

## Pheasant courtship and mating

Courtship season for pheasants is a noisy and colorful time of year. It occurs in early spring and typically lasts for several weeks. During this time male pheasants show increased aggression toward one another and distribute themselves throughout the habitat range into relatively small territories within which they remain for the duration of the courtship season. During this time females move freely within the entire habitat range and encounter many males. Sexually mature males, upon seeing a female, will begin a series of mating displays. Two characteristics of the male mating display are called waltzing and wing-flapping. In the waltzing display the male presents one wing by lowering it as he advances past or around his partner. The wing-flapping courtship display involves the male holding the head and body in a vertical position while noisily flapping his wings in short repeated bursts. If the female is receptive to mating with a male she will assume a crouched posture as the male displays.

Females only respond to a small fraction of male courtship displays. During the courtship season females generally spend more time in the territories of males with bright plumage than in the territories of males with less brightly colored plumage (including juvenile males). Almost all mature females mate during every breeding season. They usually assemble in breeding groups focused on a single male and his territory. On the other hand, only a fraction of males successfully mate during a particular year. The graph below shows how many offspring the males in one population fathered in one year.

