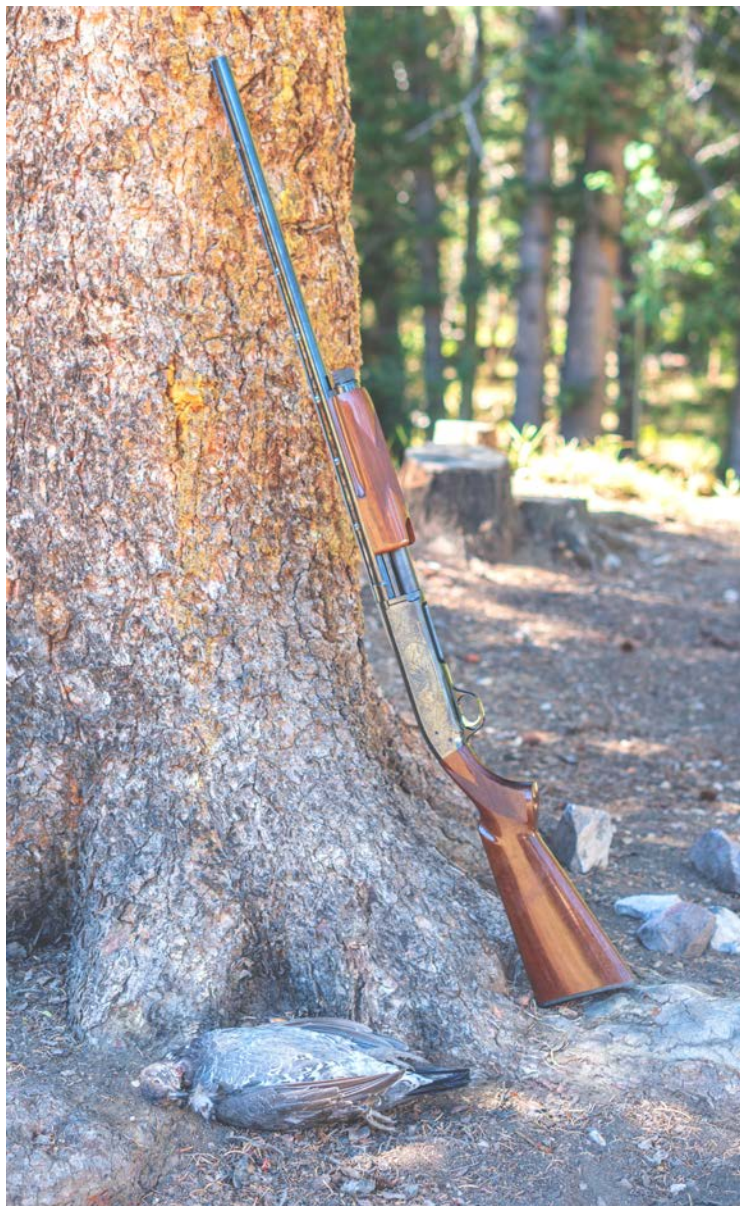


Grouse Hunting for Beginners Lesson Plan / Instructor Guide



COURSE TITLE: Grouse Hunting for Beginners

INSTRUCTIONAL GOAL: Students will learn the basics of how to hunt grouse, some of the gear and equipment needed, as well as some of the pertinent rules and regulations.

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES: Upon completion of this block of instruction, the participant(s) will be able to:

1. Name two other common names for the blue grouse.
2. Name a common domestic bird a grouse resembles in size and behavior.
3. Name the term used for a group of grouse.
4. Name the elevation grouse are most likely to be found at.
5. Name the bag limit for grouse.
6. Name the term used for a baby grouse.
7. Name the relative size of blue grouse compared to other species of grouse.

INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS: PowerPoint lecture.

HANDOUTS: New Mexico Small Game Hunting Rules & Information Booklet
<http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us/home/publications/>

COURSE DURATION: Approximately 30 minutes.

