



# Local Harvest

Foodlink Waterloo Region • Issue 35 • February 2009

## Features

Local Business Profile:  
Tanjo Gamebirds

Fresh in Focus:  
Fair Game: The Story  
of Partridge

A Game Bird Primer



**FOODLINK**  
P.O. Box 601  
Ag. Centre  
St. Jacobs Farmers  
Market Complex  
St. Jacobs, ON  
NOB 2N0  
519-513-8998

[www.foodlink.ca](http://www.foodlink.ca)

**Local Harvest  
content, layout and  
editing:**

Anna Contini

Carmen Everest-Wahl

Wendy Koch

## Local Business Profile: Tanjo Gamebirds

In southern Ontario a small but growing number of farmers are *taking a walk on the wild side* and trying their hand at raising game birds such as pheasants, quail, partridge and guinea fowl. Some are lured by their stunning plumage and fascinating nature while others are attracted by niche markets such as upscale restaurants, hunting preserves and ethnic consumers. Here in Waterloo Region raising game birds is still somewhat of a rarity. In fact **Tanjo Gamebirds**, owned by John and Tanya Gerber, is the sole farm in Waterloo Region that offers locally-raised Hungarian Partridge from “start to finish”.

Tanjo is located on a 100-acre farm on Lichty Road just east of Millbank. John Gerber began raising partridge as a hobby in 2001 starting with just eight breeding pairs. He was exposed to game birds because his brother Wayne had been raising *Chukar* Partridge for almost twenty years. Wayne acquired some Hungarian Partridge eggs from the US, but in the end didn't have enough time to devote to this new breed which carried its own set of unique challenges. John, meanwhile, was looking to diversify from his hog operation since the market had recently begun to suffer.

John gradually learned all there was to know about how to raise these beautiful but challenging birds. Because they are not domesticated, raising game birds in captivity takes special expertise. They require plenty of space, specially-designed housing, and conditions that are just right. Hungarian partridge can be aggressive, making feather picking and cannibalism serious issues, explains John. To combat the problem he



*John & Tanya Gerber with their son Neil on their partridge farm near Millbank.*

inserts a small plastic device in the beaks of the birds when they are just 2 ½ weeks old. While Hungarian Partridge tend to be a little more high strung than other game birds, they are hardy compared to *Chukar* Partridge which are more susceptible to disease.

Today the Tanjo flock has climbed to 295 pairs. While the Gerber's continue with their hog farming, the partridge have become the focal point. From March to July their breeding flock is housed in outdoor cages of eight square feet per pair. Each day they collect the eggs to be incubated. After 25 days of incubation the tiny chicks hatch and are placed under propane brooders where they are carefully hand-tended. Interestingly, only 60% of the eggs hatch.

The young chicks are extremely temperature



Local Business Profile continued

sensitive, explains John. “If they are too cold, they pile on top on one another and the bottom ones get crushed, but if they are too hot, they jump in water and can drown or become hypothermic.” As the chicks grow they are given more space and moved to large free-range outdoor pens when they are six weeks old. By this time they can already fly quite well but generally only do so when they sense danger.



Tanjo’s partridges are housed in large free-range pens.

The partridge are fed a whole grain based diet which is purchased from *Yantzi’s Feed and Seed* in Tavistock. When they reach maturity at approximately four months they are taken to a provincially-inspected abattoir near Elmira to be dressed. So, while the life of a Hungarian Partridge at Tanjo’s is a relatively short one, it is indeed a good one.

Last year John became more serious about marketing the specialty birds for their meat. Although the lion’s share of his market continues to be hunting preserves, a growing number of partridge are being sold to hobby farmers, restaurants and consumers. Tanjo sells fresh or frozen birds in any quantity directly from their farm and provides delivery on orders of 25 birds or more. In addition, they sell their partridge eggs and also raise ducks for other farmers during the summer months when space permits.

Recently a couple of area restaurants, known for serving local food, have featured Tanjo’s Hungarian Partridge on their menus. This past fall *Artbar*, a contemporary bistro located in the K-W Art Gallery, debuted the specialty game birds as part of their Tuesday evening wine classes. Chef Ryan Murphy deboned the partridges and stuffed them with a bread, bacon and cranberry dressing. He made a flavourful stock from the giblets and

served the dish with local vegetables and a Pinotage wine. Not surprisingly the evening was a resounding success.

