

A Scots tradition, acted out in the Imnaha Unit



GARY LEWIS
ON THE TRAIL

“Let’s stay 30 to 50 yards apart,” I whispered. “Watch the horizon.”

James walked the edge where the canyon dropped away to the creek 2,000 feet below us, a tributary of the Imnaha. My path took me through groves of yellowed aspens. Brittle leaves rattled in the breeze.

We walked and stopped and took a few steps and started again, on the lookout for the horizontal line of a back, for the shine of antlers, for the flick of an ear. What we saw were cattle, mostly black Angus, and after we had walked better than half a mile, we turned and retraced our steps.

We had a cow between us, a short-horn white-faced old girl. She looked at me then swung her head and looked at James. Then she stretched out her neck as if to vent her displeasure. She bawled, long and loud.

Alerted and spooked, two mule deer broke from cover and ran across the opening we’d just walked through. James had his binocular up.

“They’re bucks,” he whispered. And as soon as they’d disappeared, they had turned around and begun to run back to where they started. A hundred fifty yards across the little prairie. James shot the first buck. My crosshair swung through the second buck and I fired.

When the echoes died away we started up through the trees and found them where they’d come to rest, five yards apart. It was the work of an hour to skin and quarter the animals. And half the day left.

I remembered the Macnab Challenge. I had accomplished it once on a hunt in Eastern Washington. Up here in the Imnaha Unit, I guessed, I might be able to pull it off again.

The late outdoor writer Ed Park told me about it. A hunters’ tradition out of English literature, the Macnab is named for the fictional John Macnab, and a challenge to poach a red stag or a salmon from a landowner’s favorite beat with the landowner’s



Gary Lewis/Contributed Photo

A hunter with a deer tag, an upland bird stamp and a fishing license can pull off the Macnab Challenge in one day, but it can take a few seasons to get everything to line up right.

full knowledge.

So the Macnab has come to embody the classic challenge to take a red deer, an Atlantic salmon and a partridge, all in one day, between sunrise and sunset. But the challenge changes depending on the environment. In Eastern Oregon, for example, Ed explained, the hunter must tag a mule deer, catch a steelhead and shoot a chukar. In the finest sporting tradition, the fish must be caught on a fly, the bird must be taken on the wing.

Because it was early, and because I was in the Imnaha Unit, I took a shotgun and walked up to the ridge top where I had found the buck rubs and where I had seen blue grouse. In fact, I had walked around the blue grouse early in the morning to avoid flushing them and maybe spooking a deer. They were still there. The birds flushed and I

