

## The Silver Bell

Every morning I open the kitchen door and start ringing a silver bell. There are two beady eyes watching me as I walk out from the porch; the ringing of the bell is my announcement because I know the object of interest is the cup of grains or "scratch" I am carrying in my hand. At this sound a Chinese Pheasant peaks his beaky head up from the tall dead grass of last season, I can see the white ring of his neck while I walk up to the almost ground level stump and scatter the contents out on the surface.

I am also being watched by the Morning Doves high in the nearby cottonwood tree. This is one of the daily events the wildfowl await with some apparent anticipation. Once all is well scattered, I resume ringing the bell on my return to the porch and go into the house, it is not long to wait at the window because the pheasant will begin to come out from behind his hedgerow. At first he tries to saunter nonchalantly toward the stump, but as soon as he gets closer he runs; seeing all the grits and grains spread out for him is just too tempting to resist. He hops up on the stump like king of the hill and begins feeding with furtive glances in case of intruders. The morning doves wait above in the tree.

This has been a ritual since the first snow fall of winter, and has continued as the season turns toward spring. It is my understanding that pheasants usually live about a year, so this fellow is doing quite well for himself. He is robust and thriving and has claimed this area of my yard and the adjoining field as his territory. Learning more of his life I realize he is "nesting" and will try to find a mate. The other day another pheasant came to challenge him. What a show that was as they faced off in the field beyond our yard. They would jump up in the air at each other, then bob their heads up and down and parade around. Finally he ran the other one off and returned to patrol his hedgerow. It's Valentine's Day tomorrow and he is looking for love.

