

Putting Nevada's Upland Game Birds in the Bag

By Doug Nielsen

Ask hunters who have been around for more than a couple of years and most will tell you that simply being in the outdoors is perhaps the most fulfilling aspect of the hunting experience. That said, they will also tell you that bagging their game of choice is a bonus they all hope to enjoy. After all, you can't savor the taste of quail baked on a bed of rice and cream of chicken soup if you don't first put a few birds in your bag.

While Nevada is well known for the quality of its big game, the state also boasts some excellent upland game bird hunting opportunities. Hunters can pursue three species of quail, three species of grouse and the chukar partridge. And for the hardy soul, Nevada offers the country's only population of the elusive Himalayan Snowcock which makes its home at about 10,000 feet in the Ruby Mountains of Elko County. But the most popular of Nevada's upland game birds are chukar and quail.

Chukar and quail are both tied to water and can be found near small streams, springs and even manmade water sources. The chukar partridge prefers arid to semi-arid habitat consisting of steep rugged canyons with talus slopes and rocky outcrops. Quail favor low, brushy country and areas where mesquite is common, but they are also found in areas with steep rocky slopes.

A good, sturdy pair of broken-in boots is recommended when hunting either bird. These will protect your feet while walking or hiking in rugged terrain. Bad feet equal a bad hunt. The same is true for your dog, especially in Southern Nevada where several species of cholla cactus lie in wait to sabotage your hunt. Even then you should be sure to carry a multi-tool with a pair of pliers for pulling cactus spines from your dog's paws.

Don't forget water for you and for your dog. The nose of a dehydrated dog tends to lose its ability to smell the small amount of scent an upland game bird leaves behind in an arid environment. If you don't have a dog, you may want to think about getting one, but only do so if you have the time to train the dog yourself or to pay someone to do it for you. An untrained dog is an award winning episode of Funniest Home Videos waiting to happen.

For upland game birds the firearm of choice is a 12, 16, 20

or 28 gauge shotgun with a modified choke. A low base shot shell with 7 to 7 1/2 shot is ideal for quail, but insufficient for all but the most inexperienced chukar. For chukar, a high-base number 6 shot shell is recommended. Keep in mind that when hunting on state Wildlife Management Areas and National Wildlife Refuges non-toxic shot is required.

While some people seem content to hunt with their back side in the saddle of an ATV or pickup truck seat, you will always find more birds if you are willing to burn some shoe leather. For quail, walk along the washes and brush lines near water sources and be prepared for flushing birds, but keep an eye out for running birds as well. If you jump an entire covey, watch where the birds land and be quick to jump them a second time. When you do so, many of the birds will hold tight and you can go back through the area and pick up singles.

For chukar, be prepared to climb in rugged country then walk back and forth along the side hill while working your way up the hill or back down. Once these birds are flushed they will often hold where they land so don't waste time getting there. A word of caution: these birds are notorious for leading hunters up the hill only to fly back down to the bottom once the hunter reaches the top. Then these ornery birds will laugh at you just to make a point.