CURRICULUM REFERENCES: New Mexico Department of Game and Fish website, Hunting tab, Information by Species, Upland Game, Dusky Grouse,
<http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us/hunting/information-by-animal/upland-game/>

Biota Information System of New Mexico (BISON-M), <https://bison-m.org/>

The Cornell Lab website, "All About Birds," <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/>

Upland Life, "Upland Hunting Dog Breeds," <http://uplandlife.com/dogs/breeds/default.asp>

Avian Conservation Partners, on-line PDF, "Blue Grouse," <http://avianconservationpartners-nm.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Blue-Grouse.pdf>

Rocky Mountain National Park, Colorado website, "Dusky Grouse,"
<https://www.nps.gov/romo/learn/nature/dusky-grouse.htm>

Partners in Flight, "Population Estimates Database,"
<http://pif.birdconservancy.org/PopEstimates/Database.aspx>

ADDITIONAL READING MATERIAL: None.

SAFETY CONSIDERATION: Don't use loaded firearms in or around the home.

EQUIPMENT, PERSONNEL, AND SUPPLIES NEEDED: Laptop (with presentation uploaded), projector or screen, jump drive with presentation or uploaded to a computer, power cords (if needed), extension cords (if needed) and New Mexico Small Game Hunting Rules & Information Booklet. <http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us/home/publications/>

NOTE: Please check out additional reading material and check out references for more material to look over.

TARGET AUDIENCE: Beginning and novice level grouse hunters.

COURSE PREREQUISITES: None.

EVALUATION STRATEGY: Written Final Test.

AUTHOR & ORINATION DATE: John Martsh, Aug. 20, 2020.

REVISION / REVIEW DATE(S): N/A.

REVISED / REVIEWED BY: N/A.

CRITERION TEST:

1. Name two other common names for the blue grouse.
2. Name a common domestic bird a grouse resembles in size and behavior.
3. What is the term used for a group of grouse?
4. Grouse can be found at an elevation of sea level. True or false.
5. What is the bag limit for grouse?
6. What is the term used for a baby grouse?
7. Are blue grouse the largest species of grouse in North America?

CRITERION TEST ANSWERS:

1. Dusky grouse, fool hen, mountain grouse, pine hen and pine grouse
2. A chicken
3. Pack or covey

4. False
5. Three
6. Cheeper
7. No, they are second to the sage grouse

COURSE OUTLINE:

- I. Introduction
 - A. Give name and Title
- II. Give Goals and Objectives
- III. Blue Grouse
- IV. Definitions
- V. Practice Shooting
- VI. Preseason Scouting
- VII. Hunting Techniques
- VIII. Clothing
- IX. Essential Gear and Equipment
- X. Rules and Regulations
 1. Know all the game laws regarding quail hunting.
 2. Remain ethical.
- XI. Conclusion

COURSE CONTENT:

Course Introduction and Overview

It's not recommended that someone brand new to hunting start with blue grouse. It's better to start with other small game species first and then try a grouse hunt. Blue grouse are not as abundant as the other small game in New Mexico and they require intense, high elevation hiking. A blue grouse hunter needs to be at a high level of cardiovascular health and have lots of stamina.

Why would someone want to hunt blue grouse? They offer the hunter an opportunity for a calorie-burning, rigorous cardiovascular workout. The vistas and views in the fall from the high elevations

grouse are found at are some of the most spectacular in all of the Rocky Mountains. Grouse can be challenging to find and can be hard to hit on the wing. Since grouse rarely fly, their meat is white, lean and mild tasting. They are almost the size of a chicken, so there is a fair amount of meat on a grouse.

Goals and Objectives

This presentation aims to inform the novice grouse hunter about the hunting method needed to harvest their first blue grouse. Additionally, students will learn about the necessary gear and equipment and some pertinent rules and regulations.

The objectives are that after this presentation, the student will be able to:

1. Name two other common names for a blue grouse.
2. Name a common domestic bird a grouse resembles in size and behavior.
3. Name the term used for a group of grouse.
4. Name the elevation grouse are most likely to be found at.
5. Name the bag limit for dusky grouse.
6. Name the term used for a baby grouse.
7. Name the relative size of blue grouse compared to other species of grouse.

