

Pheasant hunting tips

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Pheasant Hunting... what do we need to take?

Long handles	Boots, Pac boots in case of wet or mud
Brush pants	Dog, water, chair, food, whistle
Hotel reservations	Orange vest, hat
Shotgun	Gloves
Shells	Face mask
Rain gear	Permission
Game Vest, some Blaze Orange	Maps, telephone numbers
First aid kit	Thermos, coffee pot
Putty knife	Plastic Bags for cleaned pheasant
Snacks	Bottles water field cleaning birds
Game shears cleaning birds	Ice chest for beer and cleaned birds
Shooting glasses yellow and dark	Hat, hooded sweat shirt Blaze orange

Ring-necked pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*

Nothing much raises adrenaline quite like the rush of sound and activity of a flushed pheasant. There is nothing to replace an hour of quietly walking through a field along windbreaks with your dog sniffing and searching for just that certain scent followed by a few seconds of explosive excitement.

The ringneck's distinct coloring and pounding flight when flushed provide a challenging target. Instant decisions, quick reflexes, and accurate aim are skills necessary to bring home the meat and to have a successful hunt.

Historians record the first ring-necked pheasants released in North America during the late 1800s, but large numbers were not released until the 1910s and 1920s. The population rose to its highest point in the 1950s and since then has declined sharply. Wild pheasants adapt to agricultural land if farming is not too intensive. Unfortunately, the wide fencerows and barrow ditches that formerly provided good pheasant nesting and escape cover have all but been eliminated or reduced to narrow strips as farmers maximize production. Federal farm subsidies reduced the amount of idle or fallow lands by rewarding farmers for producing

more crop. Weedy cornfields pheasants used for food and cover have been reduced due to greater use of more effective herbicides.

My first trip to SW Kansas was in 1963 to Sublette and after we crossed the Kansas Oklahoma border the 30-40 miles treated you to literally hundreds of Pheasants both dead on the road as well as flying across the road.

I remember:

- the mayor of Sublette making rounds and making the hunters feel welcome.
- the \$15 out of state license fee plus the \$1 upland bird stamp.
- the local churches putting on hunter feeds where they served just about everything you wanted to eat family style for \$100 or \$2.
- Not being turned down ever when asking to hunt.
- Sleeping the back of the pickup under some straw at the park where hi83 and hi56 intersected.
- Always getting your limit.

Getting Permission

The first step to a successful pheasant hunt is gaining access to good land. Some good public land is out there, but a few private honey holes never hurt. Many land owners charge "trespass fees" or have their ground leased out, but free permission can still be had-it just takes more work than it used to. Trespass fees are not necessarily bad, its fair compensation for access to good game hunting, just a shame it has come to that.

Start asking around early in the year and stick with it. Don't be disappointed if you don't get permission right away.

This exact topic arose the other day and everyone had had similar experiences and noticed that most farmers have a sliding scale and a different reaction depending upon the permission sought. Hunt Pheasants? Well - I don't know, (accompanied by much feet shuffling and staring at the ground) I kinda save those for myself and the family."

Who can blame them? If you owned a piece of prime pheasant real estate, would you jump at the chance to let every Tom, Dick and Harry who knocked on the door take a crack at them?

First aid

Kit should include:

Crazy glue

Ace bandage

Iodine, Neo Sporrán

Band aids, Cotton pads

Peroxide

Aspirin, sinus pills,

Alcohol

Carry a first-aid kit for dogs you should have at the minimum some 3M Vetrap and a selection of gauze pads. A small bottle of saline can be used to wash the cut or clean seeds out of the dog's eyes and ears. Locking forceps are just the ticket for porcupine quills something to stop the bleeding and iodine or neo-sporran to treat wounds on hunters as well as dogs, once in my life I needed and had sutures to stitch up a dog wound and the dog didn't seem to mind as well as making me feel good about not getting it infected.

You can purchase the inexpensive first-aid kit that will fit right in your hunting vest and carry it on every outing. You may never need it, but when you do it can mean the difference between a minor tragedy and a long, lonely, quiet ride home.

Pheasant Hunting.

