

The Basics of Upland Bird Hunting in Washington



Photo by William Reynolds



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Table of Contents

Introduction	5
License Choices	6
Pheasant	6
Hunting Strategies – Eastern Washington	7
Hunting Strategies – Western Washington	8
Quail	9
Hunting Strategies.....	10
Chukar Partridge	11
Hunting Strategies.....	12
Gray (Hungarian) Partridge	13
Hunting Strategies.....	13
Grouse	14
Hunting Strategies.....	16
Food and Feeding Habits.....	17
Roosting areas	17
Hunting Equipment.....	17
Shotguns	17
Muzzleloading Shotguns	18
Clothing.....	19
Dogs	20
Where to Go	20
Hunting Ethics.....	21
Shot placement.....	21
Crossing.....	21
Flying Away and Head On.....	21
Game Care	22
Skinning.....	22
Plucking.....	22
Processing	22
NOTES	24
Ten Basic Safety Rules.....	25

The information contained in this manual was collected from the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife website (wdfw.wa.gov) and its employees unless otherwise cited. (2016)

Introduction

Welcome to upland bird hunting! This course should provide you with basic knowledge about upland bird hunting in Washington State and give you a general guide to be successful in your hunting pursuits.

In our Basic Hunter Education course, we teach students how to hunt safely. This course is designed to give you an overview of the biology and habits of Washington’s upland birds and how to hunt them effectively. This guide will also help teach you about game handling, hunting equipment regulations and choices, correct shot placement, and much more. These topics will help you become more knowledgeable as a hunter and make the animals you harvest become great table fare.

One thing to remember when pursuing any animal is that it is called hunting for a reason. You may not be successful in harvesting an animal every day, or every season. That’s part of the enduring challenge and fun of hunting. Each season brings a new opportunity to hone your skills. To properly set your expectations, check the annual harvest statistics, which are posted on the WDFW website at <https://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/management/game-harvest>.

For most of us, hunting is about much more than a successful harvest. It’s about spending time afield bonding with family and friends, watching the sunrise over the mountains on a crisp fall morning, and having exciting stories to tell when you get home.



Photo by Kelly McAllister, James Cummings, and WDFW

License Choices

WDFW offers many different licenses that allow you to hunt various game species in Washington. To hunt upland birds in Washington, you will need to purchase a small game license. To hunt western Washington pheasants you will have to purchase the necessary permits. You can also receive a discount if you purchase your small game license and a big game license as a combination license. Remember that you will not receive the discount unless the license items are purchased at the same time.

License choices are as follows:

- Small Game License
 - Allows you to hunt small game such as upland birds, forest grouse, and rabbits, as well as unclassified animals such as coyote.
- Any of the big game combos with the discounted small game license
 - Allows you to hunt the big game species denoted by the license, small game, forest grouse, and unclassified animals.



Photo by Kenny Collins

Pheasant

The ring-neck pheasant is one of the largest and certainly the most brightly colored of Washington's upland birds. An adult male (rooster) ring-neck weighs two and a half to three pounds and measures up to 35 inches from the tip of its beak to the tip of its tail. That long, pointed tail may account for over half the overall length. An adult hen pheasant weighs about two to two and a half pounds and has a much shorter tail.

The ring-neck isn't native to Washington, or even to North America. The first pheasants were brought from China and successfully introduced into western Oregon in 1881. Washington received its first ring-necks in 1883, and heavy plants were made in western Washington in the early 1890s and in several areas of eastern Washington later in that decade. The first Evergreen State pheasant season opened in 1897.

A few small, self-sustaining populations of ring-neck pheasants occur in the agricultural areas west of the Cascades, but the grain-producing lands on the east side of the state provide the best pheasant habitat and the highest ring-neck populations. WDFW releases thousands of pen-




Photo by Wikimedia Creative Commons, Charlesjsharp

raised birds in both eastern and western Washington provide additional opportunity for upland bird hunters.


In eastern Washington you are only allowed to harvest roosters (male pheasants). They have the distinct ring around their neck, a green head and red feathers around their eyes. Female pheasants or hens are not legal to harvest in eastern Washington. Either sex is legal to harvest when pheasant hunting in western Washington.

Sharp-tailed and Sage Grouse Are Protected

These are the areas you will likely encounter Sage and Sharp-tailed Grouse.
Remember these species are protected and cannot be hunted.