**Charbries** in uptown Waterloo also featured Hungarian Partridge on their menu this past holiday season. Chef Lance Edwards, who is known for sourcing food from local farms and showcasing the exotic, was in his element with this game bird. He stuffed the partridge with wild boar and red rice. “The special completely sold out,” recounts Lance.

Both chefs admit that while the relative high cost of partridge prohibits them from making it a regular menu offering,

it is perfect for special occasions and features. Watch for the return of Hungarian Partridge at *Artbar* and *Charbries* and don’t be surprised if you see it cropping up at other area restaurants.

If you are seeking a unique local food experience another option is to purchase your own partridge directly from Tanjo. They are very versatile and easy to prepare, says Tanya who passed on one of her recipes for this newsletter (see page 4).

John recognizes the importance of marketing these specialty birds and introducing people to this new taste experience. This past fall he attended Taste of Wellesley and passed out samples of his grilled partridge. Many folks came back for seconds of the delectable morsels!

If you haven’t already, *savour the flavour* of Hungarian Partridge raised from start to finish right here in our own backyard.

*Tanjo Gamebirds is located at 2468 Lichty Road in the Township of Wellesley. John and Tanya Gerber can be reached at 519-698-2407. Please call ahead to ensure availability of birds. ♦*

## A Game Bird Primer

### Pheasants

Pheasants are relatively large birds that can be raised for hunting or meat. Meat birds are sold primarily to European-style restaurants, where they are often served as quarters or halves. Pheasant is high in protein, providing more ounce for ounce than pork, lamb, or beef.

### Quail

The two most common types of quail are Japanese and bobwhite. Both are small birds that can be raised for meat, hunting, or their eggs, which are a delicacy in many parts of the world.

### Partridge

Partridges are medium-sized birds, smaller than a pheasant but larger than a quail. While several breeds are available, chukars are a popular choice because of their docility. Partridges are raised mainly for hunting, as well as restocking birds in the wild, although a small restaurant market exists.

### Squab (young pigeons)

The mildly flavoured, tender meat of young pigeons is considered a delicacy in many European, Asian, and Middle Eastern cuisines. Squab are fed by their parents and slaughtered at about four weeks, before they leave the nest. In North America, they are sold primarily to the restaurant trade.

### Guinea fowl

Roughly the size of a broiler chicken, guinea fowl are raised primarily for their dark, delicate meat. They can be raised in broiler conditions or as free range birds if you provide some shelter. Beware—guinea fowl can be notoriously noisy birds, liable to shriek at the smallest disturbance.



## Fair Game: The Story of Partridge

One man's partridge is another man's grouse...or is it one woman's quail is another woman's ptarmigan? When it comes right down to it, birds of the pheasant family (Phasianidae), which include the aforementioned varieties as well as pheasant, are among the most confusing group of wild birds to accurately identify.

The Phasianids occur on every continent except Antarctica. Quail and grouse are indigenous to North America, while their cousins, the pheasant and partridge, are found throughout northern Africa, Eurasia, and Australasia. However, since pheasants and partridges were brought along with the colonists to the New World, our forests and fields are now alive with dozens of varieties of these terrestrial birds.

Early hunter gatherers would have found these birds to be a rather easy catch and a decent source of protein. Later on, farming communities learned to domesticate some species and to supplement their diet with the nutritionally-rich eggs. Few birds have had such a long relationship with people as the Phasianids, but their own history is even older. Fossils show that an ancestor species dates back to the Eocene period (50 to 60 million years ago) when northern latitudes were tropical.

Grouse were likely the first species to have evolved from this early ancestor. Grouse differ from the rest of the pheasant family in a number of ways: feathered nostrils; feathery (not scaly) ankles without spurs; feathered toes (in most species); and, often the presence of a bright coloured comb above the eye. Most, if not all, of these differences appear to be adaptations to the cold climate and heavy snow conditions in which these birds live. Ptarmigan are a type of grouse, found in arctic or high-latitude forests and scrubland, that are particularly well adapted to a bitter cold climate.

The evolutionary line of the early Phasianid ancestor then split into three different directions, giving rise to quail, pheasants and partridges. Quail is a collective name for several kinds of mid-sized birds that are similar in appearance and behaviour, but not necessarily within the pheasant family. While partridge and pheasant are somewhat similar in appearance, the latter is larger and often more colourful. There is relatively little geographic overlap between the different families of birds. This is not surprising given that these sedentary birds move only a few miles from where they hatched.

