

PHEASANT OPENER | SATURDAY STAR TRIBUNE OCT 9 '05

Lawmaker was for the birds

Charlie (Chuck) Davis is one of the people responsible for the revival of the Minnesota pheasant population.

What's amazing in the autumn of 2005 is not that another Minnesota pheasant season is set to open Saturday.

No, what's amazing is that Minnesota is holding a pheasant season that includes a rather robust forecast for good bird hunting.

Simply amazing.

Thirty-plus years ago I wrote a story about a rooster ringneck pheasant spotted along Hwy. 14

near Waseca, Minn.

A pheasant was a rare sight in those days.

Even a dead ringneck, which this one was.

Cause of death? I wondered.

Probably loneliness.

And now, it seems, Minnesota's pheasants have come back from the dead.

The rise of ringnecks is attributed to many factors, the major one being the federal farm pro-



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gram, turning millions of acres of corn and soybeans into grasslands where ringnecks flourish.

SCHARA continues on C19:
— Legislator fought to protect bird's habitat in state.

SCHARA from C20

Thank Davis for helping pheasants

Add Minnesota's CREP program, idling more land, and the rush of ringnecks flies higher.

Now, include the work of Minnesota's Pheasants Forever and other individuals, farmers and the like — each adding what they can to further the ringneck cause and, well, ... decades later the story is simply amazing.

And while we're all giddy over our pheasant fortunes, let's pause a moment and remember a Minnesota legislator, Charlie (Chuck) Davis.

In 1984, Davis led a campaign in Minnesota to improve the state's road ditches for wildlife.

To Davis, it was just common-sense stuff.

Davis was a Milaca farmer and a Princeton vo-ag teacher

who wondered why Minnesota was spending millions of tax dollars to mow miles and miles of road ditches. He also didn't like the answers.

Mow for safety. Why not only at intersections?

Weed control. A weak argument?

Snow control. Worth the price?

In the meantime, the Department of Natural Resources showed Davis the importance of road ditches as nesting habitat for song birds and hen pheasants. A DNR study showed that some 40 species of wildlife utilized roadsides for habitat.

At that time, the only extensive undisturbed grasslands remaining in Minnesota were the road ditches, roughly 76,000 miles of ditches, amounting to 525,000 acres of potential wildlife habitat.

And it was all being mowed.

One day, Davis was driving along Hwy. 169 and Hwy. 10 — his route from home to the Capitol — when he noticed a billboard message from Pheasants Forever in support of de-

layed mowing of roadsides.

Under the billboard, a MnDOT tractor was busily mowing.

"I thought that was a little ridiculous," Davis recalled.

At that moment, Davis was to become a hero to pheasant hunters, bird watchers and admirers of native prairie flowers.

The lawmaker pushed until it passed legislation that delayed ditch mowing by state, county or township crews until Aug. 1 each year.

In 1991, Davis also was a principal author of Minnesota's Wetland Conservation Act, a law that further preserved wildlife habitat required of pheasants. He retired from the Legislature the next year.

On Dec. 23, 2004, Davis, at age 59, was killed in a car accident.

If the pheasant prognosticators are correct — if Minnesota has a ringneck romp this fall — this one's for you, Chuck.

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