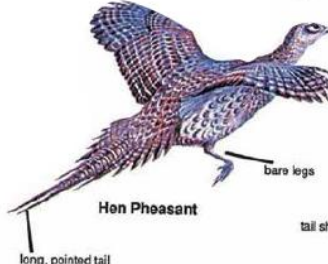
**Sage Grouse
Primary Management Zone**




**Sharp-tailed Grouse
Primary Management Zone**

Sharp-tailed and Sage Grouse Are Protected


The hunting season is CLOSED for both of these game birds. Their sagebrush and grassland habitats in Washington have changed dramatically since the state was settled. The population status of these birds is sensitive. Other game birds such as pheasant, gray partridge (huns), and quail may occur in similar areas. Hunters need to be certain of their targets. Both sage and sharp-tailed grouse are quite distinctive from other game birds. Know your target.



Hen Pheasant
long, pointed tail
bare legs



Sage Grouse
Male
Female
long tail
black belly
feathered legs



Sharp-tailed Grouse
tail short and pointed
under parts white

Hunting Strategies – Eastern Washington

Taking to the field early in the season provides the opportunity to get first crack at young, unwary, and “uneducated” birds that haven’t yet figured out the dangers of getting too close to hunting dogs and people wearing hunter orange clothing. Those that survive the first week or two of the season tend to “smarten-up” and therefore, become harder to hunt. Starting your hunt early in the day gives you an opportunity to hunt pheasants leaving their roosts to search for food and grit (for their crop), and active birds in more open country are easier to find. Like many game animals and birds, ring-necks are often most active during the first two hours of the morning and again during the last hour or two before dark.

Pheasants like to roost or rest in tall cover. Try walking any ditch that has cover and is fairly close to agricultural fields. Cattail patches, standing crops (with farmer approval), thick stands of Russian olive and other trees, and high bushes are great places to try hunting for pheasants. In areas where corn and other grain or seed crops have been recently harvested, hunt the cover



Photo by WDFW

immediately surrounding the cut fields for birds that didn't travel far from their former hiding spots.

Early season pheasants often sit tight and flush fairly close, which makes them perfect targets for small groups of hunters. Walk a zigzag pattern and stay fairly close together to cover more ground and keep pheasants from sneaking away between hunters.

Birds that survive the first few weeks of the season have learned that it's best to avoid humans and their canine companions. Pheasants resort to hiding, changing their daily habits, moving to a new neighborhood and/or flying at the first sight or sound of hunters and their dogs. If you want to keep harvesting pheasants, you must change your tactics accordingly.

There are several ways pheasant hunters can benefit from teaming up rather than hunting alone. Three or four pairs of legs can cover a lot more ground and kick up a lot more birds into the air. This means more potential shooting opportunity for everyone involved. Two or more hunters can work *both* sides of a thick hedge row or brushy ditch line and get shots at birds that fly out on either side. Hunting a field of standing corn, a cattail patch or other tall cover can be an exercise in futility for a lone hunter, but with a small group you can send two or three hunters through the cover and post a couple of "blockers" at the far end of the patch to pick off exiting birds.

Hunting Strategies – Western Washington

Western Washington pheasant hunting is a different type of hunting. It resembles the style of hunt in North Dakota or South Dakota, where a line of hunters walk a field. With this style of hunting, you will want to find a spot in the line that gives you a good zone of fire and will allow you to hunt cover you like to hunt. You will also want to hunt edges of trees and fields. Any cover that is thick at the top and not at the pheasant level should hold birds. Western Washington pheasants are farm raised and released for hunters.

Quail

Both valley (California) quail and mountain quail are found in Washington. Valley quail are the more abundant of the two species and are found on both sides of the Cascades. Although the largest populations and best valley quail hunting occurs in eastern Washington. Mountain quail are hutable in western Washington only and are protected by a closed season east of the Cascades.



Photo by WDFW

The mountain quail, the largest member of the quail family, may weigh over half a pound and measure 11 to 12 inches in length. Its head plume (top knot) is taller and straighter than that of the valley quail, especially when standing on the ground or perched. Males and females look very much alike, with chestnut-colored throat patches and chestnut sides with wide, white bars. They tend to travel in small coveys, usually 5 to 10 birds. Most common in California, Oregon, and parts of western Washington, they're the only quail that makes an annual migration, moving upslope into the high country during the spring and returning to the lowlands in the fall.

Mountain quail are most likely to be found in two to six year-old clear-cuts, under power lines, and in tall stands of scotch broom. Their tendency to run rather than fly or hold for a pointing dog makes them an especially challenging upland game bird.

California (Valley) quail are originally found from southern Oregon to the sound end of the Baja Peninsula and as far east as the western edge of Nevada. The valley quail has been introduced throughout much of the west, including Hawaii and British Columbia. Both males and females sport a curving plume, comprised of several small feathers, that droops forward. The male's plume is larger and darker than the females. Males have a dark brown cap and a black face edged in white, a brown back, a grey-blue chest and a light brown belly. Females and immature birds are mainly grey-brown with a light-colored belly. A covey of valley quail may range from a dozen to several dozen birds.