This sport is where the hunters go to the field where the pheasant live and attempt to collect them for later consumption. At the beginning of the season the majority of the pheasant available for hunting were recently hatched and have no idea what is going on... the pheasant have the wild sense of survival and have seen humans coming and going for most of their short life span. Then on opening day of pheasant season they begin to be educated very rapidly... I read somewhere that 60% of the pheasant killed during the season in Kansas are killed during the opening day of the season. This means the second day of the season 40% of the birds were new to the concept and now have a single day of education, the remainder were survivors from last season and it all begins to come back to them. This accounts for the difficulty of springing a surprise on the pheasants during the later part of the season. By now it should be obvious that you cannot merely stop your car and walk up on the pheasant and kill it without the pheasant taking some evasive action.

Surprise!

One thing the hunter has to keep in mind is these pheasants live where the hunting is going on. They are sitting around feeding or otherwise minding their own business when they become aware of hunters in the field... when this happens the hunters should be ready to do their thing because the lapsed time between when the birds become aware of the intrusion and the beginning of the hunt gives the birds time to react... the normal reaction is to leave the area and get out of danger. Surprise is a key element in being successful!

Walkers and Blockers.

The typical hunt involves walkers and blockers... the idea is for the blockers to get into position usually upwind of the walkers at the end or edge of the feed field. The job of the Blocker is to prevent the pheasant from flying or running out of the field and out of range of the hunters shotguns without someone in the party getting a shot... The walkers job is to walk close enough together to keep the birds running/moving in front of them until they have to fly out of the area. Normally walkers in a feed field will walk 6-8 rows (30 yards) apart slowly and make sufficient noise to keep the birds moving in front of them... when the walkers get close to the end of the field it is appropriate for the walkers to stop and make the birds nervous... many times after a couple of minutes they will fly up and

give the walkers and the blockers opportunity to shoot in each other direction. Keeping in mind the cocks are the only birds to shoot and to avoid shooting in line with the other hunters in front of beside them.

Blockers are positioned at the edge or end of the field occupied by the walkers, if we have 12 Walkers 30 yards apart this would place at a minimum four blockers spanning the end of the field... all at least 30 yards beyond the edge of the field and one on each end of the walkers and the other two spaced evenly between the outside of the blocker post positions.

This can be dangerous part of the pheasant hunt... everyone, the walkers and blockers, should place foremost in their mind the safety of other hunters... remain extremely aware of the whereabouts of the other hunters and dogs... the Blockers traditionally (I always do) squat down when the walkers approach the end/edge of the field... this may allow a otherwise unaware pheasant to get out in the open before spotting the blocker and also minimize the possibility of catching stray shot from the walkers.

Because most grain fields are too large (40 acres up)for the walkers to adequately cover in a single pass the area the hunt begins on one edge of the field and the blockers move to the other end of the field as the walkers move over and take another swat out of the field... as you have guessed many birds find and take the opportunity to move over making the later swats more productive than the last. When walking the first and last pass of the field yields the horizontal edge which is my favorite position.. Although not mentioned until now Pheasant don't like open ground, most of the time they'd rather fly than run in the open... when attempting to slip out of the hunters trap they will often run along the edge and dart in and out. When you see them darting in and out this gives you advance warning and assures your readiness when the conditions of cock in flight presents itself.

Now the technique just described is the large percentage of the hunting conditions during the typical Pheasant hunt... a Milo or corn field that has been harvested offers wasted grain that the Pheasant will want to feed on... the proximity of the walkers to each other is dependent upon the thickness of the cover... if the field isn't heavy cover the walkers can move farther apart, if cover is waist deep to the hunter and extremely thick moving closer together is efficient... give the birds a chance and they will hid and hang tight and you'll never see them not

alone feed on them.... keeping in mind being to far apart will allow the birds to slip between the walkers and escape the hunt.

Now what is the routine of these animals, where are they at first light, noon and at dusk?

Pheasant routine

Sun down til dawn	Dawn til 9am	9am - 3 pm	3pm til sundown
Roost	Gravel Water, feed	Loaf, Water, brush	Feed roost

According to a wildlife research biologist and my own 40+ years chasing after these fool things pheasants do follow a schedule as routine as your daily commute to and from work. Understanding the pheasant's daily movements can increase your odds of flushing a rooster. It has also been my observation that not all Pheasant read the rules and you can customarily find some where the routine suggests they shouldn't be.

