



JAYSON JACOBY

Failing to capitalize on a rare chukar mistake

As I raised my shotgun the covey of chukars flew broadside, as straight as clay pigeons, although not bright orange.

Also I didn't holler "pull." But the scenario was otherwise about as ideal as a chukar hunter could hope for.

(The threshold for "ideal" being quite a low one, considering what chukars are capable of, and the ankle-busting terrain the birds prefer. The U.S. military tends to bestow more noble avian nicknames on its fighter jets, such as Eagle and Raptor, but I keep hoping that the newest supersonic high-G machine will be the Chukar.)

I fired three times in the span of as many seconds.

All those pellets and I didn't ruffle a single feather, so far as I could tell.

This is a typical score for me, to be sure.

But rarely, if ever, have I had so few plausible excuses for wasting 12-gauge shells in hopes of bringing down one of these fleet partridges.

I was hunting with my brothers-in-law, Dave and Chuck Britton, in the big canyon country above Brownlee Reservoir, north of Huntington.

Dave and I were on a ridge near Morgan Creek that reliably yields birds.

Almost none of which have ever ended up in my vest, but at least there was a decent prospect of coming across a covey or two.

The notion of "flat ground" is more theoretical than real on the breaks of the Snake River, but the spine of this ridge is quite gentle by local standards.

I was standing among shoulder-high sagebrush in a sort of shallow bowl, the slope rising at a modest angle to the north.

I actually heard the birds muttering to themselves in their distinct chattering style.

It always sounds to me as if the chukars are taunting. But that might just be frustration-induced anthropomorphism. Shotgun shells aren't cheap.

Since I knew approximately where the birds were, I wasn't shocked when they flushed.

Which is to say, I didn't flinch, as though I had stepped next to a rattlesnake, and then nearly fall down and forget to push the safety button besides.

And since I wasn't standing on a precipitous slope (like as not coated with grainy snow with the approximate traction of ball bearings; whoever came up with the slur "bird brain" knew nothing of chukars and their telepathic ability to appear when the nearest hunter is in the most precarious position possible), I had a stable base.

I had time to point the barrel. I even fancied that I was leading a particular bird out of the dozen or so that comprised the covey.

I worked the pump as fast as I could. With each blast I was sure I would see the telltale sign of a hit — a bird dropping its legs, or a flutter in the otherwise smooth flight.

But I knew better even before the echo from the last shot dissipated in the chilly air of early November.

See **Jacoby** / B2

Ready for roosters



GARY LEWIS
ON THE TRAIL

When our daughter invited us for dinner on a Thursday night, we already had the birds in a balsamic vinegar, olive oil, garlic, soy sauce and pepper marinade. At her place, we added pheasant to the fondue feast.

Into a saucepan went the mole (pronounced "mole-ay") poblano to simmer. A mole sauce is ground from chili pods, tomato, raisins, apricot, cocoa beans, anise, cinnamon and other good things.

When the pheasant came out on the skewer, we spooned the mole on then sprinkled it with toasted sesame seeds. Only the day before, the bird had risen out of the grain in a shower of seedpods.

Larry Lee, of Bar-Lee Setters, had a few dogs that needed field time. He invited me, Chris Yaeger and Steve Ries out to Gateway Canyon Preserve north of Madras for an afternoon.

The hunting areas take in 1,268 acres of croplands and boulders and rimrock where the canyons gather water that feeds Trout Creek and the Deschutes. With crops in production, fencerows, shelter belts, native grasses and plenty of water, the preserve provides year-round feed and cover for wild birds and the pen-raised pheasants and chukar that manage to outwit the pointers and flushers.

Lee and Yaeger let the dogs out of the boxes. Steve Ries thumbed 12-gauge loads into the magazine and racked one into the chamber. I plunked yellow 20-gauge rounds into the twin steel barrels of my side-by-side.

Wind howled over the top of the ridge and brought the rain. We faced into the gale and the dogs, Jake and Ashley, cut back and forth in the uncut grain.

The two-year-old Jake, a black-and-white English setter, locked up on a rooster that skulked in the grass and Ashley pulled up short behind him. With a cackle, the pheasant launched, faltered above the dog then towered in the wind. The rooster folded at the shot and Jake made the retrieve.

We put Ries on the downwind side and the next time Jake locked up on a bird, he dropped it. The squall blew through. Shifting shafts of sunshine lit the cattails before us. Jake and Ashley bashed into the reeds to find and hold the bird they knew was there.

Over my shoulder I caught a glimpse of a pheasant that made good his escape across the railroad track. Shortly after that, two more roosters left another half-acre patch of cattails to follow the first.