<p><u>Instructor Notes:</u></p>

<p>Show photographs of blue grouse.</p>

Grouse

Blue grouse (*Dendragapus obscurus*) are known by quite a few other names, including dusky grouse, mountain grouse, pine grouse, pine hen and fool hen. New Mexico hunters know this grouse as the blue grouse. They are the second-largest species of grouse in North America, second only to the sage grouse. Averaging 17.5" in height and approximately three pounds in weight for males and about two pounds for females and juveniles. This chicken-like bird bobs its head forward while walking. They are found at high elevations of 8,500 feet and above, in aspen and mixed conifers. A solitary bird, they are often found alone except for hens with young.

They survive almost exclusively on Douglas fir and other conifer needles and buds and grouse whortleberry (*Vaccinium*) in the fall and winter months. During summer, they consume berries, buds, dandelions, flowers, insects and seeds. Young birds tend to feed on insects, such as ants, beetles and grasshoppers, more than the adults. They are a fairly curious bird, often flying to a nearby low branch when flushed or approaching a bass, guttural sound produced by a person's mouth

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nhTsBbw5hg8&list=PLZgwPzwIKqdKqtetuUO7uwxLBWwFLzmm8>). A blue grouse can fly at speeds of 25 miles per hour and this causes many excited hunters to miss their intended target. If sufficiently spooked, a grouse can glide for a far distance after takeoff but most often land in a nearby tree.

The blue grouse population is estimated at 200,000 in the United States. The male has a fanlike, black tail with pale gray tips, a yellow eyebrow, dark brown eyes, a red throat patch and a mottled brown and gray body. Females have a barred, brown-gray body and a belly with white and brown markings. In the spring, the male will display his tail fan, strutting and puffing out his throat sac. This produces a deep bass sound to attract a female. Most breeding activity occurs in late May and young are typically hatched between mid-June and mid-July. Brood size varies from four to six young who stay with the hen until the fall. The blue grouse can live up to three years of age.

By far, the best times to hunt grouse are early in the morning and late in the afternoon. That is when blue grouse tend to be active foraging for food. Grouse tend to become inactive and immobile around mid-day.

Definitions

Male grouse - cock

Female grouse - hen

Baby grouse - cheeper

Group of grouse - covey or pack

Instructor Notes:

Show photographs of pre-season scouting and one hunting technique.

Practice Shooting

Since grouse are fast and explosive when flushed, they can be challenging to hit in the air. For this reason, the beginner should practice shotgun shooting before the season opens. Practice should be done with the same shotgun the hunter will use while hunting. A sporting clays course, where clays are thrown to simulate hunting different small game species, offers a wonderful opportunity to practice. Another popular course with clays thrown from different angles and speeds is called five stand. Should the hunter find neither of these courses close to their location, they can try shooting either trap or skeet. Trap and skeet don't imitate a hunting situation like sporting clays or five stand, but they are still better than no practice at all. This is because the hunter can adopt a good stance, practice leading a target and develop a good follow-through. The more practice a new hunter has before the season, the more frustration can be avoided once the season starts.

Preseason Scouting

Active in the field, scouting is not recommended for grouse. There are two reasons for this 1) The primary reason is that grouse can be hard to see without flushing them. Once flushed before the season begins, they become skittish and tend to "flush wild" and travel long distances before landing in a tree the hunter cannot see. Once they have landed in an unseen tree, they can be impossible for the hunter to locate again. 2) Once coveys have been flushed once they tend to be found in smaller groups of birds.

Passive scouting would be recommended for grouse. This means looking at topographic maps, making phone calls to local Game and Fish Conservation officers and talking to other hunters and hikers. Looking at elevations around the state that are 8,500 feet or higher would be a good starting point. The truth is that not all aspen and mixed conifer forests will contain grouse. This could be due to several reasons, including an overabundance of predators, not enough food for them to eat, too much undergrowth or the aspen grove has fully matured. Once peaks have been located, it is time to communicate with the local conservation officer and hunting and hiking organizations. Hunting organizations include Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, Wildlife Federation and U.S. Sportsman's Alliance. Hiking organizations include NM Wilderness Alliance, NM Mountain Club and the Santa Fe hiking groups. Officers can be consulted about the presence of grouse in their districts and members of these organizations could be asked about where they may have seen grouse on their outdoor outings. Since none of these organizations are focused specifically on grouse, they may be more likely to share sighting locations than a grouse hunter would. Some grouse hunters prefer to keep their specific areas a secret.

