Edwardian sterling silver partridge hen

John George Smith

£2,550



REF: 9560

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Height: 178 mm (7.01")

Width: 150 mm (5.91")

Weight: 482 g

Description

This charming sterling silver model of a partridge hen was made in Germany for the UK market. John George Smith imported the game bird which bears London import hallmarks for 1903. It is attributed to Berthold Müller, one of the greatest and most famous animal and bird model makers and this is a fine example of his work. The feather detail is nicely hand-chased and the model has a removable head and hinged wings; features often seen on the original antique examples.

The head of the partridge is detachable which is common for animal models of this age. During the late 19th century a thriving industry had built up in Germany and Holland, making silver models for the British market. From traditional game birds to knights in armour and nefs (model ships on wheels). These models were made in sterling silver (925) and each imported piece was usually sent to a UK assay office to be tested and stamped with import hallmarks.

During this period, a minor trade war broke out in Europe with England imposing a tax on luxury goods, including silver models. To legally avoid this punitive tax, enterprising workshops in Germany and Holland adapted their designs of animals, ships and birds, making them into vessels. Ships were made into two parts, hull and deck with masts and rigging; while birds and animals had removable heads. Suddenly they were no longer considered just luxury items, they were functional. This ploy persisted into the early 20th century, when the tax was removed.