We crossed the tracks in a foot-race with four roosters. I guessed one would run away from Ries and try to escape downhill. I guessed wrong.

Steve saw one clear the top of the sage and shot it. He heard another blast away unseen and saw two more hotfoot it into a rosebush, where they



Gary Lewis/Contributed Photo

Grant Gehrman hunting out of a box canyon with Liesl the pudelpointer leading the way. Preserve hunts for pen-raised pheasants extend the upland season until March 31. The extra time affords the opportunity for more time with the dogs, more golden days in the field.

must have charged out the other side. In any case, the dogs looked at the thorns and said, "no thank you."

Preserve hunting for pheasants

In Oregon, preserve hunting takes the place of past state-managed bird planting operations. Today, instead of hunting state-funded pheasants on state lands, many pheasant hunts take place on licensed hunting preserves like those offered by Gateway, Ruggs Ranch, TREO outside of Heppner, Olex Preserve south of Arlington, Sage Canyon east of Maupin and Horseshoe Curve near Pendleton. The system allows for expanded opportunity and the ability to pursue gamebirds through the end of March, far beyond the end of the public-land season.

Into the rough

With seven birds in the bag, Larry put Jake and Ashley away and let Stu and Eli out of the box. I took advantage of the moment to put my gun and vest down.

Eli, the white-and-red setter, must have heard about the long shot I missed because he paused over my pretty side-by-side and lifted his leg, irrigating the fine Turkish walnut. I



Gary Lewis/Contributed Photo

A couple of rooster pheasants (one a melanistic color phase) skulk out of a roadside ditch.

wiped it down, but when the next bird rose, I missed with both barrels and you can bet I used the excuse I was holding my cheek off the wood.

Past a couple of reservoirs, the dogs led us along a narrow trail through the junipers, up into a box canyon with boulders the size of wickiups.

Otherworldly in the diminished light, the grasses glowed golden and sage shimmered silver. Caves, like hooded eyes in the lava, glowered down from the rimrock. Water trickled out of lichen-encrusted stone to gather in a pool bordered by willow

and bitterbrush, then burred down to a cattail marsh.

The dogs found the last one when we thought we were finished. Two hours before, there had been another rooster here, a bird I already carried in my vest. Larry looked over his shoulder and saw Eli locked up, Stu behind him.

Scattering seed with his wings, the rooster blasted straight away.

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Duck and goose hunting seasons continue

EO Media Group

LA GRANDE — Hunters harvested more than 350 ducks during the first three weeks of the waterfowl season at Ladd Marsh Wildlife Area.

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife tracks hunting statistics, for waterfowl and upland game birds, in wildlife areas across the state, including Ladd Marsh near La Grande. Statistics are available online at <https://myodfw.com/ladd-marsh-wildlife-area-game-bird-harvest-statistics>.

Numbers for the first three weeks:

Oct. 8-12

A total of 238 hunters took 220 ducks (not including coot), nine geese and 61 upland birds (including pheasant, quail, partridge, grouse and dove).

Oct. 15-19

A total of 123 hunters harvested 56 ducks, seven geese and 18 upland birds.

Oct. 22-26

A total of 112 hunters took 87 ducks, nine geese and 17 upland birds.

Mallards were the most common duck killed at Ladd Marsh. Pheasants made up the majority of the upland birds taken.

Season dates, details

Ladd Marsh is in Zone 2 for duck, snipe and mourning dove hunting, and part of the High Desert/Blue Mountain zone for goose hunting.

Both zones include Union, Wallowa, Baker, Grant and Malheur counties.

The current duck season started Oct. 8 and continues



Nick Myatt/Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

A male gadwall duck in flight. Gadwalls are among the duck species commonly found at Ladd Marsh Wildlife Area near La Grande.

through Nov. 27. The second season runs from Dec. 1 through Jan. 22 (the second

season for scaup ends Jan. 4).

The current season for Canada geese runs through

Nov. 27. The second season runs from Dec. 13 through Jan. 29.

For white and white-fronted geese, the first season ends Nov. 27, and the second season runs from Jan. 16 through March 10, 2023.

Umatilla and Morrow counties are in Zone 1 for duck, snipe and mourning doves, and in the Mid-Columbia Zone for goose hunting.

The current duck season (including scaup) in the Mid-Columbia Zone continues through Jan. 29.

The season for Canada geese started Nov. 8 and continues through Jan. 29. The Mid-Columbia Zone season for white and white-fronted geese continues through Jan. 29, with the late season running from Feb. 4 through Feb. 25, 2023.