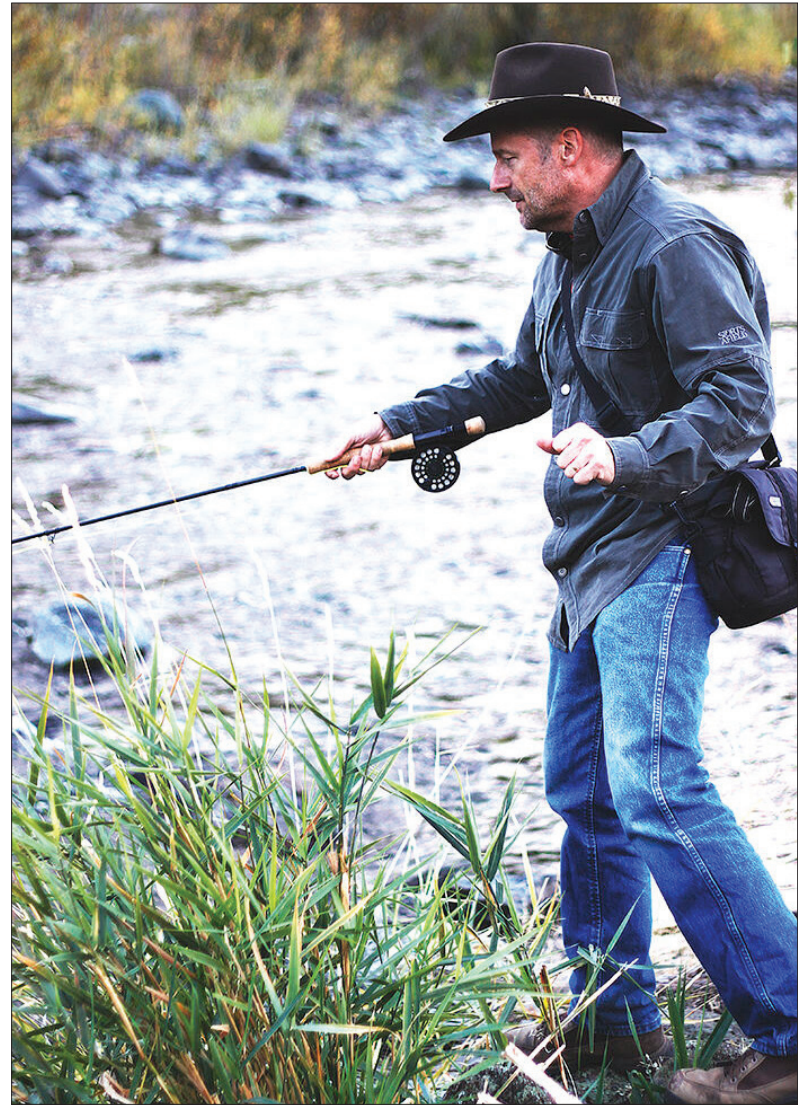


James Flaherty/Contributed Photo

In pursuit of the Macnab. After taking a mule deer buck in the morning, it was the matter of a few minutes to walk back up on the ridge and find a blue grouse.

picked one out and shot it going away. I had to climb over a barbed wire fence to pick it up. I carried my prize back to camp, cleaned it

and then finished getting my deer meat on ice. When our deer meat was cooling, my friend James and I drove down to the Imnaha River.



James Flaherty/Contributed Photo

Flyfishing on the bank of the Imnaha, angling for a trout to complete a trifecta.

It was early October and the river was low. Steelhead and salmon were out of the question. I tied on a grasshopper pattern and floated it down the foam lines and a trout took the fly. It was a small fish, but it was a rainbow and it completed my second Macnab.

Sometimes it all lines up. A hunter in the breaks of the Snake, the Imnaha or the Minam could pull off a Macnab this fall. It can happen all in one action-packed sunrise to sunset span. A buck deer or bull elk, a partridge on the wing and a trout, steelhead or salmon on a fly. Pack a shotgun, bring the pointing dog and take the fly rod too.

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Mixed bag for upland bird hunters as season gets underway

By **JAYSON JACOBY**
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The upland bird hunting season is more than a month old but for some wingshooters, the true season starts today, Oct. 9, when several species join forest grouse on the list of legal species to pursue.

The season for blue and ruffed grouse started Sept. 1.

But hunters have had to wait until now to try their shotgunning skill with fast-flying quarry including chukar and Hungarian partridges, rooster pheasants and California and mountain quail.

Bird populations vary across Northeastern Oregon, according to reports from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW).

Although the dry spring was conducive to a healthy hatch of chicks — cold, damp weather can kill the delicate newborn birds — a summer of drought was less than ideal for birds.

The season continues through Jan. 31, 2022, for most species (see breakout box, “More Information,” for details.)

Following are prospects for upland birds from ODFW biologists.

Baker County

Upland game bird hunters should see a better than average year in Baker County. A mild winter and favorable spring conditions led to good chick production. Birds had good reproduction, chicks were of good size, and broods were generally large.

Quail seem to be still trying to recover from the hard winter of

MORE INFORMATION

Chukar and Hungarian partridge
Open season: Oct. 9 through Jan. 31, 2022
Daily bag limit: 8 (possession limit, 24)

Rooster pheasant
Open season: Oct. 9 through Dec. 31
Daily bag limit: 2 (possession limit, 8)

California and mountain quail
Open season: Oct. 9 through Jan. 31, 2022
Daily bag limit: 10; no more than 2 mountain quail (possession limit, 30; no more than 6 mountain quail)

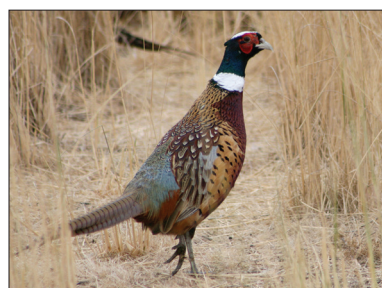
Blue and ruffed grouse
Open season: Through Jan. 31, 2022
Daily bag limit: 3 of each species (possession limit, 9 of each species)

2016-17 and their numbers have been down the last several years. Hunters should expect to see birds scattered in pockets of good habitat. Access and Habitat properties offer good upland hunting and access to public land.

