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Musem Project

When you look at this Ring-Necked Pheasant, you see an immigrant turned migrant. This bird of many colors is today found in the grasslands of North America after being brought from Eastern Asia in the early 1800s. Climate change has implicated this resilient creature by changing its habitat in unsuitable ways for the species, causing a decline in their population which damages the mythos surrounding it.

In examining the bird's habitat, I found that climate change is greatly affecting the balance that occurs in the pheasant's wild home. The more frequent and intense hot dry summers, provided by global warming, do not allow for many regular grasses and ground cover to grow. The lack of amicable summers is leaving grasslands barren. Pheasants are a bird that reside in the waves of grass that cover the prairies of the United States. The summer heat is not the exact phenomena that is killing off the bird, but the severity of the winters that follow is. The pheasant does not migrate to avoid the cold like most birds. Instead, the pheasants must simply stay five degrees warmer than their environment and they will survive. They do this by staying amongst the plentiful cover of grass. Now the scorching summer's heat has affected the pheasant by allowing for less ground cover to grow. Without a lush crop of groundcover grown in the summer, it leaves no place for the pheasants to survive in the winter. Furthermore, the increasingly intense winters are covering the ground in snow for longer. The nesting season for this fowl in the spring cannot take place as well in this cold climate. Baby chicks cannot self-

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regulate heat until three weeks old, causing a larger amount of newly hatched pheasants to die than normally would. The virulent temperature changes that have occurred due to climate change have decreased the pheasant's chance at survival.

These birds that are scattered over the United States have become migrants as they move to find areas with milder temperatures. Because of the similarity between their native habitat's environment and parts of the United States, the Ring-Necked Pheasant was introduced to the American west, beginning in Oregon. From that they were introduced to Idaho, immigrating directly from India and China (their native home) to Idaho. The Ring-Necked Pheasant is indicative of many immigrant families that traveled to the U.S. during the 1800s. This bird is intertwined with our history as a nation and without it a piece of the American immigrant's story is lost. This bird is representative of the resilience found by these immigrant families as they survived the "harsh winters" of assimilating to a new culture. This bird has thrived in parts of the western United States and it has migrated to the Great Plains. Because of the implications of climate, the birds are having to migrate again inside the country, attempting to settle in an area with milder temperatures to live. As climate change progresses the seasons become more violent, leaving behind the mild temperatures of the past and leaving the ring-necked pheasant with them.

This traditional symbol of immortality is dying. As their natural home is in India and China, the Buddhists were exposed to this species initially. Through observing their peculiar habit, they began to see the Ring-Necked Pheasant as a bird that signifies a great resilience and immortality. This strong bird does not migrate in the winters as others do to escape the cold. Instead, they brave it and survive, which earned them the title of immortal amongst many cultures. Greek generals would have two pheasants adorn the tops of their staff, using their symbolism to inspire and protect as they planned for battle. [The irony is not lost on me.] The implications of this bird are intrinsically linked to their almost unnatural ability to survive, yet

Commented [MT2]: I love this irony between what the pheasant symbolizes and what is happening to it because of climate change. Because you do such a good job pointing this out in this paragraph, I wonder if this sentence is completely necessary?

climate change threatens the credibility behind this mythos, weakening its meaning to these cultures.

I find some solace in this bird. It is extremely resilient, and I find that my own family shares that quality. Maybe that is why we were so inclined to raise them, or maybe it is simply because they are “good eats” and a rewarding hunt. Nevertheless, they became a source of income for my family for around 30 years. Even within confinement these birds were being affected by the weather, causing us to have to change the way we raise and keep these birds to increase survival. The climate crisis has not only affected the birds in their wild homes, but in their curated human-controlled habitats as well.

Regardless, this bird and its iconography has great importance to many cultures around the world and has a special place in the homes of the Fremd family. The climate crisis is causing this great symbol to falter. Because of its inability to stay warm in the winters and for the newborn birds to survive in colder springs, there is a decline in their population in the natural realm. The bird must migrate out of its newfound home to find milder temperatures, thus turning this immigrant into a restless migrant moving throughout the plains and the western United States, attempting to find a place to call home before a chilling death is at their “immortal” doorstep.

Work Cited