Photo by WDFW

Valley quail habitat is widespread and includes thick tangles of trees and tall brush, especially near stream beds, small ponds and wetland areas. They also inhabit valley bottoms with patches of Russian olive, oak or high sage, patches of low brush, weeds or tall grass, Valley quail can also be found along edges of standing corn, wheat or other grain fields, and medium to heavy cover surrounding harvested fields.



Photo by WDFW

Hunting Strategies

As with other upland game birds, it is possible to hunt quail without a dog. One strategy is to travel back roads looking for tracks, droppings, and dusting holes that indicate there may be birds nearby. When you find evidence of birds, walk the edge of the road in short bursts, stopping often near patches of roadside cover. Each time you stop, wait at least 15 or 20 seconds before moving on. If there are quail nearby, they may get nervous and take to the air. The same stop-and-go strategy may also work for a lone hunter in relatively open areas with

scattered patches of low to moderate cover.

Another strategy for quail hunters without dogs is to hunt in groups of three or more, alternately “playing dog” for each other. The idea is for one or more hunters to push through areas of heavy cover and flush birds into the open ahead of their hunting partners. This technique works best in fairly small areas and in narrow ribbons of cover: If the cover patch is too large, quail may simply run or, if they do flush, stay within their brushy haven and refuse to fly into the open.

A well-trained dog, of course, can do a better job of playing dog than a human can, and can be a huge hunting asset. The pointing breeds are great, especially in low cover and open, shrub-steppe country, but a tough flushing dog might offer an advantage in the kinds of thick cover where valley quail often hide. Any well trained dog can improve your chances for a successful hunt.

Regardless of your hunting situation or strategy, you’re likely to harvest more quail if you listen as well as watch. Quail are very “talkative” birds, and use various calls and clucks to communicate with each other, and hunters can use this to their advantage. When a covey is scattered, birds will often emit a sort of crowing whistle to locate each other. Such calls may also erupt around dusk, as birds roost for the night. Hunters can often get the chorus started with a quail call, and use the responses to help pinpoint likely hunting spots for the next morning.

A common scenario for quail hunters is to raise a covey and get one or two shots if they all take flight at once, or perhaps stand and shoot several times if birds raise one or two at a time and there’s an opportunity to re-load between take-offs. When they scatter, quail may fly long distances, never to be seen again (at least not that day), or they may settle to the ground only a

few dozen yards away and you can spend the next hour flushing singles and doubles. Those singles and doubles will sometimes hold very tight once they hit the ground, letting a hunter or dog walk right up on top of them before they fly. Those are the rises that may just about cause cardiac arrest, but also tend to provide hunters with the longest possible reaction time for a good shot.

If you raise a covey in or near trees and tall bushes, quail may resort to the frustrating tactic of simply flying up and perching in the overhead limbs, giving you no time for a wing-shot. Shooting sitting quail off tree limbs is the bird-hunting equivalent of shooting fish in a barrel, so you may find yourself resorting to throwing rocks and sticks to get them to take flight. It may be easier and more productive to walk away and return 30 to 60 minutes later, in hopes they'll have returned to the ground and can be flushed again.

Chukar Partridge

Chukars are native to Asia and southern Europe, and they thrive in dry, rocky, steep country. Although now found throughout the western United States and in parts of British Columbia and Mexico, some of the best chukar hunting is found in the Snake River region of Washington, Oregon, and Idaho.

An adult chukar measures 13 to 14 inches long and weighs about three-quarters of a pound, making it a little larger than a valley quail and a little smaller than a ruffed grouse. Also known as red-legged partridge and rock partridge, they're bluish-gray on the back, wings, and breast, with a buff belly and flanks marked with vertical bars of black and chestnut. A black band extends across the eyes and down the side of the head, neck, and upper breast. The throat is white, while the beak, legs, and feet are red.



Photo by Chuck Abbe

Typical chukar habitat features cliffs, bluffs, canyon walls, talus slopes and other generally vertical terrain. They not only roost in steep, rocky areas, but feed on grains, seeds, forbs and grasses they find among and around the rock piles and cliffs. Brush provides nesting cover in spring and shade from the summer heat, so sage, greasewood, and other bushy vegetation is an important part of their habitat. Although they don't require as much water as other upland bird species, there's usually a water source close to where these birds congregate.

Hunting Strategies

Chukar will sometimes move down to flatter ground to feed at the edge of wheat or hay fields, but chukar hunting usually involves hiking, climbing and crawling up and down steep slopes, around the edges of rock outcroppings and canyon walls. Chukars often feed throughout the morning and then move to shady slopes and draws, dusting sites and water holes during mid-day. They'll usually begin moving back toward steeper roosting areas late in the afternoon.



