

## Translocation Boosts Dwindling Population

By Rick Baxter and Dr. Jerran Flinders,  
Brigham Young University



Rick carefully puts a Parker Mountain hen in a transport box.

The Strawberry Valley Greater Sage-grouse population has experienced a  $\geq 97\%$  decline in the past 65 years. An ongoing study, started in 1998, has revealed many of the limiting factors affecting the population. In an effort to reverse the downward trend and to recover the population, we translocated 38, 34, and 70 female sage-grouse to the Strawberry Valley in 2003, 2004, and 2005, respectively. Sage-grouse were trapped in the spring on and around leks on Parker Mountain in south-central Utah and from Diamond Mountain in northeastern Utah. Sage-grouse were transported overnight to the Strawberry Valley and were released by opening the

boxes in live sagebrush at the edge of the only known active lek in the valley in order to provide them with visual breeding cues and the opportunity to intermix with actively strutting resident grouse. To date, no mortalities have occurred during the capture, transport, or release phase of the translocations. Cooperation and collaboration among researchers and Local Sage-grouse Working Groups (i.e., PARM, UBARM, and SVARM), state and federal agencies, and many volunteers was key to a smooth translocation process. Preliminary results show exceptional survival, nest initiation, nest success, and overall growth of the population. Pre-translocation population estimates were 100-120 birds, and our current population estimate, just three years later, is 300-350 birds.