

The Basics of Upland Bird Hunting in Washington



Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
Wildlife Program
Hunter Education Division

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Introduction

Welcome to upland bird hunting! This course should prepare you for basic upland bird hunting and give you a general guide to be successful. It should also serve to help you in your hunting pursuits. This manual was designed to give you a basic overview of upland bird hunting in Washington State. The information contained in this manual will teach you about each of the species of birds considered upland birds that are available for harvest in Washington.

This guide will also help teach you about game handling, hunting implement regulations and choices, and correct shot placement. These topics will help make you a more successful hunter and make the animals you harvest become great table fare.

One thing to remember when pursuing any animal is that it is called hunting for a reason. You may not be successful in harvesting an animal every day, or every season. Below are the harvest statistics for 2014.

Bird	Harvest	Hunters	Hunter Days	Birds Harvested per day
Pheasant	41,407	13,905	72,646	.57
Quail	70,498	8,935	48,231	1.46
Gray Partridge	4,355	1,686	8,763	.50
Chukar Partridge	6,538	2,501	10,527	.62
Total	122,798	27,027	140,167	.87

Hunting shouldn't be all about the harvest of animals. It should be about the experience and time spent afield. Like bonding with family members and friends over a great trip, watching the sunrise over the mountains on a crisp fall morning, hearing a pheasant rooster cackling in the early morning light, and being able to have stories that excite all of those you tell.



License Choices

There are many different licenses you can choose that give you the opportunity to hunt for upland birds. All of the license choices give you the ability to hunt other animals as well. You can always add other licenses to your license, but you would have to pay the price of that license item itself. If you purchase a license package, you receive a discount. To hunt upland birds in Washington, you need to have a small game license. Also, if you want to hunt pheasant in western Washington, you will need to purchase the Western Washington Pheasant Permit.

License choices are as follows:

- Small Game License
 - Allows you to hunt small game like upland birds and rabbits, as well as unclassified animals such as coyote.
- Any of the big game combos with the discounted small game license
 - Allows you to hunt the big game species denoted by the license, small game, and unclassified animals.



Pheasant

The ring-neck pheasant is one of the largest and certainly the most brightly colored of Washington's upland birds. An adult male (rooster) ring-neck weighs two and a half to three pounds and measures up to 35 inches from the tip of its beak to the tip of its tail. That long, pointed tail may account for over half the overall length. An adult hen pheasant weighs about two to two and a half pounds and has a much shorter tail.

The ring-neck isn't native to Washington, or even to North America. The first pheasants were brought from China and successfully introduced into western Oregon in 1881. Washington received its first ring-necks in 1883, and heavy plants were made in western Washington in the early 1890s and in several areas of eastern Washington later in that decade. The first Evergreen State pheasant season opened in 1897.

A few small, self-sustaining populations of ring-neck pheasants occur in the agricultural areas west of the Cascades, but the grain-producing lands on the east side of the state provide the best pheasant habitat and the highest ring-neck populations. WDFW releases thousands of pen-raised birds in both eastern and western Washington provide additional opportunity for upland bird hunters.



A hen pheasant

In eastern Washington you are only allowed to harvest roosters (male pheasants). They have the distinct ring around their neck, a green head and red feathers around their eyes. Female

pheasants or hens are not legal to harvest in eastern Washington. Either sex is legal to harvest when pheasant hunting in western Washington, because those birds that are huntable have been released for harvest by WDFW volunteers.

Sharp-tailed and Sage Grouse Are Protected

These are the areas you will likely encounter Sage and Sharp-tailed Grouse. Remember these species are protected and cannot be hunted.

Sage Grouse Primary Management Zone

Sharp-tailed Grouse Primary Management Zone

Sharp-tailed and Sage Grouse Are Protected

The hunting season is CLOSED for both of these game birds. Their sagebrush and grassland habitats in Washington have changed dramatically since the state was settled. The population status of these birds is sensitive. Other game birds such as pheasant, gray partridge (huns), and quail may occur in similar areas. Hunters need to be certain of their targets. Both sage and sharp-tailed grouse are quite distinctive from other game birds. Know your target.