Since most grouse hunting occurs at high elevations, almost all the land you will be hunting will be National Forest or Wilderness designated status. Make sure to purchase a Habitat Stamp when hunting these lands.

Hunting Methods

There is typically one method used to hunt grouse, and it can be done with or without a dog. This method is known as flushing. The bird is hiding stationary in or behind concealment and is forced to fly (or flush) into the air to escape the perceived threat. Grouse are often found along the edges of an aspen or mixed conifer tree line. A dog uses its nose to find birds and can cover ground more quickly than a lone hunter. Once a dog locates a single bird or a covey, they will wait patiently, pointing at the bird(s) with a front leg and nose. The hunter moves past the dog, scares the bird(s) into the air and fires. A dog-less hunter either tries to approach the grouse they have spotted or tries to scare unseen birds from vegetation or other covers they hide behind or in. The hunter is always moving, either to a viewed grouse or through light vegetation the birds could be hiding within. When a bird flushes, the hunter mounts the shotgun, follows the grouse steadily with the front sight, leads it appropriately and then gently squeezes the trigger.

It takes a special breed of dog to hunt upland birds. Lots of energy, stamina and patience are required to transverse miles of territory looking for birds. After they locate hiding birds, they stand statue still, extend their tail backward and look in the birds' direction. The hunter commonly approaches from behind the dog and flushes the birds. They then shoot them on the wing. Some common breeds of dogs useful for grouse and other upland bird hunting include American Pointer, English Setter, Gordon Setter, Irish Setter, German Short Haired Pointer, German Wirehaired Pointer, Brittany Spaniel, Springer Spaniel, Cocker Spaniel or Vizsla. All of these dogs will require training to perform their duties properly.

Clothing

From September to November, the grouse season takes place, so dress warmly for the cooler weather in New Mexico. Camouflage colored clothing isn't required to hunt grouse, but darker,

muted clothing tends to work best. Stick to dark blue, dark green, gray, brown and black. Try to avoid wearing t-shirts with bright logos and artwork. Grouse usually require lots of strenuous hiking, so comfortable, sturdy footwear is a must. Oxygen levels are lower at the high elevations grouse are found at, so the hunter needs to be in good cardiovascular shape. A cap or wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses should be worn to keep the sun out of your eyes.

Instructor Notes:

Show photographs of the gear needed to hunt for grouse. Also, show the equipment needed to clean and store the meat.

Essential Gear and Equipment

A few items recommended for the beginning grouse hunter include a sporting arm, ammunition, a lightweight upland game hunting vest, a Global Position System (GPS) unit with a compass backup, hearing protection, a hunting license and stamps and binoculars with a harness. The equipment that can stay inside the vehicle includes a fillet knife and game shears, a cooler and a gallon freezer bag.

A hunter can legally use one of seven different sporting arms to hunt grouse. These include shotguns firing shot, muzzleloading shotguns, rimfire and muzzleloading firearms, bows, crossbows and compressed air guns firing a pellet .177 or larger. A shotgun is the sporting arm of choice for most grouse hunters, followed by a .22 caliber rimfire firearm. All of the other sporting arm types are rarely used for grouse and aren't recommended for a beginner since they don't offer multiple shots or the opportunity to hit a moving target.

A semi-automatic or pump action shotgun would be perfect for the beginner to take multiple, fast shots. You need the ability for numerous shots because grouse on the wing can be difficult to hit. They often flush from unseen spots and fly incredibly fast. Bolt action and break action shotguns, either single or double barreled, would not be recommended for beginners. This is because they either cycle shells slower or reduce the number of shotgun shells available for the hunter to shoot. A shotgun plug is not necessary to hunt upland game so that the hunter wouldn't be limited to only three shells in the shotgun. Grouse can be harvested with various shotgun gauges, including 20 gauge, 16 gauge and 12 gauge. By far, the most popular gauges for grouse are 20 and 12. The beginner would be better off purchasing a twelve gauge because it is more versatile. It allows them to hunt all upland and migratory species. The caveat is that if the beginner is diminutive in stature or adverse to recoil, then a twenty gauge would be more suited to the hunter.

