



A good day's gunning for grouse



BRAD TRUMBO
UPLAND PURSUITS

LEFT: Finn and Yuba avoid the camera as I snap a photo of our beautiful gray grouse.

BELOW: The plumage of a gray-phased ruffed grouse boasts intricate detail.

BOTTOM: Creek side channels and wetlands with grasses and shrubs beneath a canopy of golden alder leaves presents a recipe for ruffed grouse.

Brad Trumbo/Contributed Photos



CAUGHT OVGARD
LUKE OVGARD

It's not all about fishing

When drought dries up angling, go on the hunt for mushrooms

Even though my entire brand is centered on fishing, I can assure you fishing is not my only hobby or interest. I also write about fishing, and I think that's an important distinction, but you might see it as splitting hairs.

Fine. I have others. I'll share my love of audiobooks in an annual column, and I occasionally allude to watching football, playing basketball, working out, cooking, dining out, and various home improvement projects. If this doesn't prove I'm a fun guy, read on. I'm gonna write about mushrooms this week.

With the drought in full swing, this has been one of the worst years for fishing in Oregon I can remember, so if you're like me (disillusioned with reality and pining for what was), you might appreciate a few other outdoor opportunities.

Shaggy manes

This prolonged drought has been horrible for so many reasons, but it has to break eventually. When it finally rains, wait a day or two then head to the woods to forage for the West Coast mushroom that is often overshadowed by more expensive, spring varieties: the shaggy mane.

Coprinus comatus, commonly called shaggy manes, are a widespread mushroom in North American forests that are cultivated intentionally all around the world today. Some people say they taste like asparagus, which I can accept, although they still bear an obviously mushroom flavor profile.

Unlike many spring mushrooms, these denizens of fall spring up ready to harvest as soon as 24 hours after the first autumn rain. They average 3 or 4 inches in length, but they can get up to 6. Also unlike many spring mushrooms, they almost always grow in clusters of as few as three but as many as several dozen. Within 48 hours of that initial fall rain, look for the conspicuous white fungi sprouting over gravel, cinder, bare dirt, duff and grass — particularly at the edge of a road or trail.

I grew up chasing grouse and deer every fall, and if the rains cooperated, we could often fill a basket with mushrooms even if we had no meat to pair with it. This year, deer hunters haven't had much of a chance to indulge their vegetarian side in the field, and by the time it rains, most hunters will be chasing birds in wetlands, leaving the forest to the intrepid mushroom hunter.

The shaggy mane season can last for weeks if the rain stays liquid, but once the frost and snow replace it, these white mushrooms are buried or frozen.

Now that the rain has finally arrived, head to the woods and keep a sharp eye.

Shaggy manes can be identified by white or off-white coloration, tall and narrow conical shape with small tufts coming off the caps that give the little mushroom its name. They are harvestable for several days or even a week after sprouting, but extreme damp, heat or cold will all quicken their demise. Once the cap becomes loose or touching the flesh of the mushroom leaves a black, inky substance on your fingers, they have spoiled.

If they're still firm, whitish and dry, cut them off as close to the ground as you can using a knife or scissors, and you have a wonderful meal ahead.

Preparation

Many folks pan fry wild mushrooms, which is fine, but there are better ways to prepare shaggy manes. Like with all mushrooms, soaking your harvest in saltwater for a few hours to draw out any parasites, bugs or mites is the bare minimum.

Pat dry with a clean cloth and then let them sit in the air for a few minutes to firm up again. Some people even refrigerate them for a few hours before cooking, though I've noticed only minimal textural improvement from this extra step.

Once they're clean and dry, slice them into strips. The average shaggy mane will yield three or four French fry-esque strips.

Place the strips on a cookie sheet lined with baking paper and then brush with lemon juice and either melted butter, ghee or olive oil. I prefer butter myself.

Dust with salt, pepper, freshly minced garlic and then top with parmesan cheese.

Flip the mushrooms over and repeat. Broil for about three minutes and experience one of the seasonal fall bounties you can't find at the bottom of a Starbucks cup.

■ Read more at caughtovgard.com; follow on Instagram and Fishbrain @lukeovgard; contact luke.ovgard@gmail.com

Finn and Yuba came at a trot as the report of my 20-gauge double echoed through the creek bottom riparian. A handsome gray-phased ruffed grouse lay at my feet – the culmination of three minutes of utter chaos.

It was early October and Finn, Yuba, and I had yet to find any birds. We had searched high and low, including some exceptional food sources and formerly reliable grouse coverts without moving a single bird. The quail and partridge season opened the week prior, and again, I hit one of my best Hun covers from years past without turning up a single covey. It was about time to put a mark on the board.