Partridge farming is gaining a foothold across the country. While there are dozens of partridge types around the world, the two main partridges commonly found in Canada are the Chukar and Hungarian (or Gray). The Hungarian partridge has been highly valued as a game bird for centuries and its feathers are often used to create fly fishing lures. The Chukar on the other hand is more charismatic in



*A bird in the hand: Because Hungarian partridge can be aggressive a small plastic device is inserted into their beaks.*

appearance, with boldly coloured feathers that were once highly sought after for hat decorations.

At maturity, Hungarian partridges measure between 12 and 14 inches (30 to 35 centimetres) in length. They are round in shape with short tails. As their alternate name would indicate, Hungarian partridges are mainly gray, although their faces have rusty colouration and they have chestnut brown banding over their sides. The plumage is not uniformly coloured but has many markings and variations of well-defined black, brown, or gray.

In the wild, Hungarian partridges are rather solitary birds, keeping to meadows of high grasses or the edge of a deciduous forest. Farmland provides a relatively safe habitat for these foragers of seeds, grains, and insects. Hungarian partridges usually scrape out shallow, grass-lined nests in dense undergrowth or amongst cereal crops. Females bob their heads at courting males, who puff up their chests and feathers and move their tails rapidly in up and down motions. An average clutch contains between 12 and 18 eggs that will begin to incubate only after the last egg is deposited. After 21 to 26 days,



creative dining and wines

*Exceptional Cuisine,  
Artfully Prepared,  
And Presented*

*Weekday Lunches  
Dinners and Late Nights  
Caterings, Private Functions  
Cooking and Wine Classes*

*Call to reserve or enquire 519-568-8660*

[www.artbar.ca](http://www.artbar.ca)

*101 Queen St N, Kitchener, Centre in the Square*



10 king st west  
kitchener  
mon 8-2  
tue to sat 8-8  
sun 10-5  
519 568 8688



**exhibit**  
CAFÉ • LOUNGE

extended hours  
DJs fridays  
live music  
saturdays  
catering  
and events

fresh. local. organic.

our ingredients are supplied by hilltop acres  
pfennings monforte millbank cheese fertile  
ground csa waterloo coffee company grain  
harvest golden hearth vege hut and other  
fine growers and processors.

Continued from page 3

the eggs hatch. Young Hungarian partridges are usually full grown by the time they are three or four months old, and can attempt flight as early as one to two weeks of age. Mortality rates are high, and even though most young partridges spend their first winter with their parents, only about eight birds of the entire clutch will survive to leave their parents the following spring.

If you've never seen a partridge in the forest or in meadow, but have come across them early in the morning as you round the corner on a country road, there is a good reason. The gizzard of these birds is very strong and is used to grind down the hard exterior of seeds and nuts. In order to aid digestion, these birds regularly swallow small stones. An early visit to a well endowed source of gravel and grit on these back country roads gets the day off to a good start for these well adapted members of the pheasant family.

The Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) reports that in 2007 the following number of Phasianids was processed in provincially inspected slaughterhouses: quail (1.3 million), pheasants (3,000), and partridges (35,000). While the number of quail and partridges available to the market has doubled over the past 10 years, the number of pheasants has declined by a factor of three. ♦

## DID YOU KNOW?

- There are over 47 different types of partridges, each with their own distinctive call
- The Chukar Partridge is the national bird of Pakistan

## Hungarian Huns

*Here's one of Tanya and John's favourite recipes for Hungarian Partridge. It is simple and uses lots of other local ingredients such as bacon, cabbage and apple.*

### What you will need:

- 8 slices bacon, cut up
- ¾ cup all purpose flour
- 1 tbsp paprika
- 3 or 4 Hungarian partridge
- ¼ cup partridge or chicken broth
- 3 tbsp cider vinegar
- 1 small head green cabbage, coarsely chopped
- 1 apple, cored and cut into ½ inch cubes
- ½ tsp caraway seed
- ½ tsp salt
- ⅛ tsp pepper

### Method:

Cook bacon until crisp in large fry pan or Dutch oven; reserve 3 tbsp bacon fat.

Combine flour and paprika in a bag; shake to mix.

Add partridge one at a time; shake to coat.

Brown on all sides in bacon fat.

Add remainder of ingredients and toss together.

Reduce heat; cover and simmer about 1 hour stirring occasionally.

Alternatively, covered dish can be baked inside oven at 325 for 45-60 minutes. *Makes 4-6 servings*