Hen Pheasant

Sage Grouse

Sharp-tailed Grouse

Hunting Strategies – Eastern Washington

Taking to the field early in the season provides the opportunity to get first crack at young, unwary and “uneducated” birds that haven’t yet figured out the dangers of getting too close to hunting dogs and people wearing hunter orange clothing. Those that survive the first week or two of the season tend to smarten-up and therefore become harder to hunt. Starting your hunt early in the day gives you a crack at pheasants leaving their roosts to search for food and grit,

and active birds in more open country are easier to find. Like many game animals and birds, ring-necks are often most active during the first two hours of the morning and again during the last hour or two before dark.

Pheasants like to roost or rest in tall cover. Try walking any ditch that has cover and is fairly



close to agricultural fields. Cattail patches, standing crops (with farmer approval), thick stands of Russian olive and other trees, and high bushes are great places to try hunting for pheasants. In areas where corn and other grain or seed crops have been recently harvested (since the start of the season), hunt the cover immediately surrounding the cut fields for birds that didn't travel far from their former hiding spots and are also good bets.

Early season pheasants often sit tight and flush fairly close, which makes them perfect targets for small groups of hunters. Walk a zigzag pattern and stay fairly close together to cover more ground and keep pheasants from sneaking away between hunters.

Birds that survive the first few weeks of the season have learned that it's best to avoid humans and their canine companions, so they resort to hiding, changing their daily habits, moving to a new neighborhood and/or flying at the first sight or sound of hunters and their dogs. If you want to keep harvesting pheasants, you must change your tactics accordingly.

There are several ways pheasant hunters can benefit from teaming up rather than hunting alone. Three or four pairs of legs can cover a lot more ground and kick a lot more birds into the air than one pair, and that means more potential shooting opportunity for everyone involved. Two or more hunters can work *both* sides of a thick hedge row or brushy ditch line and get shots at birds that fly out on either side. Hunting a field of standing corn, a cattail patch or other tall cover can be an exercise in futility for a lone hunter, but with a small group you can send two or three hunters through the cover and post a couple of "blockers" at the far end of the patch to pick off exiting birds.

Hunting Strategies – Western Washington

Western Washington pheasant hunting is a different type of hunting. It sort of resembles a hunt in North Dakota or South Dakota, where a line of hunters walks a field. With this kind of hunting, you will want to find a spot in the line that gives you a good zone of fire and will allow you to hunt cover you like to hunt. Evergreen trees are always a safe bet because they help keep the rain off the pheasants. You will also want to hunt edges of trees and fields. Any cover

that is thick at the top and not at the pheasant level should hold birds. These birds are reared in pens and released on the weekends for hunters so they may not be as wily as eastern Washington birds, but they are still great table fare.

Quail

Both valley (California) quail and mountain quail are found in Washington. Valley quail are by far the more abundant of the two and are found in huntable numbers on both sides of the Cascades, although the largest populations and best valley quail hunting occur in eastern Washington. Mountain quail are available to western Washington hunters only and are protected by a closed season east of the Cascades.



The mountain quail, the largest member of the quail family, may weigh over half a pound and measure 11 to 12 inches in length. Its head plume (top knot) is taller and straighter than that of the valley quail, especially when standing on the ground or perched. Males and females look very much alike, with chestnut-colored throat patches and chestnut sides with wide, white bars. They tend to travel in small coveys, usually five to 10 birds. Most common in California, Oregon, and parts of western Washington, they're the only quail that makes an annual migration, moving upslope into the high country during the spring and returning to the lowlands in the fall.

Mountain quail are most likely to be found in two to six year-old clear-cuts, under power lines, and in tall stands of scotch broom. Their tendency to run rather than fly or hold for a pointing dog makes them an especially challenging upland game bird.