Grouse can also be shot with a .22 caliber rimfire rifle or handgun. This technique would only work early in the season before grouse have been hunted. Once grouse are flushed more than once, they tend to fly long distances and it becomes impossible to see what tree they land. Therefore, the only opportunity to harvest them once they are "educated" is when they flush with a shotgun. Therefore, a rimfire firearm would only be recommended as a sporting arm early in the season or conjunction with a shotgun, as a sidearm on the hip.

A shotgun with different sized, screw in choke tubes would be ideal. Depending on a hunter's reaction time, the widest shotgun chokes would be preferred. They allow fewer shotgun shot to

penetrate the meat. Improved cylinder and modified chokes are perfect choke sizes for 25- to 35-yard shots. They will also allow enough dispersal for up-close shots so as not to ruin the meat.

Grouse can be hunted with lead filled shotgun shells. These shotgun shells are less expensive than those with non-toxic shot and, on average, have a longer effective range. A 2-3/4" shell is the ideal length in any of the shotgun gauge sizes. Also, 2-3/4" shells are more inexpensive than 3" or 3-1/2". There could be catastrophic results if a 20 gauge shell is fired through a 12 gauge barrel. Always be aware of your shotgun gauge and the ammunition you are putting into it. Check the side of the metal barrel to confirm shotgun gauge size.

Since the shotgun is the most common sporting arm for grouse, a hunter can pick from various shot sizes. Shot sizes #5, #6 and #7 will allow the hunter a closer shot than #7.5, #8 or #9. The larger shot paired with a wide choke will distribute a wider pattern and not ruin all the meat on a bird. Conversely, the larger shot will travel a farther maximum range than the smaller sized shot. That means the total effective lethal range will be farther with the slightly larger shot sizes and little meat will be wasted. The most versatile shot size will be #6.

A lightweight upland hunting vest with lots of pockets is perfect for the mobile grouse hunter. This vest frees up the hunter's arms and hands to mount, lead and shoot grouse. The pockets allow the hunter to store several different items, including a GPS unit, compass, hunting license, extra shotgun shells, harvested grouse, a snack and plastic grocery bags to stow grouse in before depositing them into a vest pocket. Also, spent shotgun shells should be stashed inside a pocket and thrown away later.

The grouse hunter is going to be covering lots of territory away from established hiking and game trails. This amount of cross-country hiking greatly increases the probability of a grouse hunter becoming lost in the woods. A GPS unit, actively working, can decrease the odds of getting lost to essentially zero. Marking a camping location or vehicle as a waypoint lets you return to your place of origin, as long as the batteries don't die and the unit doesn't break. A compass backup is always recommended in case something goes wrong with your GPS.

Hearing protection is highly recommended when discharging firearms. There are two types of hearing protection earmuffs which fit over the ears and earplugs which fit inside the ear canals. Earplugs cancel out more decibels of noise is more inexpensive and lighter weight than ear muffs. Often earplugs are tethered together by a plastic cord that runs behind the neck. Conversely, earmuffs are easier and faster to put on than earplugs. They also tend to last longer and are harder to lose than earplugs. Decide on the best hearing protection for you.

Always have a hunting license and the required stamps with you in the field. These include a game hunting license, a habitat management and access validation and a habitat stamp if hunting on Bureau of Land Management or Forest Service lands. All youth under 18 need either a hunter education number or a New Mexico Mentored-Youth (M-Y) hunter number. Keeping these documents on your person will save you a long walk back to your vehicle if a conservation officer checks you while actively hunting in the field.

Binoculars can be invaluable for seeing grouse that have flown into a tree. Leaves and branches can often completely camouflage a grouse high in a tree and make them almost impossible to spot. If grouse haven't been previously hunted, they will often fly straight up after flushing into the nearest tree. An elastic binoculars harness, which straps around the hunter's shoulders, is preferable to a neck strap. This body harness alleviates neck fatigue, frees your hands and makes them instantly available.

The following equipment can be kept inside the vehicle: fillet knife, game shears, a gallon freezer bag, cooler and ice packs. Game shears and a fillet knife allow field cleaning to be super quick. Blue grouse are entirely white meat, so keeping the bird whole is best for processing and cooking. Grouse are quite simple to clean; feathers and skin can be pulled off by hand, usually in one motion. The head, wings and legs can be snipped off with the game shears. The bird can be gutted with the fillet knife. There is no proof of species required for dusky grouse.

