



PHOTOGRAPH BY VICTOR SCHEDEL

One of the most valuable lessons I've learned is that a group of hunters working at a steady pace consistently kills more birds than a group that dallies as they meander through a field.

A

13

29

60

29

60

WILD PHEASANTS

Close the gap on a limit of ringnecks with these tips and put more roosters in your vest. **By Dennis Foster**

GENERALLY SPEAKING, most pheasant hunters know and follow the hunting basics such as working into the wind, trusting the dog's nose and only shooting the pretty, colorful ones. But knowing and utilizing a few advanced strategies can increase your chances of success.

KEEP UP THE PACE

As a guide, one of the most valuable lessons I've learned is that a group of hunters working at a steady pace consistently kills more birds than a group that stops or dallies as they meander through a field.

Conventional wisdom has been for hunters to work slowly to find birds. That approach will turn your hunt into a spectator sport: You'll watch birds flush out of range.

I'll admit that stopping isn't a bad option for solo hunters or those without the aid of good dogs; picking off a tight-holding bird in a large patch of cover is often the best route you can take in these scenarios. However, if you're hunting in a group with the benefit of competent canines, remember that a wild pheasant's first instinct is to run, and they never really sit still until they're out of room at the end of a field or run out of suitable cover.

Pheasants have incredibly keen eyesight and hearing, and when you top off their heightened awareness with a sprinter's body, it just doesn't make much sense for them to lounge around and wait for a hunter to catch up with them, and ultimately kill them.

GET OUT IN FRONT

Big mistake: When hunters on the edges do not start far enough ahead of the guys walking through the middle of the cover. You need to have your edge hunters, also called wingmen, out in front — way out in front. If there is one aspect that I continually have trouble communicating to new hunters that I guide, this is most definitely it.

It's important to explain this strategy in detail well in advance and not as you're standing at the field's edge. Reinforce that safety and common sense are paramount; wingmen will have their backs to the walkers the majority of the time, and everybody needs to be on the same page.

But when you break down a patch of cover and decide on your strategy, keep in mind that staying ahead is relative. If you're walking a narrow food plot that's only 200 yards long, the hunters on the wings should be at least 40-50 yards in front.

If you're walking a half-mile-long tree strip, however, 50 yards is too short a distance. In this scenario, edge hunters should be anywhere from 80 yards to 100 yards ahead, if not more. As with anything, always be ready to adapt to daily conditions. If the birds are flaring 100 yards ahead of your wingmen, stop your walkers and allow the wings to hustle up.

Having hunters on the wing, way in front, accomplishes two things:

- It allows the hunters pushing the middle of the cover, the drivers, to safely shoot at close-flushing roosters that jet sideways be-

Dennis Foster is an outdoor communicator and hunting and fishing guide. He welcomes comments and questions at his site, dakotapheasantguide.com.



Do you hunt on your own?
 Get a leg up with these tips.
gafmag.com/pheasant-hunting-alone

hind the edge hunters.

- Having hunters far enough ahead also hems in running birds that are scampering ahead of the main group, keeping the birds from dodging out the sides.

EVEN IT OUT

The goal of any walk or push is to cover as much ground as possible, maximizing the group's effective range. If you think about it, a shotgun's range for pheasants is roughly 40-50 yards. So having hunters 30 yards ahead of the group is illogical and reduces the group's effective range.

In reality, wingmen should be far enough ahead where the edge of their shotgun's range — their shooting radius — meets up or just barely overlaps with the shooting range of hunters pushing the middle of the cover behind them. While afield, visualize your shooting radius. This helps you evenly space yourselves and maximize your effective range.

By doing this, a group of four or five hunters can cover up to a 150-yard stretch of cover or more at a time. Any bird that gets up within that zone will likely be in range of at least one hunter.

The same principle goes for blockers. Before entering the field, allow the blockers to find their place at the end of the field or at likely escape routes.

At the end of the field, hunters on the wings essentially turn into blockers and should fan out in an equidistant manner and surround the edges. Too often hunters will clump up at the end of a field, minimizing their effective range and letting birds slip out the corners.

At this point, hunters and dogs should zigzag through the remaining cover and stop often. With escape routes sealed, you can now slowly search each bit of cover for any remaining birds.

Continued on page 28...

CIRCLES OF INFLUENCE

EACH WINGMAN and blocker needs to visualize his shooting radius. Make sure it slightly overlaps or runs tangent to the shooting radius of other hunters in the party. It will close the gaps and maximize the group's effective range.



DID YOU KNOW?

SCRAMBLED EGGS

A hen will lay anywhere from 6 to 15 eggs over a two-week period.

CHICK CLIQUE

It takes roughly 21 weeks for a chick to assume full adult plumage.

FOOT RACE

Pheasants are said to run 8 to 10 mph. My dogs would put that figure much higher!