California (Valley) quail are originally found from southern Oregon to the sound end of the Baja Peninsula and as far east as the western edge of Nevada, the valley quail has been introduced throughout much of the west, including Hawaii and British Columbia. Both males and females sport a curving plume, comprised of several small feathers, that droops forward. The male's plume is larger and darker. Males have a dark brown cap and a black face edged in white, a brown back, a grey-blue chest and a light brown belly. Females and immature birds are mainly grey-brown with a light-colored belly. A covey of valley quail may range from a dozen to several dozen birds.



Valley quail habitat includes thick tangles of trees and tall brush, especially near stream beds, small ponds and wetland areas; valley bottoms with patches of Russian olive, oak or high sage; weather-break tree lines and fence lines; patches of low brush, weeds or tall grass; edges of

standing corn, wheat or other grain fields; and medium to heavy cover surrounding harvested fields.



Hunting Strategies

As with other upland game birds, quail can be taken by hunters without a dog. One strategy is to drive or hike back roads, looking for tracks, droppings, and dusting holes that indicate there may be birds nearby. When you find evidence of birds, walk the edge of the road in short bursts, stopping often near patches of roadside cover. Each time you stop, wait at least 15 or 20 seconds before moving on: If there are quail hiding nearby, they're likely to get nervous and take to the air. The same stop-and-go strategy may also work for a lone hunter in

relatively open areas with scattered patches of low or moderate cover. If they haven't been hunted too hard, quail may hold in those available hiding spots rather than breaking into the open or taking flight as you approach. Move quickly from one patch of cover to the next, but stop at each one for a short time before moving on.

Another sometimes-successful tactic for quail hunters without dogs is to hunt in groups of three or more, alternately "playing dog" for each other. The idea is for one or more hunters to push through areas of heavy cover and flush birds into the open ahead of their hunting partners on either flank or to a blocker at the far end of the cover strip. This technique works best in fairly small areas and in narrow ribbons of cover: If the cover patch is too large, quail may simply run or, if they do flush, stay within their brushy haven and refuse to fly into the open.

A well-trained and disciplined dog, of course, can do a better job of playing dog than a human can, and will certainly help put more quail in the bag. The pointing breeds can be a great asset, especially in low cover and open, shrub-steppe country, but a tough flushing dog might offer an edge in the kinds of thick cover where valley quail often hide. A dog that does a decent job of retrieving will more than earn its keep by locating downed quail that we humans would never be able to find.

Whether you hunt open country or thick cover, with or without a dog, you're likely to bag more quail if you listen as well as look for your quarry. Quail are "talkative" birds, using various calls and clucks to communicate with each other, and hunters can use that bird talk to their advantage. When a covey is scattered, birds will often emit a sort of crowing whistle to locate each other, and a chorus of such calls may erupt around dusk, as birds roost for the night. Hunters can often get the chorus started with a quail call, and use the responses to help

pinpoint likely hunting spots for the next morning. While hunting—if you hunt quietly and listen closely—you may even be able to hear the soft clucking sound that quail often make while they're feeding.

A common scenario for quail hunters is to raise a covey and get one or two shots if they all take flight at once, or perhaps stand and shoot several times if birds raise one or two at a time and there's an opportunity to re-load between take-offs. When they scatter, quail may fly long distances, never to be seen again (at least not that day), or they may settle to the ground only a few dozen yards away and you can spend the next hour flushing singles and doubles. Those singles and doubles will sometimes hold very tight once they hit the ground, letting a hunter or dog walk right up on top of them before they fly. Those are the rises that may just about cause cardiac arrest, but also tend to provide hunters with the longest possible reaction time for a good shot.