Pheasants start their day before sunrise at roost sites, usually in areas of short-to medium-height grass or weeds, where they spend the night. At first light, pheasants head for roadsides or similar areas where they can find gravel or grit to replenish that ground away in their gizzards during the grinding and digesting the grain. I mmediately after ingesting sufficient rocks and grit Pheasant move to the feed field to fill their crow... once full to the brush to grind the food and digest it.

Pheasants are usually feeding by 8 a.m. in grain fields while cautiously making their way toward safe cover. By mid-morning,(9–10am) pheasants have left the fields for the densest, thickest cover they can find, such as a standing Milo, corn, federal Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) fields, brush patches, wetlands, or native grasses. The birds will hunker down here for the day until late afternoon.

It's next to impossible for small hunting groups of two to three hunters to work large fields. Pheasants often run to avoid predators, a response that frustrates dogs and hunters working Milo, corn, soybean, and alfalfa fields. Groups of two or three hunters usually have better success working grass fields, field edges, or fencerows, barrow ditches, fence corners, irrigation pits. Remember: The nastier the weather, the deeper into cover the pheasant will go.

One year my hunting buddy and I set out for Scott City Kansas trailing the old Land Rover. We got there in the middle of the night and awoke the next morning to 10⁰ and blinding snow storm. About noon we had cabin fever and headed out to round up some of these pheasants... we found several brush piles with thousands of fresh pheasant tracks all around and through the brush and were not able to get one Pheasant to show themselves... my observations is when its snowing you might as well stay at the cabin and find something else to do as killing pheasants will be unlikely. I have hunted in the misting rain and found it not to be as productive as dry hunting but you get better dog work but I think less pheasants.

But eventually, pheasants have to eat again. During the late afternoon (3pm), the birds move from their loafing spots back to the feeding areas. As in the morning, birds now are easier to spot from a distance and are more accessible to hunters. That's why the first and last shooting hours are consistently the best times to hunt pheasants in the feed field.

On previous trips to Kansas I hunted with a crop duster turned guide in the fall... he charged \$35 per gun per day and we usually had our limit by noon and would quit until the next day. The hunters met for breakfast and off to the brush or heavy cover by 9am... from then until we had our limit we would drive from one brush pile to the next communicating via CB radio and surrounding the birds. You have to remember by the first of the year (60+ days into the season) all the birds remaining are well educated and very weary of any intrusion into their surroundings. If you pull up and get out, load your guns, holler at your dog or each other you will witness (if you are paying attention) a mass exodus of all the birds in the field. This technique this guide used was to plan the attack in advance often over the CB and converge from all sides at once... within 30 - 40 yards of the weed patch the vehicles would all come to the stop and every one out with guns loaded... many times you would witness literally hundreds of birds flying in all directions. We'd hardly even dent the population of the brush pile but we'd always harvest some birds... even if you got only 3-4 and you had ten hunters it took only 10 brush piles to have the limit.

This brings up the safety issue...

Safety

If you have new hunting partners that have not had the experience of hunting pheasant it is necessary (mandatory) to educate them and discuss the hunt sufficiently to give them an idea of what to expect. Shotguns can be dangerous in the hand of an idiot, a fool, as well as an inexperienced hunter. Not to mention the heat of the moment when the cock gets up in front of the first time hunter and all that is on his mind is kill the bird... after the shot bring to mind the whereabouts of the other hunters.

It is important to go over the three basics of hunter's safety with every member of your hunting party. First, treat every gun as if it were loaded. Second, always keep your muzzle pointed in a safe direction. And, third, know your target and beyond. When an unexpected rooster busts out of thick cover, it's easy to get lost in the moment, But, no matter how excited you get, it's important to remember safety. A safe hunt is a successful hunt, no matter how many birds are bagged.

In addition to being safe, hunters should be courteous, ask permission before hunting private lands. Many landowners will gladly grant permission to hunters if approached with a friendly request. You should also consider sharing your take with the landowner. Be courteous, show respect, and ask permission.

