

Raising birds no game for Heppner man

Mention chucks or pheasants and most people think of the sport of bird hunting. Mention the birds to Merlin Cantin of Heppner, and it's strictly business.

Merlin is raising game birds for sale to fee hunting ranches, and in the last several months has seen his home-grown business take off like a startled bird on an October morning.

"I decided to raise a few chucks, and maybe sell some to the guys around here," Cantin says while surveying a brooder full of chicks on his ranch nine miles out of Heppner on Hinton Creek.

He advertised the chucks for sale in the newspaper, and sold about 100 to local farmers. Response wasn't overwhelming, and all of a sudden he found himself wondering what to do with 400 unsold birds.

Thinking perhaps he had made a big mistake, Cantin again ran his advertisement, and this time hit pay dirt.

"I put in another ad, and bingo, a woman in Arlington picked it up. She told her father, who runs a hunting ranch in Southern Oregon, and he called me up," recounts Cantin.

Still amazed at the chain of events, Cantin says the rancher took all the birds he had left, and asked for more, much more. "He wants 250 a week, chucks and pheasants."

Cantin has about 300 chucks on hand now, and about 400 more presently incubating. Those, along with several hundred more chicks he has on order, will be raised and sold this year, and then he will begin gearing up to deliver the larger amount for next year's season.

"I really wasn't prepared to handle that many so fast, but I guess I'm in it with both feet," says Cantin eyeing one pen with about 100 six-week-old birds.

Which means he has had to learn the business fast. "I can hatch 400 birds at a time," he says pointing to his home several hundred feet from

where his brooding shed is located. There is no room in the shed so he keeps the incubators in the den of his house. Incubation time is 23 days.

With chucks, Cantin says, he will keep 50 breeding hens and 15 roosters over the winter, and then in May start the birds laying again. "The chucks only lay five months out of the year, and they will lay one egg per day," he says.

Once the birds are hatched, they are transferred to brooders where they are kept for two weeks.

Cantin says his buyer will take the chucks at eight weeks, an age at which fee hunters are assured the birds will fly. "He turns some out every week, and at eight weeks they will fly. They gotta fly," says Cantin.

The hunting ranch where Cantin will sell his birds is located in southern Oregon near Vale, and offers a total package to the hunter. For \$108 per day the hunter gets room and board, a dog, a guide if he wants one, and, of course, good bird hunting. "And there's no bag limit," says Cantin.

In addition to the chucks, Cantin says he also will raise ringneck pheasant. "They're a little harder to handle," he explains, "but I guess I'm into it."

Pheasant must be turned into flying pens when they come out of the brooders, and they must be fitted with spectacles.

Placing the birds into flying pens insures they will fly when released into the wild, and the spectacles, which fit over the nose of the bird, block the view and keep the pheasant from pecking each other.

"They (hunters) want a nice looking bird," Cantin says in explaining the ins and outs of the game bird

business. It is also essential that the birds fly. "If the birds don't fly they aren't much use to 'em," he says.

Cantin may have got into the bird business "with both feet" as he puts it, but those feet seem firmly planted on the ground. He knows there are hazards, as with any venture, in raising birds for sale.

"Feed costs money, my electric bill went up \$40 a month. You've got to be careful," he points out.

The hazards of the business were dramatically demonstrated to him one evening, when he came home and discovered 23 dead birds in the brooder.