If you raise a covey in or near trees and tall bushes, quail may resort to the frustrating tactic of simply flying up and perching in the overhead limbs, giving you no time for a wing-shot. Shooting sitting quail off tree limbs is the bird-hunting equivalent of shooting fish in a barrel, so you may find yourself resorting to throwing rocks and sticks to get them to take flight. It may be easier and more productive to walk away and return 30 to 60 minutes later, in hopes they'll have returned to the ground and can be flushed again.

Chukar Partridge

Chukars are native to Asia and southern Europe, and they thrive in dry, rocky, steep country, with an emphasis on steep. Although now found throughout the western United States and in parts of British Columbia and Mexico, some of the best chukar hunting is found in the Snake River region of Washington, Oregon, and Idaho.



An adult chukar measures 13 to 14 inches long and weighs about three-quarters of a pound, making it a little larger than a valley quail and a little smaller than a ruffed grouse. Also known as red-legged partridge and rock partridge, they're bluish-gray on the back, wings, and breast, with a buff belly and flanks marked with vertical bars of black and chestnut. A black band extends across the eyes and down the side of the head, neck, and upper breast. The throat is white, while the beak, legs, and feet are red.

Typical chukar habitat features cliffs, bluffs, canyon walls, talus slopes and other generally vertical real estate. They not only roost in steep, rocky areas, but feed on grains, seeds, forbs and grasses they find among and around the rock piles and cliffs. Brush provides nesting cover in spring and shade from the summer heat, so sage, greasewood, and other bushy vegetation is also an important part of their habitat. Although they don't require as much water as other

upland bird species, there's usually a water source of some kind fairly close to where chukars congregate.

Hunting Strategies

Chukar will sometimes move down to flatter ground to feed at the edge of wheat or hay fields, but chukar hunting is usually a matter of hiking, climbing and crawling up and down steep slopes, around the edges of rock outcroppings and canyon walls. Chukars often feed throughout the morning and then move to shady slopes and draws, dusting sites and water holes during mid-day. They'll usually begin moving back toward steeper roosting areas late in the afternoon.



Later in the fall, as snow begins to accumulate in eastern Washington's chukar haunts, they tend to congregate in areas that are relatively free of snow. Pursuing these birds over snow and ice-covered rocks on their home turf can be risky, but also productive.

While legging it out all day and flushing coveys wherever you find them is standard chukar-hunting procedure, there are other ways to find birds. One is to scan distant slopes with binoculars, looking for feeding or roosting birds, then get into position for a stalk.

Listening for the clucks and cackles that give the chukar its name is another way to locate birds. Like quail, they call to help maintain contact among members of a covey, and attentive hunters can use those sounds to pinpoint the whereabouts of birds. You can also use a chukar call to draw a response and get the conversation started.

Whenever possible, try to approach chukars from above. While they tend to fly downhill, they usually run uphill, and they're about as likely to run as they are to fly, whether approached by a dog or a hunter. Chukar are notorious for running out of shooting range before rising, and they can get up a hillside much faster than you can. Chasing a covey of runners up the side of a mountain rarely produces a good shooting opportunity.

Something else to keep in mind is the rather high probability that at any given time of day most birds will be at the same approximate elevation, so if you flush a covey at one point along a hillside, move uphill a little and continue along that line in hopes of being just above the next covey you encounter.

Chukars have a reputation as spooky birds that don't hold well for a dog, but, as in any upland bird hunting, a good dog is going to find chukars that even the best two-legged hunter won't

find. A close-working pointer is a good choice as a chukar dog, but a pointer or flusher trained to work below birds and flush them back up toward you is even better. Remember, though, that the steep hills and cliffs that comprise chukar country pose a serious threat to undisciplined or unmanageable dogs.

If you don't have a bird dog or choose to hunt without one, you can still take chukars. One tactic is to do a stop-and-go push through likely looking chukar spots, moving quickly while walking, then stopping for 30 seconds near cover to make hiding birds lose their nerve and flush.