SOURCE: Pheasants Forever studies

BEST ADVICE EVER

I'VE LEARNED that there isn't anything more important you can take to the field than a good bird dog. Adding a good dog to a pheasant hunt will help you find more birds and lose fewer cripples.

Don't get me wrong; I view my dogs as much more than just hunting equipment. Our dogs are part of the family! As a breeder of German shorthairs, I am partial to that breed.

However, it's important that you find the right breed for the type of hunting you do, and then find a quality breeder that you feel comfortable with.

So if you're looking to add something new to your pheasant-hunting game, my advice is to look at quality breeders and find yourself an excellent hunting dog and family companion.

— *Ethan Pippitt, professional guide, dog breeder*

ILLUSTRATION BY RYAN KIRBY

A

13

29

BROWNING
AMMUNITION

BPT - BXP
Dedicated to Perfection

BROWNINGAMMO.COM

©2015 BROWNING AMMUNITION **MADE IN USA**

GEAR ISSUE

...Continued from page 24

MAKE THE SHOT COUNT

One of pheasant hunting's biggest draws is that anyone with a license and shotgun can head out and have a chance at shooting a bird. While that's all fine and good, it makes no sense to spend hundreds of dollars on everything else — gas, guns, licenses, clothing — if you plan to skimp on shells. After all, a thousand-dollar gun is only as valuable as the shotshells you're willing to feed it.

Simply stated, a pheasant doesn't care what you look like or what kind of gun you shoot, but I can guarantee you their survival unquestionably depends on what kind of shells you're packing.

Don't take your choice of shotshell for granted or buy the same load your grandfather swore by years ago. Today's high-velocity shotshells made by reputable manufacturers, such as Federal Premium, Remington, Winchester, Fiocchi or Rio, are game-changers. Knowing that your shotshell will perform will undoubtedly help your confidence in the field, and they also ensure cleaner, more ethical kills.

ENJOY IT!

When a bird presents a shot, you need to maintain singular focus. This is easy to do when a lone rooster breaks cover. But it's hard for many hunters to single out a bird if several get up with the ensuing shouts of "rooster" and friendly fire popping off all around.

It's not a race, and you shouldn't be rushing your shot to beat your friends to the punch. Rushing a shot results in misses and frustration, but more importantly, it presents a safety issue. Take your time, lock on a bird and make a quality shot. This is especially true later in the season when larger flushes are common and birds group up around food sources.

Failing to be primed or lacking focus will lead to misses and frustration and, ultimately, to not fully enjoying the unique and wonderful experience that pheasant hunting truly is. To that end, always be prepared and give your shot the proper attention that our most beautiful of game birds fully deserves. ■

60

NEW! ADJUSTABLES FOR MOST BOLT RIFLES

LAMINATED WOODS

OVERMOLDED COMPOSITES

GRS

Stocky's
ph (561) 584-8500
America's Gunstock Specialist!

FREE SHIPPING!

www.NewRifleStocks.com

MODELS TO FIT: Blazer, Browning A Bolt X-Bolt, CZ 452 455 550, Howa 1500, Mauser 03 12 67 98, Rem 700, Savage 12 16, Sako 75 85 A7 Quad, Tikka 595 695 CTR T3, Ruger 77, Winchester 70

JULY/AUGUST 2016

GEAR ISSUE

WILD PHEASANTS

SHOTSHELLS



PRAIRIE STORM FS LEAD

FEDERAL PREMIUM
These 12-gauge shotshells feature the FliteControl wad and Flite-Stopper lead shot.

The shells use the same technology that's proved to be outstanding on waterfowl but are specially designed for the needs of pheasant hunters. A mix of 70 percent copper-plated lead and 30 percent nickel-plated lead increases pattern density. Muzzle velocity of 1,500 fps. MSRP, \$20 per box. Federalpremium.com.

HV GAME LOADS

RIO AMMUNITION

With a muzzle velocity of 1,330 fps, the HV36 shotshells are Rio's top-of-the-line upland bird ammunition. The 2 3/4-inch, 1 1/4-ounce loads are available from No. 4 to No. 9 shot. MSRP, \$11 per box. Rioammo.com.

BXD UPLAND

BROWNING

Premium nickel-plating keeps the shot round to retain velocity and increase downrange energy. The XD stands for extra distance, and the idea is there will be fewer misses and cripples. In 20, 16 and 12 gauges. Browningammo.com.

SUPER PHEASANT

WINCHESTER

Designed specifically for large upland game, Winchester's Super Pheasant high-brass loads feature copper-plated shot for hard-hitting knockdown power. The 2 3/4-inch 12-gauge shells are packed with 1 3/8 ounces of 4-, 5- or 6-shot sizes, and each high-velocity load tops out at 1,300 fps. MSRP, \$19 per box. Winchester.com.



TENZING

NEW GEAR Unlike waterfowl or big-game hunting, pheasants don't care what you look like. However, it pays to take gear into the field that is built for the real-world wild-bird experience.

