

# Late is Great for No-Rush Roosters

by Dennis Foster

There is no need to get in a figurative and then an actual sweat out here in the real world of pheasant hunting. In particular, South Dakota has plenty of birds to go around. Shouting hours start at 10 a.m., so there's time for a leisurely breakfast before heading to the field. After all, this is as much about camaraderie as it is hard-core hunting.

Take time to fully appreciate the varied and beautifully subdued hues of fall, the sharp colors of mature roosters and in camouflaged contrast, the mottled browns of the hens. Don't forget the sounds of a cackling rooster rising, wind rustling cover and the inevitable pop of shotguns, followed by the intoxicating fragrance of burnt cordite and a dog bouncing back with your bird.

You will quickly see that the myth of needing to come to South Dakota the first month of season, before all the birds are shot off, is just that—a myth. From opener on, every successive day of the season improves. Several factors contribute to this. First and foremost is temperature. Until the weather cools down significantly, the birds have absolutely no reason to be in cover and will be loosely scattered most anywhere—often away from classic habitat options, making them difficult to pin down.

So, we are putting on more miles, and our dogs dozens more, to pick off one bird here and there. And it is too warm for them to work effectively. By midday, the extra stress sets in and they are just going through the motions. It can even become flat-out dangerous for dogs, and a good many have died in the field because their masters lacked



Hunting later in the season means longer tails...

the common sense to spot the warning signs.

Another significant consideration is standing row crops, posing further challenges in our quest to harvest a limit of roosters. It's not that the birds are hiding from us in the corn; they simply have absolutely no reason to leave, other than a sunrise strutting session and coming to the roads for gravel at sunset. It is a pheasant paradise with overhead cover from raptors, along with being able to easily see and hear any ground-bound predators approaching. And an inexhaustible source of food.

Narrow corn strips which remain after harvest, purposely left intact for hunting, are a completely different story. If you have access to them, they are easily the most effective way to quickly fill your game bag.

I am sharing insight and perspective gained by the blessing of being raised in South Dakota and having logged 45 years of hunting traditions in this region. My dogs, the guests of Dakota Pheasant Guide and I have the honor of hunting on the very spot (sacred ground) where the first successful release of the Chinese Ringneck Pheasant took place

in 1908. Further introductions, coupled with the bird's innate ability to survive, spread and permanently establish themselves led to the first one-day season to be held in Spink County in 1919. Our County Seat of Redfield has long held the distinction of Pheasant Capital of the world. (The good folks of nearby Huron in Beadle County may beg to differ, but fortunately, there are plenty of birds to go around throughout the area.)

*story continued on next page*

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More than a few years in the field have resulted in many lessons learned.

### As the temps cool a little, the action heats up a lot

Later season means crops are in the bin and birds are in the cover—thus, not only narrowing our search, but the birds also become much more predictable. Temps are conducive for the dogs to be on top of their game. You will immediately appreciate the extra bounce in their step. Peak performance is a direct result.

The birds are no longer scattered and will be found in clusters, and we encounter flushes ranging from a half-dozen to, at times, hundreds. If you have never witnessed an entire slough blow up with birds, you owe it to yourself, your hunting partners and your dogs to come and experience it for yourself. Near sensory overload occurs as they explode in every direction—often bouncing off one another as they gain altitude. The wingbeats are so powerful that you can feel them in your chest as distinctly as the sub woofers of an errant youth's car.

When pursuing mature, now-seasoned birds in varying temps and conditions during the later season, we must put more emphasis on all the gear and tactics that we use. A little forethought and preparation not only pays dividends with more tails sticking out of your vest, but also makes the whole affair comfortable, no matter what Mother Nature throws our way. With the outdoor industry keenly aware of the popularity of pheasant hunting, we have an ever-growing selection of clothing, gear and accessories from which to choose. I will offer some tips to help you to sort through the clutter to obtain the best.

Tactics and techniques are wide ranging and lengthy subjects too immense to be accurately covered in this limited space. They can be best relayed via some visualization, and I would encourage you to check out [dakotapheasantguide.com](http://dakotapheasantguide.com) for other published articles, pictures and videos via our production of *Focus Outdoors TV*.

### Gear tips

**Dress for success:** My common workwear while guiding in cooler temps consists of high-end thermal underwear below heavier brush pants. A good pair of chaps are next. They not only ward off cockleburs and the like, but also add some water and wind resistance as well. Legs are often overlooked, and we need to take care of our means of propulsion.

