



Try Public Land Hunting for Success

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For many sportsmen, gaining permission to hunt on private lands is difficult. These hunters are typically limited to using only public lands.

After the first few days of the season, however, most veteran public land hunters realize that hunting on these popular areas requires a different approach.

With a few visits from hunters, most upland game species on public lands tend to become a bit more wary and skittish. Pheasants, quail and even rabbits soon figure out that the arrival of dogs and people mean trouble is on the way.

That's why it becomes extremely important to avoid making any unnecessary noise when arriving at a hunting area. Many game species quickly learn to head for cover at the sound of approaching vehicles, car doors or voices.

Still, that's what makes public-land hunting so interesting. It requires more than physical stamina to bring home enough game for a meal. To be successful on a regular basis you need to know something about the habits of these creatures and how they react under different conditions. Weather conditions, the type of cover, and proper equipment all play a key role in determining the hunting strategy.

Obviously, heavy snow cover greatly inhibits the running abilities of rabbits and pheasants. Single hunters or relatively small groups generally experience their best success after a thick blanket of snow covers the ground.

Many late-season hunters consider a snowcover to be the ideal late-season hunting scenario. The white background makes a hiding pheasant more visible to the hunter. And, fresh tracks also reveal the presence of game.

However, snowfall doesn't necessarily mean the hunting will be easy. Any game that has survived the early season hunting pressure also realize it has now become the main item on virtually every predator's dinner menu.

Experienced public land hunters realize the best way to ensure success is to concentrate their efforts to the densest cover available. Pheasants, as well as other upland game, tend to feel more secure when well-hidden in thick cover. Many times, they will elect to remain motionless hoping danger will pass.

Veteran hunters always slow their pace when hunting dense cover. A common mistake is to race through a likely area while their quarry simply lies low and watches the hunters pass by.

A stop and go approach when hunting heavy undergrowth will often send a nervous gamebird rocketing skyward. And, a keen-nosed hunting dog can also greatly assist in flushing a rabbit from its hiding places.

Lack of snow, on the other hand, presents a whole different situation. Pheasants will often take off like an Olympic sprinter at the first sign of danger. Or, they may simply bury themselves in a heap of dense undergrowth.

Once again, the assistance of a quality hunting dog will usually shake loose those birds that have chosen the option of hiding.

Another weather factor to consider is a cold, blustery day. With or without snow cover, most upland game often seek out areas offering some protection from the wind. Drainage ditches, brushy draws and low-lying areas are prime hunting areas on windy days.

Briar patches and hedge rows offer protection from hunters and other predators. Hunters would be wise to begin their day searching out the brushy areas bordering the fields. Pheasants, quail or rabbits occupying these edges are likely the first to escape to another field when hunters arrive.

Though rare in central Illinois, marshy type areas are another often overlooked hiding place. Few hunters ever expect to find these creatures tucked under a patch of cattails. However, public land game seek out and utilize any available cover even if it means low-lying marshy areas.