Photo by WDFW

Later in the fall, as snow begins to accumulate in eastern Washington's chukar haunts, they tend to congregate in areas that are relatively free of snow. Pursuing these birds over snow and ice-covered rocks on their home turf can be risky, but also productive.

While legging it out all day and flushing coveys wherever you find them is standard chukar-

hunting procedure, there are other ways to find birds. One is to scan distant slopes with binoculars, looking for feeding or roosting birds, then get into position for a stalk.

Listening for the clucks and cackles that give the chukar its name is another way to locate birds. Like quail, they call to help maintain contact among members of a covey, and attentive hunters can use those sounds to pinpoint the birds whereabouts. You can also use a chukar call to draw a response and get the conversation started.

Whenever possible, try to approach chukars from above. While they tend to fly downhill, they usually run uphill. Chukar are notorious for running out of shooting range before rising, and they can get up a hillside much faster than you can. Chasing a covey of runners up the side of a mountain rarely produces a good shooting opportunity. There is a rather high probability that at any given time of day most birds will be at the same approximate elevation. So if you flush a covey at one point along a hillside, move uphill about 10 to 20 feet and continue along that line in hopes of being just above the next covey you encounter.

Chukars have a reputation for spooking easily, and not holding well for a dog, but, as in any upland bird hunting, a good dog is going to find chukars that even the best two-legged hunter won't find. A close-working pointer is a good choice as a chukar dog, but a pointer or flusher trained to work below birds and flush them back up toward you is even better. Remember,

though, that the steep hills and cliffs that comprise chukar country pose a serious threat to undisciplined or unmanageable dogs.

If you don't have a bird dog or choose to hunt without one, you can still harvest chukar. One tactic is to do a stop-and-go push through, moving quickly while walking, then stopping for 30 seconds near cover to make hiding birds lose their nerve and flush.



Photo by WDFW

Gray (Hungarian) Partridge

Making their American debut in the late-nineteenth century, these European imports were first released in Washington and California but are now found in huntable numbers in about a dozen western and midwestern states and most Canadian provinces. The first birds released in this country came from Hungary, so the gray partridge is also commonly known as Hungarian partridge, or Hun.

Gray partridge grow to just over a foot long and weigh about three-quarters

of a pound. Classic Hungarian partridge country might be a field of corn or wheat stubble bordered or intersected by a couple of brushy draws or a gently-sloping hillside dotted with sagebrush. A small stream, pond, or wetland nearby would likely make such a spot even more attractive to a covey of Huns.

To most hunters, the gray partridge doesn't appear very gray at all. That's because they're most likely to see the bird's rust-colored tail and reddish-brown back and wings as it flies straight away from them. If the bird is crossing, you may see the chestnut and gray bars along its flanks. A horseshoe-shaped mark of dark chestnut covers the lower half of the breast.

Hunting Strategies

Hunters only harvest about 5,000 gray partridge a year, far fewer than any other upland bird. If you want to hunt gray partridge, though, there are ways to improve your chances. First, cover a lot of ground. You won't find dozens of birds in any one place: Population densities simply aren't that high, anywhere. Your best bet is to cover miles of decent partridge habitat in hopes of flushing a couple of coveys in a day.

Gray partridge like to feed around the edges of grain fields and in patches of seed-bearing weeds and grasses. They tend to roost, hide and rest in hay fields, tall grass, brush patches, and

along fence lines. On windy days they may take shelter behind tree lines, fence rows, boulders, buildings, or in narrow draws and on lee hillsides.

Gray partridge tend to be more skittish than quail and other upland species, and may run or flush wild when a dog (or hunter) approaches. Some veteran partridge hunters prefer and recommend dogs that are trained to lock up on point as soon as they detect gray partridge scent. When a dog does lock up on gray partridge, the hunter should move in fast to shorten the shooting distance before the birds fly. When flushed, gray partridge usually don't fly high, but they may fly far, especially later in the season when they've had some hunting pressure. Although flushed birds usually stay together, the good news is that if you are able to locate singles or doubles after the first rise, they tend to hold better for a dog than coveys will.



Photo by WDFW

Grouse

There are six grouse species that call Washington State home. They are the ruffed grouse, sooty grouse, dusky grouse, spruce grouse, sage grouse, and sharp-tailed grouse. Four of the six grouse are open for hunting in Washington. The sage and sharp-tailed grouse are protected endangered species and it is illegal to hunt them. These two grouse are generally found in prairie areas. Large scale wildfires in 2015 altered the prairie habitats and home ranges of these species. Some of the populations may have moved closer to forest grouse habitats. It is imperative to identify the grouse prior to shooting because of their close resemblance.



