

**Tips on Prevention of Cannibalism in Pheasants**  
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Feather pulling or cannibalism in game birds reared in captivity is a very real problem, but can be controlled if a couple of things are remembered. Nearly all feather pulling, or worse, starts from the birds being too crowded, which puts them into a stressed condition. Stuffy, poorly ventilated brooder spaces will also contribute to a cannibalism outbreak.

**How Do I Stop Cannibalism?**

If cannibalism should start - you must STOP it in its early stages or your entire project will be for nothing. Birds released with critical feathers missing, especially the back and head feathers, will not get past the first hard rain, particularly if it is a cold rain.

If the problem starts, darken the brooder area by covering windows and doors. Leave only enough light for the birds to find feeders and waters, but not necessarily each other. Try hanging full heads of lettuce with a spike driven thru the center tied to a rafter or something so it will swing freely thus attracting the chicks out of curiosity and they will enjoy eating the greenery. Perhaps they'll leave their neighbor alone then. Give them more room, even if you have to move half of them to another area. If all this fails, and you will know within a day or two, there are two methods to that address this issue.

The most common solution is to apply **rubber hoods** or plastic blinders to the birds at around 5 weeks of age. About a week prior to putting the hoods on, use electrolytes in the water to give the birds some extra energy to endure the stress. You should also put extra water and feed out for them and keep that out for a while after the hoods have been applied. Keeping the lights on in the brooder building the night before hooding will give them ample time to drink and eat. When ready to apply the hoods, insert the plastic pin through one hole in the hood (depends on if you are left or right handed which hole will be more comfortable for you). Position the hood on the top of the beak. Push the pin through the nostril hole and into opposite hole of the hood so that barb of the pin is past the nostril and through the hood. If applied correctly, the hood will stand up on its own. The hood should not drop forward or droop off to the side of the beak. Keep an eye on the birds for a couple days after application. Make sure they are in a warm, dry environment to minimize stress.

You can also **de-beak** the birds if rubber hoods are not an option. Each and every one of them must be de-beaked or it will do no good. This process is very critical, especially in view of the birds being groomed for release. This is true because the young birds will need a full beak for plucking and cracking weed seed and grains, also for catching insects. Here is how you do it: if you have access to an electric de-beaker, use that. If not, a heavy duty toenail clipper will work. Snip just enough of the top beak only, to the point of it turning pink. DO NOT cut it so severely that gross bleeding takes place. You may damage the nerve endings of the beak if too much is taken, to the point of it never growing back. In any event, have a cauterizing agent available, such as silver nitrate, to stop any bleeding that occurs. De-beaking young pheasants is an art; too little taken off will not deter the problem and, of course, too much will stunt the re-growth of the beak. Go slow until you get the hang of it. Catch them one at a time and as you finish one bird, put it in an area apart from the others. This will ensure that you get them all done. The

disadvantage of de-beaking is that it is only temporary and will need to be repeated as the beaks for grow back.

The best advice on the entire subject of cannibalism is DON'T LET IT START! One last point is this: Pheasants will almost always start feather pulling on the back area, a very subtle process, hard to spot with an untrained eye because of the wings folding over and covering the back area. Periodically, catch several birds, separate the wings and examine the back area for feather pulling. This should be done initially at about two weeks of age. Upon checking there should be a single row of small feathers running down the center of the back just under where the wings fold over. If it is missing or partially missing, the birds are feather pulling and you best do something right now. If you let it go any further, you will be forced into the de-beaking process and that's a whole lot more work - not to mention the additional damage that will be done.