

Ptarmigan and Hunting: Hunting Ptarmigan

Ptarmigan! The thought of one makes me a little hungry at times. Ptarmigan hunting or just looking at the ptarmigan when they are too small to hunt yet, even after ptarmigan hunting season opens. Ptarmigan, they get tough as the winter wears on.

Here's all the little things that one learns about ptarmigan hunting, that you should know. Where should I start on a how to article about hunting these fine eating local birds upland?

I could tell you the seasons, but that would be controlled by the local area you all live in. Like I said before, young ptarmigan (born late in the season) are too small to shoot. They're only little babies. They have not enough meat on them and usually cannot fly too far yet. The flesh, is for my taste, too soft. Give them a couple weeks or so to add weight, gain strength and become fair game.

The ptarmigan seasons open in the fall, from August through March, April or May, depending on which game unit you live in. The bag limits vary in each game unit from a high of twenty a day to a low of ten a day.

A ptarmigan hunt on the day after Labor Day is a good safe bet. Just have your hunting or fishing license with you at all times. A State Trooper or Fish and Game Officer can ask for and expect to find on your person a valid and current license. He can even count your catch, and even count the number of your catch in your possession, which range from 20 to 40 once again depending on the game management unit you hunt in.

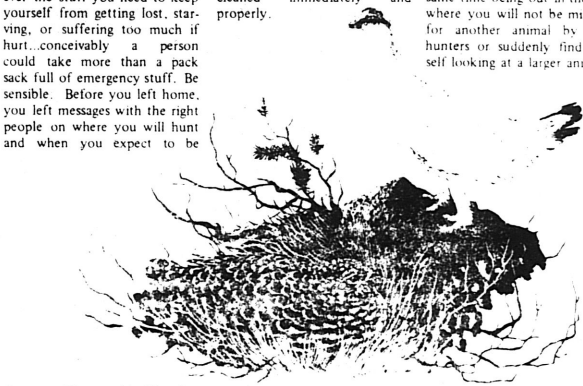
Almost sounds like you have to be a lawyer to hunt, huh? Not really. It depends on your attitude. The poorer it is, the worse off you are, especially with family, your friends or the

law!

Okay. Let's say it is hunting season. It's the first day of hunt. And there's a lot of birds along the highways, rivers or along your favorite off the usual trails super secret hunting places. The birds in the area are full grown. It's a fine fall day, with the morning cool and crisp, light frost covering the brush underfoot.

You're dressed for the weather, have a pack sack for food, coffee, first aid kit, and whatever the stuff you need to keep yourself from getting lost, starving, or suffering too much if hurt, conceivably a person could take more than a pack sack full of emergency stuff. Be sensible. Before you left home, you left messages with the right people on where you will hunt and when you expect to be

for hunting birds. I would recommend a 410 or 20 gauge, although I myself use a 12 gauge shot gun because that's all I got. Use small shot, like number 6 or number 8 shot. If you can't seem to knock the birds down from flight, use number 4 shot with a regular powder load. Using a magnum load or shot size larger than number 4's will tear up the flesh pretty much and will often times make the intestines burst causing a gut flavor to the birds flesh if not cleaned immediately and properly.



home. If you do this often enough, the people will even give you some time for the day's going's on and not worry about you.

I started off, according to my grandmother by literally running down a ptarmigan and wringing it's neck, at a grand old age of 5. Once my throwing arm improved, I graduated to throwing stones to stun or kill what I hunted. Some time later I got a 22 rifle, then a shot gun.

I believe the fish and game regulations say you need to use a shot gun smaller than 10 gauge

Full choke on a shot gun is for the waterfowl. It that's all you got, shoot the birds at the optimum shot pattern range. Shooting the birds at too close a range tends to blow them up, cause blood clots all over the places where they were shot and ruins the good eating quality of these tasty birds.

Know the area where you hunt. Even after 12 years of hunting at my favorite valley, I still follow the cautions I use in all hunts.

Before leaving your transpor-

tation or base camp, survey the area. Get a big picture. Look for the other hunters, their number, where they are going, what they're wearing and color, find another place to hunt if you have to. Look for the game you may have to shy away from, after all brown bears, moose and Wolverines can be a fearsome animal to startle, or anger. Listen for game sounds and place them. Trace routes where you will have the best chances for finding your game while at the same time being out in the open where you will not be mistaken for another animal by other hunters or suddenly find yourself looking at a larger animal at

outstretched and all. I had been eating lunch, sitting in one place for a while. I looked around some more and found a good sized flock patiently keeping an eye on me and possibly terrified to near death! They were too close to shoot. I wanted to watch the birds. So we sat around for a while, them keeping me company for lunch.

There are three species of ptarmigan, the willow, rock and white-tailed. All ptarmigan's wing feathers are white year round while they turn white in fall and turn brown in spring. The birds live all throughout Alaska. They generally weigh in at two-thirds to one and a half pounds each. Their feet are covered with feathers. Mountain sides, valleys, and rivers with good willow cover are good places to find ptarmigan, year round.

According to the fish and game the three species may inter-breed so if you have a hard time identifying the birds, it could be a half breed! Ptarmigan form huge flocks in the fall and stay in flocks until the spring when they go their own ways. The male willow ptarmigan stays with the female while the rock and white-tailed guys leave the care of the young with the female. Six to ten eggs are usually laid in early spring on the ground level soon after the snow melts. The chicks grow quickly and can get off the ground after only two weeks past hatching and can fly well after getting a full set of feathers in 8 to 10 weeks.

In spring and summer the ptarmigans eat insects, berries, new leaves, and flowers. And in Summer, they eat plants and even caterpillars and beetles. In fall as there are fewer insects, they eat more berries seeds and buds. In winter the willow

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That's how I survived hunting successfully, avoiding a bear or two and always being aware and in control of the hunt.

Ptarmigan can hide very well. I saw one pose like the Statue of Liberty, with it's neck

● Ptarmigan

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ptarmigan eats the same old foods...willow buds, willow twigs and a little birch. The rock ptarmigan in winter eat birch catkins and buds and a little willow while the white-tailed ptarmigan mix buds and catkins of willow, birch and alder.

So, with this information, and a little bit of common sense, safe practices, practical and safe use of firearms, it is possible to hunt safely and successfully and bring home some fine birds for the dinner table.