When we hired the crop duster/outfitter we relied upon him to have permission and to know where we were hunting. In Kansas if there are no obvious occupants of the land and no posted signs then it was deemed OK to hunt. If you spot a likely spot and see a farm house in the same section it is common sense to drive to the house and ask permission.

Be selective on who you hunt with, if not experienced they should exhibit parameters of intelligent individual who can comprehend and execute safety rules.

Be sure to have plenty of Blaze orange clothing and hat on... this gives others the opportunity to not shoot in your direction.

What kind of gun to use?

Guns and Loads

Pheasants have been killed by every style, gauge, load and shot size of shotgun made. From single shots to semi-autos, any shotgun will work. Some of the boys raised in pheasant country tell me about shooting them with 22's and different hand guns. But what is the best? In our case to be legal we have to stick to the shotgun.

Over the years, I have used everything from single shot .410's to good grade over-and-under, but my personal preference is something that is lightweight, and in the 12 gauge... I have hunted and killed birds with 410's, 28, and 20 gauges and there is nothing like the 1 7/8oz number 6 shot from a magnum 12 gauge 3" load. I've seen hunters good with the 410 and hardly miss a shot but probably because I am not that good or consistent of a shot the 12 gauge pattern makes up for a lot of shortcomings. The thing about missing or wounding a Pheasant is the absolute fact that some varmint gets to eat your bird because you didn't hit it hard enough to get to it before it ran off.

I prefer the 20 gauge double on quail... I find that the 12 gauge even light loads tear up too much meat and the two shot double usually allows me to get two on every covey rise, I have a B80 22 inch upland gun that is great and probably doesn't weight more that the I thaca double 20 gauge but more than once I have shot five times with it and didn't have but two birds.

My opinions aside, guns really are a personal thing; choose whatever you are comfortable with, shoot well and you will be in the birds.

Load selection can be a bit more tricky, and you need to pattern individual loads in your gun to see which gives the optimum results.

Pattern your shotgun

Common procedure is to go a office supply store and get 40" square poster paper and place it at 30yards with an "X" in the middle. At 30yards your pattern should cover the 40" evenly enough a pheasant cannot slip through. As you experiment with different chokes and different loads and shot sized you will become aware of that choke, shot size and load to use on pheasant. The shot you use should be

smallest to get the job done... as you will see there are probably twice as many #6 shot in the shell as the #4.. More shot more chances for a clean kill.

For early season birds, you don't need as heavy a load as for late season, wily roosters. A field load of 6's will work fine for most applications, but as the season progresses I prefer to switch to a premium "magnum" load such as Federal Premiums 3" 1 7/8 oz #6 shot (2 3/4 has 1 1/2 oz shot) these are buffered copper coated lead and come out of the end of the barrel with much less deformed shot than the uncoated shot.. The buffer also allows you to use a more open choke tube as the buffer tends to hold the shot together farther from the barrel. Early bird shooting you can get by with 8's or 7 1/2's light loads because you are shooting at 10 yards something as big as a cock pheasant.

Shotgun shells.

Just grab some and throw them in the duffle bag right? Wrong. When it comes to pheasant hunting, all shotgun shells are not created equal. The subtle differences that show up only as numbers printed on the box can mean the difference between bulging game bag and long walks in the grass in pursuit of wounded roosters. To make things even more complicated, ammunition requirements change depending on when and how you hunt and even on what type of shotgun you're using. How do you sort your way through the maze?

Bird hunting is not cheap. The last thing you need is substandard gear on the hunt of a lifetime. Bargain shells are no bargain if you have to use twice as many to bring down a limit of birds. Those shells for \$3 or \$4 per box are not what you need. The shot charges are too light. The power is substandard and the lead they sling is soft and imperfect, meaning your shot pattern will likely have holes in it big enough for a rooster to fly right through. Use those cheap shells for target practice if you must, but when it comes time to hunt reach for the premium loads.

