

# THE PRAIRIE CHICKEN, OR SHARPTAILED GROUSE.

(*Pedioecetes Phasianellus*). (Baird).

BY ERNEST E. T. SETON.

For brevity I may describe it as a *grouse*, mottled above and white below, pretty much like all the family, but *unlike* in having the tail feathers very stiff and so short that the upper coverts ending in a point project beyond the quill feathers. Hence the name "Sharptail," or more commonly "Pintail," though throughout this country it is most known as the "Prairie Chicken."

To avoid that most tedious and thankless task, a detailed verbal description, I forward herewith a stuffed specimen, a female, but there is little difference between the sexes. The males have bright yellow bare skin over the eye (not *red*, as say Wilson and Audubon), and on each side of the neck a bare airsac, blue, and about the size of a pigeon's egg. These connect with the mouth, for they can be inflated by blowing down the throat. When the bird is quiescent they are merely sunk under the surrounding feathers, which are not in any way specially developed to hide them, as in the Ruffed and Pinnated Grouse. In the breeding season they are in a state of chronic inflation and brilliancy.

The females differ only in having their bare skin ornamentations much less (not absent, as I have seen stated). The young of both sexes are indistinguishable from the female or the male in non-breeding season, except that they are a little smaller, and have the hair-like feathers on the feet shorter and more marked with dusky.

In the feathering of the legs this grouse comes just between the Ruffed Grouse of the South and the Ptarmigan of the North, as does the bird itself geographically. The feathering stops at the base of the toes, but by reason of its length the toes are half hidden.

Their toes, as in all grouse, are notably pectinated. Not having heard of any use for these combs, I append a few observations. In