

Going Where Nobody Has Gone Before

(A How to Guide of Finding Birds On Public Lands)

As an upland bird hunter living in Ohio we all have the leisure of having public access hunting available to us. There is one minor drawback to this; all of Ohio's residents have the same right to hunt the public lands at any given time. Believe me, after opening week all bird hunters will agree that it seems that all of Ohio has indeed been through these bird fields; however there are some hunters who can continually harvest game from these fields all season long, and by doing so will leave all his buddies wondering how it is done. The key to finding birds on heavily pressured land is to effectively go where everyone else overlooks or physically refuses to go.

When looking for pheasants on public land, most people overlook the drainage ditches. A large majority of hunters will get out and trek through the vast amounts of open field, and pass on the cover next to the drainage ditch near the road. As birds are flushed and flee for their lives they will fly from the center of the fields outward. When the birds come down they will enter the first cover they can find, which often times is the ditch running along side the road. With the close proximity of the road most hunters step right across the ditch and begin to work the field. With a little patience a hunter can work a ditch in such a manner to capitalize on this overlooked cover.

The second most overlooked piece of cover is the thin strip of cover running next to a fence. I have seen multiple birds come from a clump of grass no bigger than a throw pillow. The key to hunting a fence row is using a good cross wind to your advantage. The cross wind will allow a dog to hunt both sides of the fence at once without necessarily ever needing to cross the fence. When attempting to hunt fencerows it is worth mentioning not to be too discriminate. Some hunters will walk a fencerow up to woods and stop. There have been many birds harvested from a fencerow separating a crop field from a wood lot. A hunter will want to keep in mind the reason for hunting the fence row is to find birds that everyone else overlooked and put antics into place that others have not thought of, therefore even a fencerow with thin cover is worth working.

A third Antic worth mentioning is focusing on small wood lots. A large amount of upland hunters will work the fields around a woods, but will pay no attention to what is in the woods. On occasion a bird will flush in the direction of a woodlot and go down along a woods, and instead of returning to the field it will flee into the woods. While hunting through a wood lot it's a good idea to focus on any kind of grass cover, briar tangles, and all brush piles; all of which make for great places to take cover while watching oncoming hunters walk by.

Lastly, the easiest way to continually bag birds and bring meat home for the table is to find areas that get little or no pressure. In Ohio many of our public lands are natural marshes, which intuitively implies an abundance of water and the water will work as a natural block to prevent hunters from accessing some key fields where birds are piled up. To access areas that are lightly traveled a hunter may need to cross bodies of water, trek across the nastiest of briar tangles, or merely being willing to

walk further than anybody else. When birds are flushed from the heavily hunted fields in an attempt to find less pressure they will congregate in small pockets surrounded by water, briar tangles, or any other natural form of deterrent. If a hunter is willing to cross the water that everyone else refuses to cross then a bountiful crop of birds can be expected.

In summing things up, odd or un-thought of antics are worthwhile. Time spent working fencerows, drainage ditches, and woodlots while hunting public land for upland birds can prove beneficial. Successful hunters have proven time and time again that there are indeed birds on public land, and when a hunter is willing to go where nobody else has gone he will be rewarded with opportunities of filling his bag limit. Until next time, be true to yourself and kind to your neighbor, and maybe I'll see you in the fields of Ohio.