



Inside one of the enclosures he raises pheasants in outside Atwood, Brad Leitner walked through the natural habitat. — Photo by Kimberly Davis/The Oberlin Herald

# Birds thrive in until released for

By Kimberly Davis

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Large black netting covers the pens filled with ringneck pheasants, quail and chucker partridges.

The birds live in their natural habitat at Beaver Creek Gamebirds, with weeds of all kinds growing inside the 14 pens which stretch across Brad and Mandy Leitner's land five miles west of Atwood and southwest of U.S. 36 by a few miles.

Last year, said Leitner, he released 100 10-week-old pheasant roosters with gold bands on their legs in August. Then the Friday before hunting season, he said, he released 50 adult roosters with green bands.

The bands had a phone number on them for the hunters to call. The hunters who shoot one of the banded birds were then entered in a chance to win a prize.

During pheasant season in 2007, he said, 30 percent of the birds released were shot. Not all of the birds were harvested, he added, and some fell prey to predators and vehicles.

Raising and releasing birds does work to increase populations, said Leitner.

The pheasants are raised here, they have natural instincts, living in the native habitat

and know how to fly, said Leitner. These birds have native genetics. They are the same birds as the wild ones.

Leitner said he used to be a teacher, but when the school he worked at shut down, he tried his hand at raising birds.

At first, he said, he started out with incubators in his garage in Atwood. That was back in 1996. Then in 1998, the couple moved out to the land. Since then, he said, the business has grown.

In March, said Leitner, they start picking up eggs out of the enclosures. From the beginning of April to the middle of August, the incubators are full every week. Each incubator holds 20,000 eggs, said Leitner. About 75 to 80 percent of them hatch.

The chicks are then boxed up on Tuesday and delivered to customers. A small percentage are mailed.

Some of the chicks are kept in the brooder house with food, water and heat. They are pretty delicate for the first several weeks, he said.

Once the birds are older, said Leitner, they are moved into an outside pen.

He said he's released birds into the wild as early as six to seven weeks, but it seems twice as many of the younger birds were shot. It seems that a good age is 10 weeks, he said. The birds are just a little more mature.



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