Every major ammo manufacturer makes a premium line of shotshells and the most important benefit these shells provide is better shot. The lead pellets in premium ammo are harder and more uniformly round than the pellets in the cheaper stuff. This means the pellets suffer less deformity as they are shoved out through the forcing cone in the barrel ahead of several thousand pounds of force. Deformed pellets don't fly straight; they don't provide the uniformly dense pattern required knock a flying pheasant from the sky quickly and cleanly. And make no mistake about it - you've got to put many pellets into a bird to insure that when it hits ground it does not immediately take off running.

Now that you've opted for the top-shelf rounds, there are still plenty of options left to confuse you. The first is shot size. Lots of people love No. 4 shot because it is big, heavy and hits hard. Lots of people love No. 6 shot because it is heavy enough and provides even more pellets per ounce to increase your odds of putting some of those pellets into the vital area of a bird. No. 5 shot is a good compromise. The truth is you should choose your shot size based on when and where you will be hunting. The smallest shot size will increase your chances of more birds.

If you are hunting early season birds on a shooting preserve you can use No. 8 or even No. 7.5 shot and still be confident that if you shoot reasonably straight the birds will fall nicely. Pen-raised birds, especially those hunting in September and early October are not particularly tough to kill. They have thin skin and usually flush pretty close to the gun.

Come opening day of the regular season move up to No. 5 shot or a heavy load of No. 6. Birds that have dodged predators and battled the elements all year dramatically modify the hunting conditions. They are tougher. They will run, flush wild, scramble through the toughest cover they can find and generally do anything they can to put something between themselves and their pursuer.

As the season wears on start thinking about No. 4 or 5 shot, especially when the snow flies. Birds coming into winter are more densely feathered and have a tougher hide. They also have gotten really wily when it comes to strange stomping noises in the grass. With each passing day they seem to flush farther and farther from the gun. No. 4 shot hits a bit harder at longer range. It is no magic pill that will allow you drop every pheasant at 50 yards, but it will give you some added power when you need it.

All that other stuff The shot charge, measured in ounces, and the velocity, measured in feet per second (fps) round out your shotshell power triangle. Typically more of each is better, but the laws of physics being what they are we all have to make some compromises. Ideally, a heavy payload of shot, going really fast, gives you enough pellets and enough power to bring down the birds. Read the boxes before you buy. Here's what you'll typically see on a box of shells. I chose Federal Premium magnum 6 shot. The 12-gauge, 3" has 1 7/8oz shot with maximum powder, the 2-3/4-inch is throwing 1-1/2 ounces of lead at 1400 fps. That is a hard-hitting round that is buffered and allows the shot to come out of the barrel with

minimum distortion and requires you go open on your choke as the shot buffer tends to hold the shot together longer and makes for a smaller pattern at 30 yards. .

What about steel? Pheasant hunting on Federal public land requires the use of non-toxic shot. Any of the new polymer-matrix-bismuth super waterfowl loads will work, Any good quality steel shot that is roughly two shot sizes larger than the lead shot you would typically use will bring down pheasants. If you are shooting No. 5 lead, switch to No. 3 or No. 2 steel when you move to public land. You should also switch to a more open choke when shooting steel. Start with a modified choke and shoot at a patterning board from 30 yards. If you don't have a nice even pattern, try the improved cylinder. You won't know where the pellets are going until you put them on paper.

The major difference between steel and lead is the lead goes farther and will kill farther with the same size shot, the lead tends to deform when it hits the bird and carry fistful of feathers into the bird causing a larger wound. The steel doesn't deform and customarily will go completely through the bird allowing the bird to fly farther before its demise. My experience with geese and ducks is many more wounded birds fly out of the area. Many times hunting geese the next day we'd find several geese where the hawks had located them and ate the breast out of them... these geese had been subjected to steel shot but had enough energy left to fly out of site before hitting the ground.

Choosing the right shotshell for pheasant hunting is one little detail that will make a big difference. Remember, the success of your trip depends on an ounce of lead pellets. That's no place to skimp.

What exactly are we hunting for?

Pheasant, what are we looking for?

The Ring-necked Pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*) is a familiar sight in rural north central and northwest Oklahoma as well as south west Kansas. Although not indigenous to the United States, this Asian native was successfully introduced in 1857. .

