leaves. Put the one bird that was penned separately back with the other three. All get along well together now.

February 2 -

Found one bird dead in pen by the wire and partially eaten. Set traps along outside of wire and caught a great horned owl the next morning.

End of 36th week -

Three birds left.

37th, 38th, 39th and 40th weeks - February 13 - March 12 -

Feeding 20% chicken breeder crumbles and cracked corn. Hand feeding alfalfa leaves and plain water. Birds are eating very good and look healthy. One male is booming every morning and evening since March 2.

41st, 42nd, 43rd, and 44th weeks - March 13 - April 11 -

Feeding 20% chicken breeder crumbles and cracked corn. Giving plain water. The birds are eating green grass and are more active than ever before. The birds are wilder than anytime in the 44 weeks we have had them. Both males are booming morning and evening and sometimes in the daytime.

45th, 46th, 47th and 48th weeks - April 12 - May 8 -

Feeding 20% chicken breeder crumble and cracked corn. Plain water. Also feeding fresh clover. Males are still booming morning and night. Birds are still wild. Female acts as if she wants to build a nest.

April 22, 1958 -

Permission granted Malicky to gather a clutch of pinnated grouse eggs.

49th, 50th, 51st, and 52nd weeks - May 9 - June 6 -

Feeding 20% chicken breeder crumbles and cracked corn. Plain water. Female has a slight depression in shelter and stays in shelter whenever I am around. Checked depression female was using in Shelter on May 29 and found ten eggs. Gathered eggs May 29th.

June 2 -

Found female dead in pen. Posted bird and found small 1/8 inch spots on liver and one growth on inside of back. This growth was 3/4 by 2 inches and the inside was hollow. Male bird is looking very good.

Found the other male prairie chicken dead in pen on June 3. Posted bird but nothing definite noted.

• End of 52nd week -  
One bird left.

May 24 -

Picked up nest from the wild containing fifteen eggs. Hatched May 29 to June 1 in forced air incubator with temperature of 99.5° and humidity of 86 to 88%.

Fifteen birds hatched - one cripple which was killed. Some of birds dancing in box brooder first day.

Started feeding 31% turkey pre-starter, hard boiled eggs, and cottage cheese on first day. Plain water. Put them in box brooder on lawn. Started feeding finely chopped lettuce the third day along with other food. All birds eating and drinking good. Started adding Vit-A-Cin to feed from first day on and have not had any trouble with leg weakness in these birds. The turkey pre-starter has NF180 in it and have had no blackhead so far.

One bird seven days old was stung by bee above the eye. Pulled stinger out. Bird's eye swelled shut and was that way for four days. Started getting better, then eye clouded over and started shrinking. Bird now has only one eye but is as large as other birds.

Started mixing feed drier at two weeks and put in a dish of dry food (turkey pre-starter). Birds eat one-fourth the amount of total feed in dry feed. July 12 -

Found one bird dead in box. Possibly frightened during night and suffocated. Marvin Schwilling posted bird and this was his diagnosis also.

End of 6th week - July 12 -  
Thirteen birds left.

Ten eggs obtained from pair of birds raised last year. Hatched on July 10 in forced air incubator with temperature of 99.5° and humidity of 86 to 88%. Bird had been setting on eggs before we picked them up. Eight birds hatched, two eggs were not fertile.

Feeding same as other prairie chickens and are in box brooder on the lawn. Birds are very active, well feathered, and some of them were dancing on the first day.

End of 5th week - July 15 -  
Eight birds.



Remarks - Have put birds in movable pens on the lawn. Ten birds in one pen and eleven in the other. Pens are 8 x 10 and 10 x 10. These chickens are dancing sooner than the birds did last year and look much better. Quit feeding lettuce at four weeks as birds were eating clover and plantain leaves from lawn. Move all birds once a day to clean ground. Also put in pan of dirt for birds to dust in. Birds are very tame and dance and boom every day. Started making a booming sound when two and one-half weeks old.

Ran out of turkey pre-starter with NF180 in it during fifth week and couldn't get any more. Started feeding 28% turkey starter with Nithiazide in it but birds do not eat it as readily as the pre-starter.

Tried feeding the chickens strawberries and grapes but would not eat them.

7th, 8th, 9th and 10th and 11th weeks - July 13 - August 15 -

Feeding 30% turkey pre-starter with NF180 in it, plain water. Mixing boiled eggs and cottage cheese and clovite with pre-starter. Birds are eating dry feed better every day. Started feeding all dry feed on August 1. One bird had loose droppings so put it in separate pen and treated all birds with NF180. The bird that had loose droppings died on August 6. Upon post-mortem bird found he was in good physical condition and no spots on liver. Crop was full of starter and plantain leaves. No cause was determined for death.