VESTS

BV16 BIRD VEST TENZING

The new BV16 blaze crossover bird vest features 13 pockets, 14 shotshell loops and two radio pockets. Two load-lifter straps keep the pack's weight high and tight to a hunter's body. The hydration-compatible vest also has a large, easy-to-access bird pocket in the back. MSRP, \$219. Tenzingoutdoors.com.

UPLAND HUNT VEST FILSON

Made of water-repellant, durable fabric with blaze-orange accents that offer increased visibility, the vest features a spacious rear game bag, shooting patches and two divided bellows pockets for shells. MSRP, \$192. Filson.com.

BIRD'N LITE STRAP VEST BROWNING

It's designed to carry a heavy load while enhancing comfort and durability. The vest has a lightweight blaze shell, oversized shell pockets and a front-loading, bloodproof game bag with a stabilizing strap. MSRP, \$119. Browning.com.

UPLAND PRO STRAP VEST CABELA'S

With its mesh back panel and hydration-compatible feature, it is a good warm-weather vest. Bloodproof game pouch, multiple pockets and blaze orange. \$74-\$89 at Cabelas.com.



BROWNING



CABELA'S



BENELLI ETHOS

BROWNING

GUNS

V3 FIELD SPORT

REMINGTON

This innovative gun has Remington's Versa Port gas metering system to reduce wear on internal parts. This 3-inch 12-bore tips the scales at just a little over 7 pounds. She's definitely a waterfowler's gun, but certainly can pull double duty in the uplands. MSRP, \$850. Remington.com.

828U

BENELLI

Benelli's first-ever over-under is the 828U. The stylish firearm has a shim system that lets hunters adjust drop and cast to more than 40 positions. AA-grade satin walnut stock. Nickel-plated aluminum receiver. MSRP, \$2,500. Benelliusa.com.



BENELLI 828U

BROWNING

A5 SWEET SIXTEEN

BROWNING

Browning reintroduces an age-old favorite in their 16-gauge Auto-5. The "new" SS A5 is available in 26- or 28-inch barrel versions and tips the scales at 5.12 pounds. MSRP, \$1,700. Browning.com.

ETHOS

BENELLI

The Benelli Ethos semi-automatic shotgun features Benelli's proven Inertia Driven cycling system, which can reliably handle light game loads all the way up to 3-inch magnums. It has a AA-grade satin-walnut stock and engraved, nickel-plated receiver and blued vent-rib barrel. MSRP, \$1,900. Benelliusa.com.



DANNER

BOOTS

SHARPTAIL 8-INCH

DANNER

The Sharptail 8-inch upland has a durable, waterproof full-grain leather upper with lightweight 900 Denier nylon. The boots are waterproof and breathable, thanks to their Gore-Tex lining. The pair weighs in at 51 ounces. MSRP, \$190. Danner.com.

SILENCER 400G BOOTS

LACROSSE

Weighing about 3 pounds, these boots from LaCrosse are designed for use in any terrain. They have 400 grams of Thinsulate, which make them a great midseason option for hunters who want a boot for both upland and big-game hunting. MSRP, \$100. Lacrossefootwear.com.

IRISH SETTER

HAVOC

Irish Setter's Havoc line of hunting boots have tanned leather and Gore-Tex booties. They also have comfort tongue technology, which reduces the pressure of unpadding boot tongues. MSRP, \$224.99. Irishsetterboots.com.

SPORT UTILITY PRO

ROCKY

With its 600 grams of Thinsulate Ultra insulation and waterproof upper, this is a good late-season option. Full-grain brown leather and durable nylon upper also provide abrasion-resistant protection. MSRP, \$135. Rockyboots.com.



E-COLLARS

TEK 2.0 SERIES COLLARS

SPORTDOG

You can receive realtime audible updates of your dogs' locations through any Bluetooth-compatible earpiece. This training-tracking handheld can provide instant feedback on location and status of up to 21 dogs. MSRP, \$800. Sportdog.com.

DELTA UPLAND

GARMIN

A pointing beeper, remote dog trainer and bark limiter makes this a versatile training-tracking device. Owners of pointing dogs appreciate the beeper, but the collar is made for all breeds. Effective range is about 1/4 mile. MSRP, \$349. Garmin.com.

RH PRO 1000

D.T. SYSTEMS

The RH Pro 1000 dog-training collar features a palm-sized transmitter that has a camo battery cover with high-viz orange controls. It's

powered by an easy-to-replace 9-volt battery. The unit's 1,000-yard range is powered by a 360-degree antenna and FM signal. MSRP, \$800. Dtsystems.com.

EDGE RT

DOGTRA

Designed for dogs more than 20 pounds, the system is expandable up to three dogs. The transmitter features combination buttons, eight levels of stimulation and a 1-mile line-of-sight range. Fully waterproof collar, receiver and transmitter. MSRP, \$350. Dogtrausa.com.