There are many explanations of why pheasant introductions have never taken in eastern central and southern Oklahoma. Chiggers, mites, weather patterns, agricultural practices and soil chemistry have all been suspected but as yet there is no biological evidence to support any of these claims.

Pheasants prefer cultivated farmland habitat mixed with weedy fencerows, ditches and corners. Although they are swift runners and prefer to travel overland, when flushed these birds generally fly toward timber or thick brush for escape cover. However, pheasants are commonly seen out in wide-open fields where they feed on waste grains and weed seeds. Insects, especially grasshoppers, beetles and caterpillars, compose the remainder of their diet.

Beginning in early spring, cocks begin courtship by strutting for females. The ear tufts are raised and the bare skin on the heads becomes engorged and brilliant red. Males establish crowing territories with a bantam like "knock-ack"! followed by a loud clapping of wings. Males often fight each other

Hens usually establish nest sites within the male's crowing territory, which may cover a few acres. Nests are located in cover, on ground in a shallow depression lined with bits of grass and weeds. Ten to 12 dark green-buff or rich brown-olive eggs are laid and incubated by the female (cocks occasionally incubate eggs too). Pheasants also will lay in the nests of ducks, quail, turkeys, domestic chickens and other birds.

After 23-25 days of incubation chicks are hatched and are able to walk and run almost immediately. The young develop quickly and are able to fly short distances at only seven days of age. They remain with the mother hen and occasionally with the adult pair, for several weeks. Hens use the "cripple bird" act to lure predators away from the young. When danger has passed, one or both parents gather the brood and resume helping them find food and sheltering them from the cold or wet weather.

According to biologist many young do not live beyond October 1, and the average adult male live only 10 months. Females live about 20 months. The maximum age, estimated from a single bird kept in a zoo, is about six years.

Females are drab compared to their mates. Their coloration is a simple combination of light and dark browns, with a shorter tail and no head crest. Hens weigh

approximately two pounds.

A hunter needs to know the difference between a hen and rooster pheasant before he or she pulls the trigger. Most of the time, the identity of the bird flushing at your feet is obvious.

There are situations, though, where it is good to hesitate or hold back. Birds flushing into a rising or setting sun is a tough call. It's not always possible to hunt pheasants with the sun at your back, but it's a good idea.

Rooster pheasants often crow or cackle when they launch. Hens are silent except for the rush of their beating wings.

Early in the pheasant season, juvenile roosters can be fully colored or hardly colored at all. All rooster pheasants have spurs, while hens don't. That's why a foot left on a dressed pheasant is adequate for determining sex.

Spur length varies from just a small nub on a very young bird, to more than 3/4 of an inch on adult birds. The general rule for determining a rooster's age is that if the spur is less than a 3/4-inch in length, the bird is a young-of-the-year.

How about hunting with dogs?

Dogs

Training tips to get your dog in shape

The dream is always the same. After a year of planning, six months of organization, three months of serious anticipation and hours of anxious waiting your pheasant hunt is about to begin. Suddenly your dog bolts to the end of the field and flushes somewhere in the neighborhood of a million roosters into the next county.

You can avoid this you've got to start long before season begins. Keeping control of your dog in the field begins and ends with keeping control of your dog in the yard. The more you reinforce the most basic commands, the better of you'll be when it comes time to face a CRP field full of wily pheasants. The two basic commands "Sit" and "Come." These two commands should be absolute. That means the

dog must respond every time, without regard to distraction or distance. Teaching such a response sounds like a much more daunting task than it really is. The key is repetition – to the point that the actions of the dog become almost automatic. It doesn't take long. Training sessions of 15 minutes performed at least once a day will get all but the oldest and most stubborn dogs to obey. The attention span of the dog can be tied to the age of the dog... when you see the dog is not having fun with this and not particularly paying attention wait a while and try it again. It is a simple fact of you don't have the dog/s attention you are wasting your time.

Start with "Sit." Teaching a dog to sit is about the simplest thing in the world. Simply give the command, push the dog's butt down and praise the dog for doing what it was told. To make this a whistle command, simply say the word "sit," give one blast on the whistle, push down on the dog's butt and praise the dog. Soon, you'll be able to eliminate the voice command and the dog will respond to the just the whistle.

