

## White Paper

### *Pheasant Hunting Tips & Tricks*

#### Time of Day

- Morning: Birds will normally feed early in the morning. Look for them at or near food plots at this time. 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. Pheasants usually begin feeding around 8 a.m. When shooting hours begin an hour later, the birds are still feeding, often in grain fields while cautiously making their way toward safe cover. Look for the edges of picked cornfields.
- Mid-morning: By mid-morning, pheasants have left the fields for the densest, thickest cover they can find, such as a standing corn, federal Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) fields, brush patches, wetlands, or native grasses. Birds will hunker down here for the day until late afternoon.
- Mid-Day: Likely spots during midday are ditch banks and deep into marshes. Remember: The nastier the weather, the deeper into cover the pheasant will go.
- Late Afternoon: During the late afternoon, 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.

#### Time of Season & Weather

- Early Season: Early in the season birds will flush and usually hold tight. Many times birds will do this within close range. Also, they will run ahead, especially if hunted in row crops. A common hunting tactic is blocking, where hunters are placed at the end of the rows while a group of hunters work down the row toward them.
- Mid-Season: Birds become wild mid season and will usually hold tight when approached. Many times the hunter will walk past them, especially in good cover. They realize if they fly hunters will have a good target and smart birds will not do this. One of the biggest mistakes a hunter will make is to walk too fast. The best thing to do is slow down, walk in irregular zigzag patterns and occasionally stop and turn around and look. This will confuse the birds, regularly causing them to flush up close.
- Late Season: Late in the season hunting can be as good as 70% of the hunters that only hunted during the first three weeks of the season. The birds will hold tight on cold days and many times hunters can almost step on them to get them. During this time period it is not uncommon for dogs to catch wild birds, due to the fact they hold so tight. Birds need more food to overcome the cold weather causing them to spend most of their time eating or sunning themselves. On extremely cold days birds will be close to the shelterbelts to avoid the wind. Rosters will flock together and when you jump them, it is not uncommon to see 100 plus birds. This means hunters have to spend some time looking for the "Pheasant Honey Hole" to find the birds. Once again, talking to the owner of the land may pay off, since most of them know where the birds are in these conditions. Hunters like hunting this season due to the fact that usually they can have the whole area to themselves and never see another hunter.
- Windy Days: Pheasants will normally hang out in shelterbelts such as thick tree rows and heavy cover. The best way to hunt these areas is with a group of guys at both ends and another group working the middle in heavy cover. Great caution needs to be exercised here in order as the birds often fly low and in large numbers.

#### Lay of Land

- Tall Grass: Tall grass hunting, like in South Central South Dakota, is a different kind of hunting. It takes hunter ingenuity to outfox the birds since they can hear and see you coming. It is not predictable, unlike row crops, to know where they will go. Pheasants can outrun most dogs and they would rather run than fly. This makes hunting for small groups difficult. To be successful, a group of eight to ten hunters should converge on the area, working the ground with a good dog.
- Thick Cover: Pheasants prefer thick cover for resting, that's why CRP lands (set asides) have increased the pheasant population throughout the Midwest pheasant belt. The larger tracks of thick grass allow pheasants to escape the sharp eyes of predators. In years before CRP, pheasants rested and nested wherever they could find cover. In many areas this was along fence lines. Predators (raccoons, skunks, coyotes, and fox) had easy pickings, since all they had to do was follow the narrow fencerows to find their prey.
- Corn Fields: When hunting large cover or cornfields, you'll need a "blocker". Pheasants are known for their running ability. They'll run away from hunters. Blockers are hunters stationed at the end of the field who get shots

as birds break from cover. The presence of blockers forces birds to hold tighter, giving both walkers and blockers more shooting action

## Dogs

- Walking too Fast: There have been many cases of half a dozen hunters working a field without dogs and not getting a single bird. Shortly after, a couple of hunters walk the field with a well trained dog and they get their limit. If you have never hunted with a well-trained dog, you may not have seen up to 80% of the birds that were there. If you don't see birds in an area, you may be walking too fast and/or may need a good dog.
- Dog Safety: Make sure your dog is fit to hunt. A lot of dogs die opening day because the temperatures are high and they are not conditioned. To be cautious a good idea is to have a list of vets in the area you will be hunting so in case something does happen, finding a vet isn't the problem.

## General Advice

- Solicit Advice from Landowners: Many hunters may hunt hard in areas where there are no birds. It pays to talk to the landowners and learn which areas do not have birds.
- Bird Regularity: Pheasants 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.
- Strength in Numbers: The two things to look for are an accessible food source and good cover. Generally pheasants will "migrate" to the areas that provide these two key ingredients in the most abundance. In many situations, if you see a few birds around a piece of thick cover or food source, there are many more pheasants in the same area. Although this may appear to make the hunting easier, in fact it makes it even more difficult. Similar to the challenge of fooling a large flock of ducks or geese to commit to a decoy spread, large groups of pheasants can be difficult to outwit. They find strength in numbers, when one bird decides to flush it will almost always lead to the rest of the birds following them. Instead of relying on roosters flushing at your feet, most shots come with roosters flushing at least 35 yards in front of you... if you're lucky. It is not unusual to
- Play the Wind: Play the wind, if at all possible walk into the wind. Although this may seem obvious, especially when hunting with dogs, it is critical.
- Be Quiet: Be quiet when hunting. If the birds don't know you are there they won't flush wild. Although it seems simple for most pheasant hunters this is almost impossible. Extremely well trained dogs and a high level of confidence in fellow members of your hunting party are essential to making this method work. Successful hunters find that they will flush more birds by walking slowly and quietly, working back and forth across the field. This forces the bird to either flush or move ahead of the walkers, giving blockers at the end of the cover an opportunity for a shot.
- Shot Load: Early season shots typically are closer in range so using #6 shot with modified or improved choke is advisable. As the season progresses a tighter choked gun is a better choice. For best results, switch to a 12-gauge gun, shells with more powder and #4 or #5 shot. The birds will be flushing wild in many cases, and the heavier loads provide a bit more knock down power at longer ranges.