



A mixed bag of forest grouse



Gary Lewis/Contributed Photo

A ruffed grouse counts on stillness and its camouflage for concealment.

James Flaherty/Contributed Photo

This ruffed grouse from the Imnaha Unit flushed from a tangle of vine maple in a brushy creek bottom.



GARY LEWIS
ON THE TRAIL

Down into the dry canyon and past the spring where the little stream began. Liesl, my pudelpointer, quartered back and forth. She crashed down through the alders, through a patch of brush then burst out into the open. When her tail began to flag, I closed the gun. She was close to a bird and it likely wouldn't hold.

Like a rocket, it flushed out of the tangle of vine maple, straight down the canyon.

My gun was up, my cheek on the wood and I saw the bird crumple as it reached the line of the pines. I waded into the brush, calling the dog, feathers floating down out of the limbs above me.

What had been a September scouting trip for mule deer high in the Imnaha Unit had turned into a grouse hunt. That evening, back at the cabin, I cooked up seven grouse over a Camp Chef backpack stove, the skinless, boneless meat sautéed with spinach, mushrooms and mozzarella.



Gary Lewis/Contributed Photo

A September scouting trip for mule deer or elk can turn into a grouse hunt in the Imnaha Unit.

In the morning after glassing for deer, we hunted blue grouse on the ridge top. The birds were beneath tall pine trees where they were picking for nuts in the duff.

Grouse hunts are not insignificant in my life. The first time my dad allowed me to tag along on a hunt, it was for grouse. The first game I cooked was grouse. And if I live my life right, maybe my last

hunt will be for grouse with an old dog just ahead of me, holding the birds with a rock solid point till I can catch up.

We find two types of forest grouse in Eastern Oregon — ruffed grouse and blues — and it is easy to get a mixed bag for the hunter that knows where to look.

Ruffed grouse are most often found in canyons with a lot of

cover — aspens, alders, willows, vine maple, pines and fir trees. They like a bit of elevation change. A little bench over a spring or a swamp can pay off with looks at a bird or two or three. They flash through the timber, offering brief glimpses and a rush of wings like a heart attack.

Blue grouse are found closer

to the tops of the ridges. They seek out patches of berry bushes and peck out the greenery under the spruces, the hemlock and the tall pines.

The season for forest grouse runs from Sept. 1 through Jan. 31. Hunters should pack No. 7-1/2s for ruffed grouse and No. 6s for blue grouse. The daily bag limit is three of each species and nine of each species in possession. Hunters must leave head or one wing attached while in the field and in transit.

Grouse hunting access is available on some private lands. Click on <https://myodfw.com/articles/hunting-private-lands-access-habitat-program> for a list of private lands. Each listing includes management unit, location, huntable species and the access period. Special regulations are listed for each property and can range from walk-in-only to motorized travel on roads posted as open; leave the gates like you found them.

Gary Lewis is the author of *Bob Nosler Born Ballistic and Fishing Central Oregon* and other titles. Gary's podcast is called *Ballistic Chronicles*. To contact Gary, visit www.garylewisoutdoors.com



Rejoice! It's hunting season



TOM CLAYCOMB
BASE CAMP

For a lot of people out there it is all doom and gloom. School started back up. Sleepy headed kids who have been staying up until midnight are suddenly getting jerked out of bed at ungodly hours, thrown into a car and dumped out in front of some strange establishment called school. If they daydream and their thoughts drift off to their summer backpacking and fishing adventures, suddenly they're snapped back to reality by the sharp crack of a ruler on their knuckles.

And a lot of adults didn't escape this tribulation transition either. Some of them are the cruel ogres that inflict such pain upon the kids. Their schedules have been disrupted, too. They're the teachers. They've cruelly been snapped out of a lull, as well.

I have firsthand experience with the above. I watch it on a daily basis. My wife is a school teacher and my daughter is a college kid and works part-time as a teacher's aide. You'd think every year they were 18-year-old kids getting jerked out of a peaceful life and thrown into Marine boot camp.

Tom Claycomb/Contributed Photo

Hunting gives you a good excuse to get in the backcountry and see the prettiest country in the world, including awesome sunsets.

See, *Hunting*/Page B2