Tried feeding elderberries which the birds ate readily. All birds look better and are in better condition than last year's birds.

End of 11th week -

Twelve birds left.

6th, 7th, 8th, 9th and 10th weeks - July 16 - August 19 (Birds hatched from eggs of previous year's chicken which was raised in captivity)

Feeding birds same as other prairie chickens. Started feeding all dry feed on August 1. One bird had loose droppings on July 28th. Treated all birds with NF180. All birds look very good and active and are in much better condition than last year's birds.

End of 10th week -

Eight birds.

Remarks - Put two pair of birds in pens used last year. One pair to each pen. Divided remaining chickens into two pens of eight birds each. These are in movable pens on the lawn and we move them once a day.

12th, 13th, 14th and 15th weeks - August 16 - September 13 -

Feeding 30% turkey pre-starter with NF180, plain water for the 12th and 13th weeks. 22% Purina game bird grower and adding NF180 in feed, 13th and 14th weeks.

All birds eating well and are in good condition. The birds in movable pens which we observe the closest eat a lot of plantain leaves and are eating more clover leaves every day.

August 21 -

Two birds with loose droppings so we treated all birds with NF180 tablets for two days. All seemed to recover.

September 5 -

Two birds with loose droppings and ruffled feathers. Treated all birds with NF180 for two days. One of the sick birds died September 6 and the other died on September 8.

The NF180 tablets do not seem to work on these birds as they did last year. They act drugged and have no sense of balance. All birds are very wild for the three or four days after treatment.

All birds moulting satisfactorily and are in their second moult. Have not progressed enough to sex them yet.

End of 15th week Ten birds left.

11th, 12th, 13th and 14th weeks - August 20 - September 17

Feeding same as other prairie chickens. Birds are booming every morning and usually in the evening except when they have been treated.

September 1 - One bird with loose droppings so treated all birds with NF180 tablets for two days. All birds fully recovered and are healthy and active.

August 26 -

The one chicken left from last year died. Good condition, fat, and no sign of disease.

Remarks - The NF180 tablets do not seem to have any effect upon these birds if they are listless and have ruffled feathers. Birds usually die within two or three days. If they just have loose droppings, then the tablets appear to cure the birds.

16th, 17th, 18th and 19th weeks - September 14 -  
October 12 -

Feeding Purina game bird grower, 20%, and adding NF180 to it. Plain water. Feeding one apple a day to six birds in the movable pens on the lawn. These eat a great amount of clover and plantain leaves every day. Some of the chickens will not eat apples. Have had no sickness in birds for this four week period. One bird is extremely wild. All birds feathering very good. Some of the birds are still booming occasionally. End of 19th week - October 12

Ten birds left.

15th, 16th, 17th and 18th weeks - September 18 - October 16

Feeding same as other prairie chickens except not feeding apples to some birds. Cannot see any difference in birds that are not getting apples. They appear to be just as healthy. No sickness in these birds for this four week period. All birds eating good and look very healthy.

End of 18th week -

Eight birds left.

20th, 21st, 22nd, and 23rd weeks - October 13 - November 10

Feeding Purina 20% game bird grower, adding NF180 to feed on two days each week. Plain water. Only three chickens will eat apples. The rest will not touch them. October 14 -

One bird dead, no sickness. Bird had been scalped on wire three weeks before. Upon examination, bird showed large pus pocket on brain area where scalped. No other cause of death.

Birds are eating clover and plantain leaves and have shown no sickness for this four week period.

End of 23rd week - November 10 -

Nine birds left.

19th, 20th, 21st, and 22nd weeks - October 17 - November 14

Feeding same as other prairie chickens. Moving pens daily to new grounds. All birds eating good and look healthy.

October 19 -

One bird died. Upon examination, no sign of any disease or cause of death. Bird was not sick and looked healthy.

End of 22nd week - November 14 -

Seven birds left.

24th, 25th, 26th and 27th weeks - November 11 - December 9

Feeding 20% game bird grower and plain water. Moving cages every day and birds are doing very good. They are eating clover leaves regularly. Some of the birds are booming occasionally and some are very wild. No sickness for this four week period.

End of 27th week -

Nine Birds.

23rd, 24th, 25th and 26th weeks - November 15 - December 13 -

Feeding same as other prairie chickens. All birds eating good and look healthy. No sickness for this four week period.