Gray (Hungarian) Partridge

Making their American debut in the late-nineteenth century, these European imports were first released in Washington and California but are now found in hunttable numbers in about a dozen western and midwestern states and most Canadian provinces. The first birds released in this country came from Hungary, so the gray partridge is also commonly known as Hungarian partridge, or Hun.

Gray partridge grow to just over a foot long and weigh about three-quarters of a pound. Classic Hungarian partridge country might be a field of corn or wheat stubble bordered or intersected by a couple of brushy draws or a gently-sloping hillside dotted with sagebrush. A small stream, pond, or wetland nearby would likely make such a spot even more attractive to a covey of Huns.

To most hunters, the gray partridge doesn't appear very gray at all. That's because they're most likely to see the bird's rust-colored tail and reddish-brown back and wings as it flies straight away from them. If the bird is crossing, you may see the chestnut and gray bars along its flanks. A horseshoe-shaped mark of dark chestnut covers the lower half of the breast.

Hunting Strategies

Hunters harvest only about 5,000 gray partridge a year, far fewer than any other upland bird. It's a safe bet that many, if not most, of them are taken incidentally by hunters targeting pheasant, quail, and chukar. If you want to hunt Hungarian partridge, though, there are ways to improve your chances.

First, cover a lot of ground. You won't find dozens of birds in any one place: Population densities simply aren't that high, anywhere. Your best bet is to cover miles of decent partridge habitat in hopes of flushing



a couple of coveys in a day. A well-conditioned, wide-ranging pointing dog is an immense help, and two well-conditioned, wide-ranging pointing dogs are just about twice as helpful. A gray partridge hunter, of course, must also be well-conditioned and wide-ranging.

Huns like to feed around the edges of grain fields and in patches of seed-bearing weeds and grasses. They tend to roost, hide, and rest in hay fields, tall grass, brush patches, and along fence lines. All the aforementioned places, then, are good places to look for birds. On windy days they may take shelter behind tree lines, fence rows, boulders, buildings, or in narrow draws and on lee hillsides.

Huns tend to be more skittish than quail and other upland species, and may run or flush wild when a dog (or hunter) approaches. Some veteran partridge hunters prefer and recommend dogs that are trained to lock up on point as soon as they get a noseful of Hun scent, even if it's some distance from a bird, rather than get too close and spook birds into flushing out of range. When a dog does lock up on Huns, the hunter should move in fast to shorten the shooting distance before the birds fly.

When flushed, gray partridge usually don't fly high, but they may fly far, especially later in the season when they've had some hunting pressure. What's more, after they've been flushed once, they're likely to flush farther in front of you or your dog on the second approach, and still farther out on the third. In other words, it's a good idea to do all you can to make your first opportunity count. Although flushed birds usually stay together, the good news is that if you are able to locate singles or doubles after the first rise, they tend to hold better for a dog than coveys will.

Food and Feeding Habits

Upland birds will eat just about anything that provides them with nutrition. They will eat fresh green vegetation, seeds, fruit, invertebrates, plants, and sometimes small lizards or frogs. A field full of grasshoppers in upland bird country is sure to attract birds. They generally feed right after they come off the roost in the morning and continue to feed all day.

Roosting areas

Upland birds generally roost in dense cover areas. This can be in/under evergreen trees in western Washington or in Russian olive trees in eastern Washington. Quail seem to love brush piles. Anything that will help protect them from predators is a good spot to look for birds.

Hunting Implements

Hunting implements generally used in Washington for upland bird hunting are limited to shotgun and muzzleloading shotgun. This section details legal hunting implements at the time of the writing of this booklet.

Shotguns

Shotguns are the most widely used implement when hunting upland birds. Any shotgun can make a good upland gun as long as it shoots straight. Generally you will want a shotgun that has a choke that is improved cylinder or modified when hunting upland birds. The choke helps group the shot together. Some shotguns have interchangeable choke tubes and a threaded barrel that allows shooters to change their shotgun's choke based on their needs for shooting/hunting. If your shotgun does not have an interchangeable, improved cylinder or modified choke, be aware that your firearms effective range is less than those that do.