A creek bottom covert that sports a mix of berry-producing shrubs, fir of varying ages, and creekside stands of green alder is my best for ruffs, and I only hunt it once, maybe twice per season. It's rare to go a day in there without moving a bird or two, but on this particular morning, the girls and I would learn exactly what George Bird Evans meant by "a good day's gunning."

A lazy start to the morning put us in the creek bottom with the sun already above the ridgeline and lighting up the yellowing alder tops like golden lollipops above the lush forest floor. Typically, I walk the girls into the cover about a half mile before beginning the hunt. Most of our bird contacts come deeper in the canyon, but an instinctual sensation coaxed me to release the girls just past the parking area. Maybe it was the scene of the golden alders calling, or the mix of young firs, crimson ninebark, blackberry snarls, and the clustered white snowberries beneath the alders looked just right.

Upon releasing the girls, they took to the cover like never before, working in tandem, covering every stitch

of thick stuff. The creek bottom is braided with scour channels from high water. One such braid not one hundred yards from the parking area was lined with young firs, and the channel floor maintained a carpet of grasses and sedges. Approaching the line of young firs that spanned the right bank of the scour channel, Yuba halted onto point with Finn by her side, both fixed on the skirt of the nearest fir.

"Always and always be ready," I thought as I shifted toward the girls. At once, a grouse hammered out, then banked right and drifted toward the creek through a wall of firs. I nearly called the girls to pursue it, but they checked up on the same fir and locked up again. As I approached the tree, another grouse erupted and flew straight away behind the fir. Then another. Three grouse under the same tree and not a single shot opportunity.

I pushed on behind the dogs as they sped down the row of firs and quickly located another bird. This one jumped about 15 feet and came down beneath another fir. The girls moved on, so I left that grouse to follow the dogs. I could hear the birds running through the old channel before flushing, and each flush left the bird completely hidden through the dense firs and shrubbery.

A total of six birds got up along the old channel before things went quiet, but the show was not over. The grouse that only jumped a short distance remained to be flushed.

See **Grouse** / B2



FISHING FORECAST

Attractive options remain for anglers

EO Media Group

Although wintry weather has replaced the persistent summer-like conditions, there are still attractive angling opportunities in Northeastern Oregon, according to recent reports from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Grande Ronde River

Trout fishing has been good near Troy. Trout can be caught using a variety of techniques including spinners, flies, and bait. The October caddis hatch is in full swing and may provide for some fun fly fishing. Anglers are catching steelhead and coho salmon. For steelhead, anglers can try using flies or casting jugs under bobs. Coho can be caught with spinners, and plugs may be a good option as well. Anglers are reminded that wild steelhead, chinook salmon, and bull trout cannot be harvested and must be released.

Imnaha River

Steelhead fishing has begun to

pick up, and the lower river near Cow Creek will probably be the best area for fishing throughout the fall. Anglers should remember that wild steelhead, chinook salmon, and bull trout may be encountered in the Imnaha River. They cannot be harvested, and must be released.

Wallowa County ponds

Several local ponds have been stocked this year with rainbow trout including some larger fish over 16 inches. Casting spinners or flies can be effective for catching fish at Marr Pond. Using bait can also be a productive method for fishing for trout at the local Wallowa County ponds. Kinney Lake was recently stocked and should provide fishing opportunities for the fall and throughout the winter.

Unity Reservoir

This reservoir has been fishing steady for rainbow trout with anglers reporting decent catch rates and quality size fish. Bank anglers have been quite successful with boat an-

glers reporting good success as well. Those looking to fish from a boat are still able to launch their boats; however, the dock is no longer in due to low water levels.

Wallowa River

Recently, trout fishing has been very good with some fish longer than 14 inches being caught. Locally, October caddis have begun hatching which can create a fun fishing opportunity. Casting spinners also may be a good way to catch trout in the Wallowa River. Steelhead fishing opened Sept. 1. A few tagged steelhead have been detected moving into the Wallowa River, and more should move in as the fall progresses into winter. Coho salmon are moving into the Wallowa River watershed and will begin spawning. Please be careful not to disturb spawning salmon. There is no season for coho salmon in the Wallowa River, and anglers cannot fish for them there. Anglers are reminded that wild steelhead, chinook salmon, coho salmon, and bull trout

cannot be harvested and must be released.

Wallowa Lake

Was stocked with rainbow trout throughout the year. Some of these fish should continue to be available throughout the fall. Anglers may find good success fishing for trout near the mouth of the Wallowa River on the south end of the lake.

Snake River below Hells Canyon Dam

Sturgeon fishing was good in the this summer with fish being caught throughout the river downstream of Hells Canyon Dam. Anglers are reminded that they must use barbless hooks to fish for sturgeon, and sturgeon may not be retained in the Snake River. All sturgeon must be released unharmed and cannot be removed from the water. Anglers continue to catch fall chinook downstream of the Salmon River confluence, and some steelhead have also been caught throughout Hells Canyon.