Next is a thin, short-sleeve thermal t-shirt, covered by a long-sleeved version. Depending upon how cold it is, this can be followed with an insulated vest and or a hooded sweatshirt. It adds a ton of warmth, the added benefit of keeping the wind off your neck, and your entire head when pulled over, gangsta-style. If conditions are severe, a waterfowl-style outer coat can be employed to top it all off. By not overloading your shoulders, these setups allow you plenty of

flexibility and freedom to shoot well. More on that next.

**Hunting vests:** We have been relying on Chief Upland Vests since their onset and my introduction to the creator and owner Jake Lindemann, while he was hunting with us. In our business, functionality and diversity of use is foremost. These vests give us just that in a totally customizable platform. One of my favorite and most appreciated benefits is the magnetic flap on the dedicated shell container (holds a full box or loosely, as I prefer). Gone are the days of trying to hurriedly pull shells out for another flush or bending over to receive birds from dogs, then watching them fall and disappear in the cover and or snow.

Another feature that really comes into play when the temps drop is the ability to expand the vest to accommodate more clothing. Likewise, removing a layer or two and cinching it back down a bit. This is a truly adjustable vest and not a heavy, bulky and very restrictive coat with a game bag added. Thus, it allows for full range of movement and swing to enable much better shooting.

Do yourself a favor and check out the versatility of the vest, accessories, and other attire in detail at [chiefupland.com](http://chiefupland.com).

**Footwear:** Please do not wear oversized and over-insulated boots. They are clumsy at best, and even more so as you traverse varying terrain and cover. And your toasty boots will soon become sweat soaked, and that will lead to an uncomfortably clammy and cold feeling for the rest of the day. As you are actively walking, a top-quality, moderately insulated and waterproof boot will suit you just fine.

**Gloves:** Excessively heavy gloves should be avoided as they cause difficulty in disengaging the safety, and the bulk deters getting your index finger quickly and safely into the trigger guard. The result is a serious distraction and slows and affects the whole shooting motion. This is by far the most common cause for missing birds. There are



A decrease in temps brings an increase in activity levels.

several options for thin, yet warm gloves available. Do yourself a favor, spend a few bucks and obtain some for this season.

**Shells:** These are easily the most overlooked, yet most important piece of the puzzle. To be consistently successful and make clean, ethical kills harvesting roosters, premium shells are a must. We supply the shells for all our guests based on conditions and experience. We begin the season with hot loads of number 5 shot and then move into 4s in mid-November. Then graduate up to 3-inch 4s to finish the year.

Talking shot, copper and nickel-plated shot is far superior as it patterns much tighter due not deforming and flying erratically. Thus, it's a more condensed load of lead with more energy impacting the bird. The BBs remains cylindrical and penetrate deeper, resulting in more birds hitting the ground dead, quickly in the bag and on to the next flush. Another very appreciated facet is that the shot then easily falls out of the breast when cleaning, eliminating painful surprises when eating your quarry.

If you are "shell" shocked (pun intended) at the price of some of the premium loads, I can suggest a couple of value-conscious options with superior performance. This is definitely a consideration for our operations

as we go through thousands and thousands of shells. We have been extremely pleased with the Rio Royal Pheasant and Fiochi Golden Pheasant offerings.

**Chokes:** We start out with modified (4\*) chokes and, just like shot selection, by mid-November we are switching to improved modified (3\*). The plated shot continues to play an important role, as the pattern density achieved negates the need for using any more respective chokes, providing you with a hard-hitting combo.

Hopefully, I have dispelled some misconceptions and opened some eyes and attitudes, inspiring you to skip the opening season hoopla and crowds, work some heavier cover and put up some big flushes.

If you are interested in a South Dakota pheasant hunt in the fabled James River Corridor, I strongly recommend checking out the go-to resource for the entire area: [huntfishsd.com](http://huntfishsd.com). **MWO**

*Dennis Foster is an avid multimedia outdoor communicator, tournament fisherman and hunting guide. His work appears in publications such as MidWest Outdoors, on radio stations throughout the country, and on Focus Outdoors TV. He welcomes feedback and may be reached through either of his websites, [eyetimepromotions.com](http://eyetimepromotions.com) or [dakotapheasantguide.com](http://dakotapheasantguide.com).*

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