It is unlawful to hunt game birds, including turkey, with a shotgun capable of holding more than three shells. Make sure your shotgun holds three or fewer shells. If it is designed to hold more than three, the manufacturer should have also supplied a magazine plug to fill the space to only allow the three rounds.

Depending on the birds that you are hunting, you will want to look at different shot sizes and loads. The larger the number, the smaller the shot. For example, #6 shot is smaller than #4 shot. You may also want to think about the composition of your shot. At all pheasant release sites you have to use non-toxic shot.

Bird	Lead Shot	Non-Toxic Shot
Pheasant	4-6	2-4
Quail	7½-8	6-7
Chukar	4-6	4-6
Gray Partridge	4-6	4-6

Muzzleloading shotguns

Muzzleloaders come in all makes and models. No matter who manufactures the muzzleloader, it has to meet the following criteria to be legal to hunt wild turkey within Washington State:

- Muzzleloader: A firearm that is loaded from the muzzle and uses black powder or a black powder substitute.
- A muzzleloading firearm shall be considered loaded if a powder charge and a projectile, either shot or single projectile, are in the barrel and the barrel or breech is capped or primed.
- It is unlawful to hunt wildlife using a muzzleloading firearm that does not meet the following specifications:
 - A muzzleloading shotgun must have a single or double barrel
 - Persons lawfully hunting small game with a double barrel, muzzleloading shotgun may keep both barrels loaded.

Muzzleloaders are a great way to hunt with an implement that has been around for hundreds of years. With muzzleloaders, make sure you use a black powder or black powder substitute that is rated for your muzzleloader. If you use the incorrect powder, it could be disastrous. Some other helpful safety hints include:

- Never fill the muzzleloader directly from the powder can as it could spark and ignite the powder in the can.
- Mark your ramrod when the muzzleloader is empty so you can make sure it is empty upon storage.
- Be sure to seat the wad and shot directly on top of the powder charge.
- Store powder and percussion caps in separate dry and cool places.

Beware of what is known as a hang fire. This happens when the trigger is pulled, the percussion cap ignites, but the firearm does not go off. Make sure to keep the muzzle pointed in a safe direction for at least 30 seconds. If it still does not fire in that 30 seconds, put on another cap or re-prime the pan, and fire again. Make sure the nipple is clean on percussion locks.

Where to Go

Finding hunting access on private lands in Washington State is becoming more of a challenge. However, there are still a number of options available to hunters on public land. WDFW's wildlife areas are good places to start. WDFW also has a lot of private landowners who have signed up to allow public hunting access on their lands. These lands can be found on the WDFW website as part of the Private Lands Hunting Access program.

Also on the website is an online mapping tool called "GoHunt." This system allows hunters to print their own maps and use them in the field, and also breaks down the hunting success of several species into a visual map. This tool can be found online at <http://apps.wdfw.wa.gov/gohunt/>.

If hunters want to gain access to private property, they should do some scouting of their desired area and locate lands they might want to hunt. Once a hunter has located properties to hunt, he or she can knock on the door of the landowner. If the hunter can't locate a house, landowner contact information can be obtained from the county tax assessor office. Landowners may refuse to grant permission. If they do refuse access, make sure to thank them for their time. Hunters who are persistent in their search will most likely gain access to some lightly hunted areas and make new friends along the way. Other options include hunt clubs and hiring a guide who has access to private farms and ranches.

The department's website contains annual hunting prospects that detail WDFW biologist's expectations for hunting for the current year's seasons. These prospects are broken into 17 districts that mark where a particular biologist is responsible. Hunters can find the hunting prospects online at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/prospects/>.