Grant County

Trend counts for quail, turkey and chukar are all stable for the 2021 season while forest grouse were difficult to find in surveys. However, they tend to follow the same pattern as other birds and are likely stable as well. While the area did experience a drought this year, it appears not to have affected game bird production.

Turkey and chukar offer the best opportunities this season for upland hunters, with turkey widely distributed through the county. Turkeys tend to congregate in large numbers in the John Day Valley, Ritter area, and Monument during winter months. However, many of these birds are on private land so hunters must be



Rick Swart/ODFW

Ringneck pheasant.

sure to obtain permission before hunting. New for this year, within Grant County only, fall turkey opened Sept. 1. This change was made to allow hunters the opportunity to harvest turkeys on public lands before turkeys migrate to private lands.

The Philip W. Schneider Wildlife Area is open to the public and offers good bird hunting. Quail, both California and mountain, can be found in brushy and riparian areas throughout the county but hunters will have to work to flush them out of cover. Hunters will find grouse throughout the national forest with blue grouse on ridge tops, like Strawberry Mountain or Vinegar Hill, and ruffed grouse along brushy creek bottoms, like Murderers Creek or Camp Creek.

Malheur County

Last winter was very mild and dry. This was good for overwinter survival for upland bird, but lack of late winter/early spring moisture was not good for providing good quality forage for pre-nesting hens.

• Chukar — Surveys on established routes yielded 25 birds per 10 miles, a 14% decrease

from last year and 47% below the 10-year average of 46 birds per 10 miles. Brood production was good at 11.1 chicks per brood but total number of brood classified was significantly lower than previous years.

• Pheasant — Surveys along established routes yielded 3.9 birds per 10 miles, a 9% decrease from last year’s survey and 39% below the 10-year average. Chick production was great at 4.8 chicks per brood. Hunting prospects will vary depending on the farming practices in the area where you have permission to hunt. The outlying areas around Willow Creek and Vale have higher bird numbers than areas closer to Ontario and Nyssa.

There are very few public lands in the area available to pheasant hunters and the few parcels that are available tend to get hunted daily.

• California quail — Surveys on established routes yielded 39 quail per 10 miles, a 24% increase from last year and 4% below the 10-year average. Production was good at 9.8 chicks per brood with most of the production observed in agricultural lands.

Umatilla County

The majority of upland hunting is on private land, so be sure to ask permission prior to hunting. Hunters looking for public land can access the Columbia Basin Wildlife Areas, including Power City, Irrigon, Coyote Springs and Willow Creek. Cold Springs National Wildlife Refuge is also an option for upland hunting. Surveys indicate that the

pheasant population is way down this year in Umatilla County, but data gathered outside of regular surveys indicate brood numbers to be fairly normal. California quail hunting in the county should be average this year also. Quail surveys indicate the population to be around 72% of the ten-year average. There are some Hungarian partridge and chukar in suitable habitat in the county but none were observed on surveys this year.

Union County

The best hunting opportunities are pheasant on the Ladd Marsh Wildlife Area and forest grouse on national forests. Hunters should work ridge tops above 5,000 feet for blue grouse and stream corridors with heavy cover and water for ruffed grouse.

Ladd Marsh is open Wednesday, Saturday, Sunday and federal holidays through Jan. 31, 2022.

It’s looking like a moderate upland season on the Marsh, with good brood sizes, but they’re few and far between. We are seeing good brood sizes but they’re few and far between. A historic drought has left Union County and the marsh with low numbers of broods.

• Pheasants — Surveys showed some very good sized broods around the area, with birds ranging in age from a few weeks to almost completely grown.

• Mourning doves: — It looks like another stellar year on Ladd Marsh for doves, with very large numbers congregating around