End of 25th week -

Seven birds.

28th, 29th, 30th, and 31st weeks - December 10, 1959 - January 7, 1960 -

Feeding 20% game bird grower and plain water. Moved pens every day until January 1st. Since January 1st have not moved pens because of too much snow. Birds are eating good and look healthy. They do not get any clover leaves to eat now. No sickness for this four week period.

End of 31st week - January 7 -

Nine birds left.

27th, 28th, 29th and 30th week - December 14, 1959  
January 14, 1960 -

Feeding same as other chickens but some birds are still eating apples. Since the snow all chickens dig holes and tunnels in snow to roost in. Snow doesn't bother them at all. Some dig to the ground to eat clover leaves.

End of 30th week - January 14 -

Seven birds left.

32nd, 33rd, 34th and 35th weeks - January 8 - February 5 -

Feeding 20% game bird grower and plain water. Birds are eating good and are in good condition. One sick bird. January 12 -

Gave sick bird 1/3 NF180 pill each day for three days. Bird started recovering January 17 and looked better. Died on January 19 - probably blackhead.

Some birds still very wild, mostly from being scared at night by dogs.

End of 35th week - February 5 -

Eight birds left.

31st, 32nd, 33rd and 34th weeks - January 15 - February 12 (These are the chickens hatched from the eggs laid by the first year's chicken) -

Feeding same as other prairie chickens. Some of the birds still eating apples. All birds healthy and no sickness. Have not been adding any NF180 to feed.

End of 34th week - February 12 -

Seven birds left.

36th, 37th, 38th and 39th weeks - February 6 to March 5

Feeding 20% game bird grower and plain water. All birds healthy and in good condition. No sickness. Some birds starting to boom and are getting aggressive. I have the pairs penned separately and the hens are wild because the cock birds chase them.

End of 39th week - March 5 -

Eight birds left.

35th, 36th, 37th and 38th weeks - February 13 - March 12 -

Feeding 20% game bird grower and plain water. Birds are eating good and the cock birds are aggressive. As soon as weather permits I plan to put wire floors in some of the pens - weather very cold and lots of snow, few warm days.

End of 38th week - March 12 -

Seven birds left.

40th, 41st, 42nd, and 43rd weeks - March 6 to April 10 -

Feeding 20% game bird grower and plain water. All birds healthy and the cocks are booming every day. Some of pens I move to new ground every day. Birds eating a great amount of clover and plantain leaves. All birds are much wilder than usual.

End of 43rd week - April 3 -

Eight birds left.

39th, 40th, 41st and 42nd weeks - March 13 to April 10 -

Feeding same as other prairie chickens. All birds healthy and booming every night and morning and during day if weather is cool. All birds very wild.

March 19 -

- Sold one pair of prairie chickens to Wm. H. Pugh, Racine, Wisconsin.

End of 42nd week - April 10 -

Five birds left.

44th, 45th, 46th and 47th weeks - April 4 - May 2 -  
 Feeding 20% game bird grower and plain water.  
 Birds booming every day and all still very wild. Birds eating a great amount of grass and clover. Something scared the birds on April 29 and one bird is lame and another crippled.

May 2 -

One bird died. Upon posting bird found it was severely injured on the right side and wing and had hemorrhaged internally. All other birds healthy but very wild.

End of 47th week - April 4 -  
 Seven birds left.

43rd, 44th, 45th and 46th weeks - April 11 to May 9 -  
 Feeding same as other prairie chickens.

April 16 -

The one-eyed bird we have is droopy and has loose droppings. Gave bird one-half NF180 pill for three days.

April 19 -

Bird died, cause of death - BLACKHEAD.

All other birds doing fine.

• End of 46th week - May 9  
 Four birds left.

48th, 49th, 50th, and 51st weeks - May 3 - June 1 -  
 Feeding 20% game bird grower and plain water. All birds eating grass, clover, and plantain. One pair of birds started fighting. The hen was severely scalped so separated the birds. The male bird died ten days later - no apparent cause of death. All birds look healthy and no sickness.

None of these birds have laid any eggs and as of May 24th they are moulting heavily so will not get any eggs this season.

End of 51st week - June 1 -  
 Six birds left.

47th, 48th, 49th and 50th weeks - May 20 - June 17 -  
 Feeding same as other prairie chickens. All birds eating good and look healthy. These birds have started to moult and no eggs from them this season.

End of 50th week - June 17 -  
 Four birds left.