Be sure to keep a clean gallon freezer bag inside your vehicle. Once you are done cleaning your grouse, it can be stored inside this freezer bag. This will go into your cooler with ice packs to keep the meat cool.

Instructor Notes:

Show a slide with a Top Ten list of rules and regulations.

Rules and Regulations

All of the rules and regulations pertinent to grouse hunting won't be listed because there are too many. Each hunters' responsibility is to know all of the rules and regulations prior to hunting any small or big game species. Studying the current upland game proclamation and having it downloaded to a cell phone will allow the hunter to know and follow the rules. It will also allow them to instantly reference laws while in the field. I will list a few of the significant rules and regulations but make sure you know all of them before venturing out hunting for grouse.

1. Grouse can be hunted ½ hour before sunrise to ½ an hour after sunset.
2. Grouse may be taken with shotguns firing shot, muzzleloading shotguns, rimfire and muzzleloading firearms, bows, crossbows and compressed air guns firing a pellet .177 or larger.
3. Grouse and other upland game may be hunted with an unplugged shotgun.
4. The bag limit for dusky grouse is three per day. The possession limit is six dusky grouse.***
5. The grouse season is three months long, from Sept. 1 through Nov. 30.***

***Bag limits and season dates are subject to change, consult the latest Upland Game Hunting Rules & Information booklet for the most up-to-date information.

It is unlawful to:

6. Hunt protected species without a license and all applicable permits, stamps or validations.
7. Exceed the daily bag limit or have more than the legal possession limit of any species.
8. Hunt any protected species outside of established season for that species.
9. Leave a fire unattended or improperly handle fire.
10. Park any motor vehicle or camp within 300 yards of any man-made water hole, water well or watering tank used by wildlife or domestic stock, without the prior consent of the land-owner, private-land lessee, public-land lessee or public-land management agency.

It is encouraged to pleasantly inform fellow hunters if you see them attempting to violate any game laws. This includes asking them to pick up any litter they might have accumulated while out hunting. Most hunters aren't intentionally trying to break game laws but instead are unaware of specific ones. Showing them from a downloaded proclamation where the relevant law is found can help clear up any confusion.

Besides following state game laws, ethics are essential to always adhere to. Something can be completely legal but be unethical. If something is unethical, then avoid doing it. For instance, although it's legal to shoot a shotgun into a covey of more than three birds, that would be considered unethical. If four or more birds are tightly grouped, there is a chance the hunter could exceed the daily bag limit of three birds. By ethically not firing into a covey, but instead targeting single birds, there is less chance the hunter will break the law.

Conclusion

A hunter education class is strongly encouraged for everyone to take, even though it isn't mandatory for persons 18 and above. This class will teach the new hunter how to handle different types of firearms safely, how to hunt legally and ethically and how to cross fences and other barriers alone and with a friend while carrying a firearm. These are just a few of the many essential topics covered in a hunter education class.

A good mentor can be crucial for a new hunter. They can teach all the rules and regulations, lend encouragement if frustration sets in, answer any newbie questions and advise where to hunt. They can also let you borrow their gear while learning the ropes. Remember to have fun whenever hunting and also to respect your quarry.

After you have successfully harvested grouse a few times, please share this valuable knowledge with someone else who has never hunted grouse. Make sure they are in good cardiovascular shape and can hike longer distances. Grouse hunting isn't hard to teach an interested, patient person. Hunting will only survive as a tradition if we are willing to share our knowledge and experience with new people. Hunting grouse requires a minimal amount of gear compared to other forms of hunting. They can be hunted during nice weather, are quick and straightforward to clean and provide nutritious, delicious white meat.

Post Test

1. Name two other common names for the blue grouse.
2. Name a common domestic bird a grouse resembles in size and behavior.
3. What is the term used for a group of grouse?
4. Grouse can be found at an elevation of sea level. True or false.
5. Name the bag limit for grouse.
6. Name the term used for a baby grouse.
7. Name the relative size of blue grouse compared to other species of grouse.