Flying sharp-tailed grouse
Photo by WDFW



Flying sage grouse
Photo by WDFW



Photo by WDFW

Ruffed grouse are common throughout the foothills and lowlands of western Washington and some areas east of the Cascades. These grouse are the mid-size model of the upland bird family, measuring 16 to 18 inches in length and weighing from just under to just over a pound. Ruffed grouse are most abundant in lowland (under 2,000 feet) forests, both coniferous and deciduous, especially patchworks of clearcuts and standing timber of various ages, intertwined with brushy creek and river bottoms. These areas provide cover and the berries, seeds, plant and tree buds, clover, and other food sources grouse need. Westside alder bottoms and eastside aspen draws are both good places to look for ruffed grouse, as are timber company lands interlaced with roads of various ages where grouse can dust and pick gravel.



Photo by WDFW

Sooty and dusky grouse used to be lumped into blue grouse. These two grouse are the largest of Washington's grouse, with males measuring over 20 inches long and weighing as much as a pound and a half or more. The body of a male bird ranges in color from a light blue-gray to dark gray, with a yellow-orange comb over each eye. It has several white-based feathers on either side of



Photo by WDFW

the neck and has a fairly long, square tail. The smaller hen has a brown back, grayish under parts, and no comb. The sooty version is found in higher elevation (above 2,000 feet) conifer forests of the Olympics and on the western slope of the Cascades. The dusky version is found in similar habitat along the Cascades' east slope, in north-central and northeastern Washington, and the Blue Mountains.



Photo by WDFW

Spruce grouse are less abundant and smaller than blue or ruffed grouse. They are found at even higher elevations than the blue grouse, and are somewhat more colorful. The spruce grouse is found in the lodgepole pine, subalpine fir, and Engelmann spruce stands of the Cascades, Olympics, and mountains of

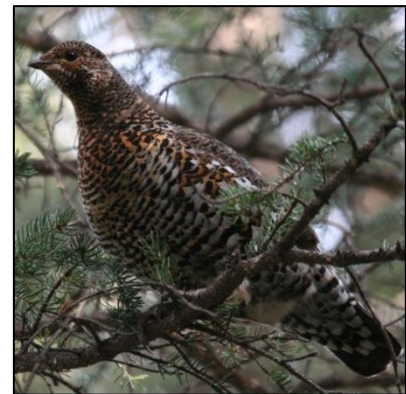


Photo by WDFW

northeastern Washington. Male spruce grouse have a scarlet eye comb over each eye and a black patch that covers the throat and upper breast. The upper portion of the black patch is trimmed in white.

Hunting Strategies

Washington hunters are lucky to have a four month season on grouse. Hunters can hunt grouse with a big game or small game license. They can also be harvested with any legal hunting equipment. Grouse hunting is an easy introduction to hunting, whether it be youth hunting during deer season or walking in the woods throughout September. The cost of entrance is low and you do not need a lot of extra gear. Whatever your preferred hunting method or choice of firearm, there are ways to improve your chances of bagging grouse.

One way is to spend a lot of time in the woods during the first two or three weeks of the grouse season. Family groups may remain together well into September, and if you locate one bird there's a good chance of flushing several birds nearby. Early season hunters might do well to concentrate their efforts at higher elevations than they would later in the season because some grouse often spend their summers feeding and rearing their young farther up the hillsides before making their way to lower elevations where food may be more plentiful as the weather worsens in late fall. Knowing where and what grouse are eating can be helpful in finding birds. The first thing many veteran grouse hunters do after bagging a bird is open up the crop to see what it's been eating! That information may lead you to places where you'll find more birds.

Logging roads, cat trails, and fire trails are good places to look for both ruffed grouse and blue grouse. Besides providing a ready source of grit and places for birds to dust, roads and trails allow hunters to cover more ground in less time. Whether hunting open ground or thick cover, a stop-and-go approach often works well on forest grouse, especially ruffs. As you walk, stop briefly every 50 feet or so, or whenever you come to a spot that looks like especially good grouse cover. Be ready to shoot when you stop, and keep ready until you've taken a few steps. Jittery birds will fly when you stop near them or when you move again.



Photo by WDFW

Ruffed, blue, and spruce grouse all have a reputation for not holding very well for a dog, and many Northwest hunters pursue them without a four-legged hunting partner. A pointer or flusher that will stay close, though, will find grouse that a hunter would otherwise pass by, and certainly can be helpful in finding downed birds, especially ruffed grouse in heavy cover. The "perfect" dog for this kind of hunting might be a pointer that stops

short and locks up at the first hint of bird scent, rather than moving in closer and flushing birds out of range (or out of sight behind trees and brush).

If you do hunt typical forest grouse cover with a dog, you might want to do something to make that dog easier to see and/or hear. Many grouse hunters hang a bell on their dogs' collars to help keep track of their whereabouts and know when a pointer may have stopped and locked onto a bird. Others add a fluorescent orange vest to increase their dogs' visibility in the woods.