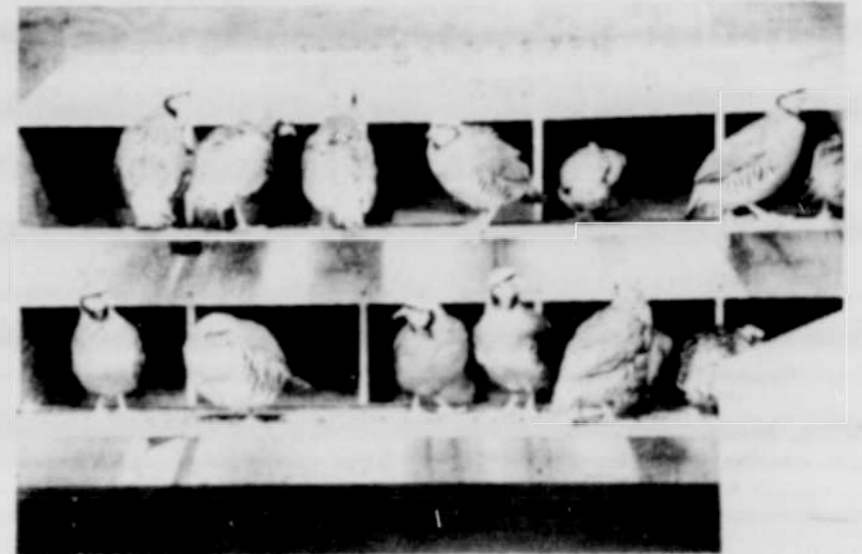
"They huddled," he said. The automatic thermostat on the brooder malfunctioned, the heat did not come on, and the birds piled on top of each other to keep warm. "It doesn't take many of those to take the profit right out of it," Cantin says of the loss.

He also knows of a bird raiser near Mitchell who recently went broke, despite having 4,000 birds.

Speaking on fee hunting, Cantin says he expects some people locally to get into the business, especially when grass on the Conservation Reserve Program land gets taller, making ideal cover for pheasant and chucks. "I understand one guy is really looking hard at going into it in a big way."

Cantin is the first to admit he doesn't know everything about raising game birds, and is still learning. For example he found that a special game bird food he bought was too big and had to be ground down before the birds could get it.

Also, in November he is making a trip to California, where he will learn how to sex the birds. "I keep learning, picking up a little here, and a little there," he says.



Chucks are getting big, and are almost ready to be turned out for hunting.



Merlin Cantin of Heppner shows brooder in which game birds are kept after hatching. Cantin has started a new business, raising chucks and pheasant on his ranch on Hinton Creek.

Log Bucking contest added to fair

A new "Log Bucking Contest" has been added to the Sunday August 23 Morrow County Fair and Rodeo Schedule. The log contest will take place on the Little League field at the fairgrounds from 10 a.m. until noon. The logging crews that have heard about the contest are very enthusiastic about entering.

A purse of over \$500, has been donated by the logging industry. The Morrow County Fair and Rodeo Board will sweeten the pot with an

additional \$100. A \$5 entry fee charged each contestant also will be added to the purse. The contest will pay awards to the first four places in the contest.

Those wishing to enter the contest may do so by calling Marlene Curran, fair secretary, at the Fair Office, 676-9474 before 5 p.m. August 22.

The Fair rules for the contest allow only stock saws. No modified chainsaws will be permitted in the contest. The contest is a timed event with timers provided by the fair.

"We look for a lot of interest in this new event and we hope the bleachers will be packed with spectators," says the fair secretary.

Laundry only casualty in fire

Cause of a Thursday evening fire at the laundromat in Heppner is undetermined, Heppner Fire Chief

Forrie Burkenbine said. The fire department was called when a dryer full of towels and aprons caught fire and began to fill the room with smoke. The load of laundry was unsalvageable, he said, but neither the dryer nor the building was damaged.

The fire department used its special fans to remove smoke from the building.

All the dryers were in perfect working order Friday morning when Heppner Nor-Gas checked them at length, the fire chief said.

Wins trivia contest

Marion McMillan was last week's winner of the Charlie's Pizza/Heppner Gazette-Times trivia contest.

Marion correctly answered that the character who played Wally Cleaver in the old "Leave it to Beaver" series was Tony Dow.

Marion has won a large pizza and pitcher of pop at either Charlie's Pizza in Heppner or Hermiston.

You have a chance to win a pizza too, but you must enter. This week's question is: What was the date of the first manned landing on the moon?

If you think you know the answer just use the entry blank in this week's paper, or pick up an entry blank at either Charlie's Pizza in Heppner, or the Heppner Gazette-Times.

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The Morrow County Grain Growers will hold a weekly drawing for one family ticket for the Pendleton Roundup. Drawings are scheduled for August 7, 14, 21, and 28. Fill out entry blank at right; bring or mail into Morrow County Grain Growers in Lexington.

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