Hunting Ethics

All hunters should be hunting ethically. There are many interpretations on ethics and what they mean, but before starting your hunt, think of what you believe is ethical and put it against

what the public as a whole may think is ethical. Being ethical hunters will improve public perceptions of hunting and will benefit the sport. WDFW encourages you to raise your ethical bar to the highest level.

Some things that are considered un-ethical in regards to hunting are:

- Shooting at birds when they are outside your hunting implement's effective range.
- Shooting birds while on the land, water, or foliage
- Hogging all of the shots from your hunting party
- Shooting a deer or elk at 1000 yards
- Using a hunting implement that is not properly sighted in

Shot placement

Shot placement is crucial when trying to harvest any animal. As ethical sportsmen and women, we should strive to only take good shots and make the most humane kill. This can be achieved by only shooting when you are 100% confident in the shot. Part of being confident is practicing with your shotgun before the hunt. Another way to be confident would be to know exactly where to put the shot. Make sure that you are not taking long shots and shooting beyond the effective range of your shotgun and ammunition combination, so you are able to drop birds within easy retrieval range.

Crossing

When crossing you want to put the shot in front of the bird so it flies into it. Depending on the speed of the bird, you may need to lead them farther than others.



Head On

When birds are flying head on, you will want to cover them up with the shotgun barrel. This makes sure that the shot will be in the right place. One mistake that is made by novice hunters is placing the shotgun barrel behind the bird because this is the sight picture when shooting a bird flying away or crossing.

Flying away

When birds are flying away from you, aim the shotgun barrel just below the bird. This will allow the bird to fly into the shot.



Hunting Equipment

Hunter Orange

Hunter orange is required to be worn by all upland bird hunters. The hunter orange has to be at least 400 square inches, be above the waist, and be visible. A hat by itself will not satisfy the requirement. It is recommended to wear as much hunter orange as possible to help other hunters seeing you in the event a bird flushes and heads your way.

Generally, upland hunters prefer their hunter orange in a vest. This allows the pockets for storing shells, first aid kits, water bottles, ear plugs, etc. The vest also has a game pocket that is great for holding birds that have been harvested so the hunter's hands are free to continue to hunt until their limit is reached.

Clothing

When dressing for an upland hunt, make sure to remember that this type of hunting is very mobile. Dress in layers so if the day heats up you can remove layers to stay comfortable. If you are warm when you walk away from the house or vehicle, you are wearing too many layers. When walking your body will heat up and you will be too warm. A thick pair of jeans also may be a good idea to help protect your legs when working in brush.

Hunting boots will help support your ankles and also keep your feet dry and warm. Wet and/or cold feet when hunting can make for an uncomfortable day. Some boots have insulation in them to help combat the cold. When choosing a boot, think about the kinds of hunting you will be doing and the temperatures in which you will be hunting. If you are primarily an eastern Washington hunter, you may want to get the boots with 2000 grams of insulation to help on those frigid mornings. But you also may have some hot foot issues when hunting early season in mid-October.

Dogs

When hunting upland birds, a dog will make a world of difference. Every hunter has their personal favorite breed for hunting and they all have their merits. This being said, any dog is better than no dog. They all have noses that are better than humans at scenting game and are faster than humans at the bird's level. You will want to make sure that the dog has gone through obedience training well enough to come, heel, sit, etc. Also it is a good idea to start training your dog early with loud noises to get them used to it. There have been dogs that are great at finding birds, but as soon as the hunter shoots, the dog runs off, hopefully towards the vehicle.

Make sure to bring snacks and water for the dog. They are covering a lot more ground than you and will need some food and water throughout the day. Also, the dogs can become quite fanatical about hunting and suffer injuries in the field, like cuts, scrapes, bruises, etc. You may

want to buy a doggie first aid kit or make one yourself. It should have similar items to your first aid kit.