Teaching your dog to come is almost as easy as teaching sit. Get your 40-foot check cord, clip it on the dog's collar and encourage the animal to run around. When you see the dog start to ignore you, give several quick blasts on the whistle, command "Come," and pull on the rope. Keep pulling until the dog is at your side. When he arrives, issue lots of praise and a treat!

The idea here is to give the dog no chance to fail. If the dog is off the check cord, he can ignore you. If he's attached to the rope, he can't. After a week of this, present the dog with distractions, but keep the check cord attached.

The key to any dog training method is repetition. Don't assume that your dog has it mastered after a couple good days on the leash. Try to conduct daily training sessions for at least three weeks or four weeks.

You can work through the dog's desire to go crazy in a field overflowing with pheasants, but you have to do it on a leash and you have to do it every day.

Don't neglect the dogs

Remember to take ample water for your dog . In addition to water in the field, make sure you offer water well before the first pheasant drive of the day. Any experienced hunting dog will get excited upon seeing the shotguns come out of

the case. The dog may get too excited to and forget to drink. So start the day with water and offer it before the dog thinks you are going hunting.

If the temperature is above 50 degrees. Remember, dogs don't sweat. They only release heat through panting. And, the dogs are also down in the grass and weeds where they do not benefit from breezes. If the dog is panting heavily, take a short break, make the dog sit and offer water. Don't over do it.

In the cold weather, dehydration can cause problems for the dog. Every breath is expelling a tremendous amount of water vapor. Stop regularly and offer the dog a drink.

But what breed is best for pheasants? Retrievers are the most popular kind of sporting dogs in America for a host of reasons. One is how they handle pheasants, America's favorite game bird. What makes retrievers so popular among hunters is their versatility

Fetch!

You may scratch down a cock pheasant, but don't count it toward the limit until you have the bird in hand. Unlike domestic pheasants, a mature wild rooster can take one heck of a beating, and unless headshot, it can always be expected to run.

This is where a retriever's good nose and desire to fetch is indispensable. You want a pheasant dog that "hunts dead" with the same desire they use when pointing or flushing the bird into the heavens. Any dog that has no interest in finding downed game and retrieving to hand is, frankly, a detriment in the pheasant fields.

Hunt 'Em Up

Pheasants are notorious runners, which is brutal on staunch and steady pointing dogs. In fact, most pro trainers recommend that you keep young pointers away from wild roosters in the beginning. Running pheasants promote creeping, among other bad habits. A lot of broken points and wild flushes are usually the result of hunting inexperienced pointers on wild pheasants.

If you hunt in areas where there are a lot of birds, the abundance of bird scent can make dogs hard to control -nearly impossible if the dog is ranging out there as pointers are bred to do.

Release the Hounds

You may be hunting solo for scattered roosters, just you and the dog, down in some narrow creek bottom or fencerow. Or you may take up position in a skirmish line with other hunters bent on pushing a wide-open field toward a line of standing gunners. Whichever the mode of putting up some birds, a retriever's duty is to work close to the handler's gun.

As often as pheasants run from approaching hunters, they are just as likely to hunker down and let trouble amble by. If you're hunting alone, retrievers and spaniels allow you to work the cover thoroughly, bit by bit. Working close to the gun, means that no clump of sod or tuft of brush along your chosen route ever goes un-sniffed.

When hunting in larger groups, a quartering retriever will rout those birds that otherwise would slip through between hunters bent on maintaining "the line." Further, retrievers are conditioned to put up any birds they happen across without hesitation. Pointers on the other hand require a gunner to walk in and make the flush. When hunting in a group, breaking formation - that is, stepping out of the advancing line to put up a bird - means holding up the progress of the line and exposing a hole in the ranks that retreating birds are prone to escape through.

Once upon a time I had a kennel of 10 trained dogs... out of the ten three had been used on pheasant and were worthwhile, most of the time. The English pointer Spot was older and mature and could be stopped and held in fairly closely... until times when I identified presence of large number of pheasants and the scent or idea of bunch of birds would cause old Spot to be kenneled because a flushing dog when you not ready to flush isn't very socially acceptable to a bunch of Pheasant hunters who have worked their tails off just to have some yo-yo's dog flush the birds.