Food and Feeding Habits

Upland birds will eat just about anything that provides them with nutrition. They will eat fresh green vegetation, seeds, fruit, invertebrates, plants, and sometimes small lizards or frogs. A field full of grasshoppers in upland bird country is sure to attract birds. They generally feed right after they come off the roost in the morning and continue to feed all day.

Roosting areas

Upland birds generally roost in dense cover areas. This can be in/under evergreen trees in western Washington or in Russian olive trees in eastern Washington. Anything that will help protect them from predators is a good spot to look for birds.

Hunting Equipment

Legal hunting equipment is as diverse as the companies that create and sell them. Since we only have limited space and time, the regulations behind the hunting equipment will be discussed below. There are also suggestions on different shot sizes for each species. Below are some suggestions and information on the different hunting equipment that you may need when hunting in Washington. These are just suggestions and you will need to find what works for you. This section details legal hunting equipment at the time of the completion of this booklet. The current regulations will be in the hunting regulations for the current season.

Shotguns

Shotguns are the most widely used hunting equipment when hunting upland birds. Any shotgun can make a good upland gun as long as it shoots straight. Generally you will want a shotgun that has an improved cylinder or modified choke when hunting upland birds. The choke helps group the shot together. Some shotguns have interchangeable choke tubes and a threaded barrel that allows shooters to change their shotgun's choke based on their needs for shooting/hunting. If your shotgun does not have an interchangeable, improved



Photo by Jerry Lemke

cylinder or modified choke, be aware that your firearms effective range is less than those that do.

It is unlawful to hunt game birds, including turkey, with a shotgun capable of holding more than three shells. Make sure your shotgun holds three or fewer shells. If it is designed to hold more than three, the manufacturer should have also supplied a magazine plug to fill the space to only allow the three shells. Depending on the birds that you are hunting, you will want to look at different shot sizes and loads. The larger the number, the smaller the shot. For example, #6 shot is smaller than #4 shot. You may also want to think about the composition of your shot. At all pheasant release sites you have to use non-toxic shot. There is a list of these sites in the Migratory Waterfowl and Upland Game Seasons regulation pamphlet.

Bird	Lead Shot	Non-Toxic Shot
Pheasant	4-6	2-4
Quail	7½-8	6-7
Chukar	4-6	4-6
Gray Partridge	4-6	4-6
Grouse	4-6	2-4

Muzzleloading Shotguns

Muzzleloaders come in all makes and models. No matter who manufactures the muzzleloader, it has to meet the following criteria to be legal to hunt upland birds within Washington State:

- Muzzleloader: A firearm that is loaded from the muzzle and uses black powder or a black powder substitute.
- A muzzleloading firearm shall be considered loaded if a powder charge and a projectile, either shot or single projectile, are in the barrel and the barrel or breech is capped or primed.
- It is unlawful to hunt wildlife using a muzzleloading firearm that does not meet the following specifications:
 - A muzzleloading shotgun must have a single or double barrel
 - Persons lawfully hunting small game with a double barrel, muzzleloading shotgun may keep both barrels loaded.

Muzzleloaders are a great way to hunt with a method that has been around for hundreds of years. With muzzleloaders, make sure you use a black powder or black powder substitute that is rated for your muzzleloader. If you use the incorrect powder, it could be disastrous. Some other helpful safety hints include:

- Never fill the muzzleloader directly from the powder can as it could spark and ignite the powder in the can.
- Mark your ramrod when the muzzleloader is empty so you can make sure it is empty upon storage.
- Be sure to seat the wad and shot directly on top of the powder charge.
- Store powder and percussion caps in separate dry and cool places.

Beware of what is known as a hang fire. This happens when the trigger is pulled, the percussion cap ignites, but the firearm does not go off. Make sure to keep the muzzle pointed in a safe direction for at least 30 seconds. If it still does not fire in that 30 seconds, put on another cap or re-prime the pan, and fire again. Make sure the nipple is clean on percussion locks.

Clothing

In hunting as in everything else, if you are not comfortable you won't enjoy your experiences as much as if you were comfortable. Below are some suggestions on choosing boots, clothing, hunter orange, and finding what works for you is the key.

Boots

Hunting boots will help support your ankles and also keep your feet dry and warm. Wet and/or cold feet when hunting can make for an uncomfortable day. Some boots have insulation in them to help combat the cold. When choosing a boot, think about the kinds of hunting you will be doing and the temperatures in which you will be hunting. If you are primarily an eastern Washington hunter, you may want to get the boots with 2000 grams of insulation to help on those frigid mornings.

