

## OF THE OUTDOORS:

# Tips For Productive Pheasant Hunts

BY GARY HOWEY

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Pheasant season 2010 will soon be under way. Reports from the Game, Fish & Parks & D.N.R. indicate good numbers of birds in several states with South Dakota once again reporting an increase in its bird population.

One of the reasons that South Dakota has more birds is simple.

They farm for pheasants; taking care of what habitat they have while enhancing the habitat they do have, making it more attractive to wildlife.

ants can live in corn or bean fields. It doesn't work that way. The clean farming practices of today leave little if any cover between the rows which are so close together that there's barely enough room for a pheasant to walk in, so pheasants head into them to feed and just as quickly head out into thicker cover once they've finished eating.

In areas that had dry weather, the successful hunters have been working the areas with water near by. It doesn't have to be much, an area near a small slough, creek, and ponds or even as small as the water collected in the irrigation tracks will do.

Another tip that is worth listening to is to hunt even the smallest patches of cover. The larger CRP fields are usually hit pretty hard. As soon as one group comes out one end, another group is probably coming in the opposite end of the field.

Most hunters tend to overlook those small weed patches or small clumps of trees. These places may surprise you with the number of birds they can hold.

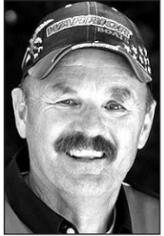
It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure it out, all the other spots are getting hammered and the birds are looking for a place to hide out, making do with what's available.

You'd be making a big mistake if you overlook these smaller patches of cover. As long as a bird can hunker down in it, it's big enough to hunt.

Another thing that I've learned over the years, when it comes to hunting pheasants is that hunters have a tendency to move through the field way to fast. You'll bag more birds by walking slowly, taking your time and even stopping from time to time.

This is especially true in warm dry conditions when hunting with dogs. Dogs hunt best in damp conditions and when it's dry, it takes a dog longer to locate the bird.

In South Dakota, you'll see sloughs; some hold water while others are no more than muddy swamps. These areas give the birds a place to hide during the early



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season and make great winter cover.

They have well laid out shelterbelts and plant trees specifically suited for wildlife. Unlike other areas where they allow the cattle to graze the tree rows and shelterbelts, in good pheasant country, shelterbelts are a big part of winter habitat.

In good pheasant country, you'll see milo, corn and sorghum food plots planted for the birds. These along with other habitat improvements help assure that the birds have cover from predators both on the ground as well as those flying overhead, helping to assure wildlife will have a fighting chance to survive the long winter months.

These things along with the fact that birds are stocked heavily by game preserves also helps to ensure good numbers of pheasant.

Many people have the misconception that pheas-



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Once again, pheasant numbers in the Dakotas are up this year, the walk-in areas will get a lot of pressure during the early season, but still hold good numbers of birds during the late season.

Take your time when you go through a field, let the dog set the pace and work through each area slowly.

I don't know how many times, I've called my dog back, thinking I know where the birds are, only to see a bird bust out of the cover after I've pulled the dog back to where I wanted to hunt.

Follow your dog; no matter how silly it looks or what direction he's going. Let him lead you to the birds.

Another problem that early season hunters are running into is birds that are flushing out ahead of the hunters. If you have enough hunters in your group, have the outside hunters or wingmen work slightly ahead of the walkers post blockers at the end, you'll solve part of your problem.

If you hunt in smaller groups, you might want to consider using heavier loads. Some hunters' start the

season with a 6 shot and when the birds start flushing wildly switch to a 4 shot. I've found that by using 5 shot throughout the season, my shooting improves. Not only am I shooting a heavier load, I'm shooting the same load all season. Some loads pattern different in shotguns and by shooting the same load all season, you learn the limitations of your shotgun and become a more consistent hunter.

To me it really doesn't matter if I bag my limit, sure I like to eat pheasant, but to me it's just getting away from it all and enjoying the great outdoors.

Gary Howey, Hartington, Neb., is a former hunting and fishing guide and the producer/host of the *Outdoorsmen Adventures television series*, which can be seen on Fox affiliates and on [www.MyOutdoorTV.com](http://www.MyOutdoorTV.com). For

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