The other Pheasant dog was Maggie a German Shorthair. Maggie was reliable 99 % of the time and I wished I had a picture of her pointing and holding cock pheasant,,, most Pheasant wouldn't hold for her but she worked in close enough

that you got a lot of shooting. Again, when dozens and dozens of birds are ahead of you I would have to tether Maggie as she couldn't control herself.

Miracle, our yellow lab. One year I met these guys while pheasant hunting in Kansas from Branson Missouri. After several hunting trip where we met in Kansas I got to know and appreciate two Labs that Mackey Box had bread and trained. Both Yellow Labs Duke and Ellie either one would walk to Mackey's truck and get into the glove box and open the pack of cigarettes, light it and bring it to Mackey... not true but they were amazing dogs. My miracle was from the last litter for Ellie and she turned out great. She would heel and not get more than 6 feet from me while walking hunting pheasant... she probably brought me as any birds as I shot over the years because when the birds were holding tight she would catch them behind the wings and bring to me smiling "hea dad here's a pheasant"... of course half of these birds were released as they were hens, Miracle had such a soft mouth she didn't harm the birds but caught many that were added to my bag. She was a fair retriever also, a wounded bird didn't have much change... I have knocked birds down on frozen ponds and convinced Maggie to go out on the ice and retrieve the birds... miss her a lot.

Hunting General Techniques

If the birds are holding tight, a good dog is not only productive but also a pleasure to hunt behind. As the season progresses and the birds become wilder, only a well-trained dog can be used with much success, as the birds tend to run, with the dog in hot pursuit, only to flush wildly well out of shotgun range. However, if a dog responds well to commands and hunts close, it still can be a valuable asset throughout the year.

Without a dog, likely looking cover still can be pushed with good results. Concentrate on narrow brush row, patches of cover and fence lines. If there is too much cover it is all too easy to walk by a bird or have one circle around behind you. The key is to find enough cover, but not too much.

If large fields and brush patches are to be successfully hunted, without the aid of a good dog, large numbers of hunters are required. This is a common Pheasant hunting technique; Groups of four to 12 guys line up across a crop field about 30 yards apart and begin walking, keeping abreast of each other. Blockers are placed on the end of the fields to keep birds from running to the end of the world.

If you do use this technique, keep safety at the forefront of your mind and only hunt with hunters you can completely trust. Pheasants can be unpredictable and do not always fly in the direction they are "supposed" to go. Blaze Orange, knowing where everyone is at and keeping your wits about you is a must to ensure everyone's safety. Insist everyone wear safety glasses while hunting.

The Different Seasons

The difference between pheasant hunting in your shirt sleeves and pheasant hunting in the snow with a 35 - mile - an - hour gale pounding down the back of your neck is like the difference between a new born kitten and a Bengal tiger

In the early-season, you can expect the birds to be less spooky and the shots will often be close. Lighter loads can be used (I prefer 1 1/8 ounce of 6's) with an improved cylinder choke.

When the northerns start to blow, look for the thickest cover you can find. Shelterbelts, brush rows, fence lines and snow covered long grass are all prime pheasant spots. Some birds hold tight, but by this time in the year, the birds that survived the early season onslaught of hunters have learned to run as far away as possible before flying. I have used for years 3" 1 7/8oz #6 shot in improved bore 22" Browning B80 upland bird gun.

Kansas Pheasant. The open season for the taking of cock pheasants shall be the second Saturday in November through January 31 of the following year.
Bag limits. four cock pheasants., Possession limits. 16 cock pheasants.
The entire state shall be open for the taking of cock pheasants.

Oklahoma Pheasant Panhandle and N.W. Counties Dec. 1 - Jan. 31
Bag limit 2003-4—Cocks only-2 daily, 4 in possession after the first day, 6 in possession after second day..
*Persons who hunt in two states having separate daily bag limits may not exceed the largest number of birds that can legally be taken in one of the states in which they take birds.