Layering

When dressing for an upland bird hunt, make sure to take into consideration what type of hunting you may be doing. Dressing in layers will allow you to regulate your body temperature more efficiently. The idea is to wear only the layers that you need to stay warm and dry at the time, but have the option to take a layer off or put another layer on if conditions change. A tough pair of jeans or brush pants also may be a good idea to help protect your legs when working in brush. A good rule of thumb is if you aren't a little chilly when you walk away from the car, you are wearing too many layers.

Hunter Orange

Hunter orange is required to be worn by all upland bird hunters. The hunter orange clothing has to be at least 400 square inches, be above the waist, and be visible. A hat by itself will not satisfy the requirement. It is recommended to wear as much hunter orange as possible to help other hunters see you when in the field.

Generally, upland hunters prefer their hunter orange in a vest. This allows the pockets for storing shells, first aid kits, water bottles, ear plugs, etc. The vest also has a game pocket that is great for holding birds that have been harvested so the hunter's hands are free to continue to hunt until their limit is reached. To maximize your use of the hunter orange you may just decide to purchase an upland bird vest to use for all hunting you do that requires hunter orange. Hunter orange hats are also recommended when hunting in tall cover because they are visible over the tall cover and increase the chances that other hunters will see you.

Dogs

When hunting upland birds, a dog will make a world of difference. Every hunter has their personal favorite breed for hunting and they all have their merits. This being said, a well behaved dog is better than no dog. They all have noses that are better than humans at scenting game and are faster than humans at the bird's level. You will want to make sure that the dog has gone through obedience training well enough to come, heel, sit, etc. Also it is a good idea to start training your dog early with loud noises to get them used to it. There have been dogs that are great at finding birds, but as soon as the hunter shoots, the dog runs off, hopefully towards the vehicle.

Make sure to bring snacks and water for the dog. They are covering a lot more ground than you and will need some food and water throughout the day. Also, the dogs can become quite fanatical about hunting and suffer injuries in the field, like cuts, scrapes, bruises, etc. You may want to buy a canine first aid kit or make one yourself. It should have similar items to your first aid kit.

Where to Go

Finding hunting access on private lands in Washington State is becoming more of a challenge. However, there are still a number of options available to hunters on public land. WDFW's wildlife areas are good places to start. WDFW also has a lot of private landowners who have signed up to allow public hunting access on their lands. These lands can be found on the WDFW Hunting Access webpage <https://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/locations> as well as a booklet on how to find hunting access.

The "Hunting Regulations Webmap" provides users with a different way to review the Hunting Regulations. Users can explore regulations data by either selecting criteria for a search or clicking on the map to find out what hunts are available for their selected Hunt Type. In addition, it has the capabilities to look at public/private ownership, show private lands hunting opportunities, map water access sites, and display satellite imagery. The data shown in this webmap are an extension of the printed PDF pamphlet and not an authoritative source of WDFW hunting regulations. This tool is also available for use on smart phones. It can be found online at <https://geodataservices.wdfw.wa.gov/huntregs/>.

If hunters want to gain access to private property, they should scout their desired area and locate lands they might want to hunt. Once a hunter has located properties to hunt, he or she can knock on the door of the landowner. If the hunter can't locate a house, landowner contact information can be obtained from the county tax assessor office. Landowners may refuse to grant permission. If they do refuse access, make sure to thank them for their time. Hunters who are persistent in their search will most likely gain access to some lightly hunted areas and make new friends along the way. Other options include hunt clubs and hiring a guide who has access to private farms and ranches.

The department's website contains annual hunting prospects that detail WDFW biologist's expectations for hunting for the current year's seasons. These prospects are broken into 17 districts that mark where a particular biologist is responsible. Hunters can find the hunting prospects online at <https://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/locations>.

Hunting Ethics

All hunters should be hunting ethically. There are many interpretations on ethics and what they mean, but before starting your hunt, think of what you believe is ethical and put it against what the public as a whole may think is ethical. Being ethical hunters will improve public perceptions of hunting and will benefit the sport. WDFW encourages you to raise your ethical bar to the highest level.

Some things that are considered un-ethical in regards to hunting are:

- Shooting at birds when they are outside your hunting equipment's effective range.
- Shooting birds while on the land, water, or foliage
- Hogging all of the shots from your hunting party
- Shooting a deer or elk at 1000 yards
- Using a bow or firearm that is not properly sighted in

Shot placement

Shot placement is crucial when trying to harvest any animal. As ethical sportsmen and women, we should strive to only take good shots and make the most humane kill. This can be achieved by only shooting when you are 100% confident in the shot. Part of being confident is practicing with your shotgun before the hunt. Another way to be confident would be to know exactly where to put the shot. Make sure that you are not taking long shots and shooting beyond the effective range of your shotgun and ammunition combination, so you are able to drop birds within easy retrieval range.