Game Care

Birds are generally not cleaned in the field. This can be completed back at camp or at home the same day they are harvested. If you foresee traveling a great distance to get home, you may want to have a cooler with ice ready to cool the meat and keep it from spoiling. It is unlawful to possess in the field or transport game birds unless a feathered head is left attached to each carcass, except falconry-caught birds. So if you are transporting the game birds anywhere after cleaning, remember to keep the feathered head attached.

Skinning

For some hunters, plucking the bird for the skin is too time consuming. They opt to skin the birds so they don't have to pluck the birds. If you want to skin your birds, follow the below procedure. If not, you can continue down to the next process.

- Pull the skin up on the breast area to make sure to not nick the meat and make a small slit.
- Once the skin has been opened, gently peel it off.
 - Upland bird skin is fairly delicate and can tear easily.
- Remove the wings at the first joint or if you prefer the second wing joint. There is not much meat past those joints.
 - To do this, find the wing joint and cut around it.
- Remove the feet by cutting around the knee area making sure to sever the tendons.
 - You can bend the knee to the side to make this easier.
- Discard the feet unless you are feeling adventurous and want to try bird feet.
- Once the feet and wings are removed you can pull the skin down the leg or wing just like removing a sock.

Plucking

You can also pluck the bird and keep it whole for roasting. To do this you will want to pull the feathers out. You will want to do this for the entire bird you plan to cook, unless you are in the field and need to keep the feathers on the head.

Processing

When processing your birds you will want to ask yourself what it is you will be doing with the birds when it comes time to cook them. If you are going to roast the birds, you will probably want to keep them whole. If you are barbequing them, you may choose to have them cut into pieces like thighs, legs, and breasts. Generally the smaller birds like quail are left as whole birds when cooking or even halved.

To leave whole follow these instructions:

- Once you have the bird plucked or skinned, find the bottom of the breast meat.
- Make a small cut here to expose the entrails.
- Reach two fingers into the body cavity and lightly grasp the entrails.
- Pull them straight down, removing the innards.
- Make sure you got the heart from the upper chest area.
- Wash the bird and chest cavity and pat it dry.

To piece the bird out follow these instructions:

- Once you have the bird plucked or skinned, cut down the middle of the chest to one side of the chest ridge bone.
 - They have a ridge bone in the middle of their chest like chickens and turkeys do.
- Carefully fillet the breast off the rib cage. Then do the other side.
- Turn the bird over chest side down.
- Make a cut along the meaty part of the thigh where it connects to the back for each thigh.
- Flip the bird back side down.
- Push the thigh down towards the cutting board until you hear a crunch. This will be the thigh dislocation from the socket.
- Cut the connecting ligaments and remove the thigh-leg quarter.
- Repeat the last three steps for the other thigh-leg quarter.
- If you want to separate the leg and the thigh, find the area where the two meet by moving the leg back and forth.
- Cut diagonally across this location to remove the leg from the thigh.
- Wash the pieces and pat them dry.

This may take a few tries to perfect it. If you would like to practice on other birds, try getting a whole chicken and breaking it down like described above.

Once the birds are cleaned and processed, you are ready to have some great table fare!

Ten Basic Safety Rules

1. Always keep the muzzle pointed in a safe direction and under control.
2. Treat every firearm as if it were loaded.
3. Keep your finger off the trigger until ready to fire. Use your safety, but remember that safeties sometimes fail.
4. Be sure of your target and what lies beyond before firing.
5. Never place or carry a loaded firearm in a motor vehicle.
6. Never use a firearm unless you are familiar with how it works. If you need an owner's manual, write to the manufacturer.
7. Never cross a fence, climb a tree, cross a stream or jump a ditch with a loaded firearm.
8. Never point at anything you do not want to shoot.
9. Unload firearms when not in use. Store firearms and ammunition separately.
10. Never use alcohol (or drugs) before or during shooting.

Learn More about WDFW's Hunter Education Program

Website

<http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/huntered/>

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More Information

For more information about the Hunter Education Program, contact our staff in Olympia at (360) 902-8111.

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