Crossing

When crossing you want to put the shot in front of the bird so it flies into it. This is also known as "leading the bird." Depending on the speed of the bird, you may need to lead them farther than others.



Photo by Keith Fahlgren



Photo by Flick Creative Commons, Counselman Collection

Flying Away and Head On

When birds are flying away or head on, you will want to start moving your gun from behind the bird, then pull the trigger when you cover it up with the shotgun barrel. This makes sure that the shot will be in the right place.

Game Care

Birds are generally not cleaned in the field. This can be completed back at camp or at home the same day they are harvested. If you foresee traveling a great distance to get home, you may want to have a cooler with ice ready to cool the meat and keep it from spoiling. It is unlawful to possess in the field or transport game birds unless a feathered head is left attached to each carcass, except falconry-caught birds. So if you are transporting the game birds anywhere after cleaning, remember to keep the feathered head attached.

Skinning

For some hunters, plucking the bird for the skin is too time consuming. They opt to skin the birds so they don't have to pluck the birds. If you want to skin your birds, follow the below procedure. If not, you can continue down to the next process.

- Pull the skin up on the breast area to make sure to not nick the meat and make a small slit.
- Once the skin has been opened, gently peel it off.
 - Upland bird skin is fairly delicate and can tear easily.
- Remove the wings at the first joint or if you prefer the second wing joint. There is not much meat past those joints.
 - To do this, find the wing joint and cut around it.
- Remove the feet by cutting around the knee area making sure to sever the tendons.
 - You can bend the knee to the side to make this easier.
- Discard the feet unless you are feeling adventurous and want to try bird feet.
- Once the feet and wings are removed you can pull the skin down the leg or wing just like removing a sock.

Plucking

You can also pluck the bird and keep it whole for roasting. To do this you will want to pull the feathers out. You will want to do this for the entire bird you plan to cook, unless you are in the field and need to keep the feathers on the head.

Processing

When processing your birds you will want to ask yourself what it is you will be doing with the birds when it comes time to cook them. If you are going to roast the birds, you will probably want to keep them whole. If you are barbecuing them, you may choose to have them cut into pieces like thighs, legs, and breasts. Generally the smaller birds like quail are left as whole birds when cooking or even halved.

To leave whole follow these instructions:

- Once you have the bird plucked or skinned, find the bottom of the breast meat.
- Make a small cut here to expose the entrails.
- Reach two fingers into the body cavity and lightly grasp the entrails.

- Pull them straight down, removing the innards.
- Make sure you got the heart from the upper chest area.
- Wash the bird and chest cavity and pat it dry.

To piece the bird out follow these instructions:

- Once you have the bird plucked or skinned, cut down the middle of the chest to one side of the chest ridge bone.
 - They have a ridge bone in the middle of their chest like chickens and turkeys do.
- Carefully fillet the breast off the rib cage. Then do the other side.
- Turn the bird over chest side down.
- Make a cut along the meaty part of the thigh where it connects to the back for each thigh.
- Flip the bird back side down.
- Push the thigh down towards the cutting board until you hear a crunch. This will be the thigh dislocation from the socket.
- Cut the connecting ligaments and remove the thigh-leg quarter.
- Repeat the last three steps for the other thigh-leg quarter.
- If you want to separate the leg and the thigh, find the area where the two meet by moving the leg back and forth.
- Cut diagonally across this location to remove the leg from the thigh.
- Wash the pieces and pat them dry.

This may take a few tries to perfect it. If you would like to practice on other birds, try getting a whole chicken and breaking it down like described above.

Once the birds are cleaned and processed, you are ready to have some great table fare!

Ten Basic Safety Rules

1. Always keep the muzzle pointed in a safe direction and under control.
2. Treat every firearm as if it were loaded.
3. Keep your finger off the trigger until ready to fire. Use your safety, but remember that safeties sometimes fail.
4. Be sure of your target and what lies beyond before firing.
5. Never place or carry a loaded firearm in a motor vehicle.
6. Never use a firearm unless you are familiar with how it works. If you need an owner's manual, write to the manufacturer.
7. Never cross a fence, climb a tree, cross a stream or jump a ditch with a loaded firearm.
8. Never point at anything you do not want to shoot.
9. Unload firearms when not in use. Store firearms and ammunition separately.
10. Never use alcohol (or drugs) before or during shooting.

Learn More about WDFW's Hunter Education Program

Website

<http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/huntered/>

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Regional Offices

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Region 3 Yakima Office: (509) 575-2740
Region 4 Mill Creek Office: (425) 775-1311
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More Information

For more information about the Hunter Education Program, contact our staff in Olympia at (360) 902-8111.

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If you need further assistance or information, please contact the Olympia office of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife: (360) 902-2349, or Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD), (360) 902-2207.