

OF THE OUTDOORS | GARY HOWEY

Brown Co. A Haven For Waterfowl Enthusiasts

BY GARY HOWEY

Hartington, Neb.

Working our way north out of Aberdeen, South Dakota, just off to our right, a funnel appeared, this one was descending, rising again before descending, resembling thousands of maple leaves as they tumbled down onto the frozen surface of the wildlife area.

Thousands upon thousands of Snow geese were making their way into the area with these massive flocks of migrating waterfowl looking like tornadoes descending onto the ice covered ponds and wetlands near Sand Lake Refuge.

Mark Anderson (Sioux Falls) and the 2005 Federal Waterfowl Stamp artist, along with good friend Casey Weismantel (Aberdeen) and I had planned a waterfowl/pheasant hunt the week before Thanksgiving. On this trip, we'd hoped to get the opportunity to hunt not only ducks, geese, pheasants as well the Tundra

Swan's that used the shallow water sloughs found throughout the area.

Tundra Swans are large birds with wing spans up to six feet that rest and feed in the area as they wing their way south during their annual migration, giving hunters excel-



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lent opportunities to pass shoot and decoy these large migratory birds.

As any outdoorsmen or women has heard, "we should have been there yesterday" as the Saturday before, millions of birds, including over a thousand swans had been on the refuge. Unfortunately for us, a front moved through, turning the sloughs and ponds the birds were using, into a giant skating rink, freezing them solid. The remaining unfrozen water was packed with the remaining waterfowl that were taking turn keeping it from freezing.

The day prior to checking in at Aberdeen, we'd spent some time cruising around Brown County, looking for swans and any open water, while at the same time, doing some road hunting for pheasants. On almost every turn we made, pheasants could be seen along the road and in the ditches, giving us numerous opportunities to fill our three-bird limit.



Casey Weismantel of Aberdeen, left, and Mark Anderson, Sioux Falls, are pictured with a few of the Snow geese taken on a recent hunt near Aberdeen.

The Aberdeen/Brown County area is one of the hot spots for pheasant hunting in South Dakota with the Aberdeen Convention and Visitors Bureau (www.MillionDollar-Bird.com) once again would be holding their Million Dollar Bird Hunt where they released 100-tagged birds. If you bring down one of their tagged birds, you have the opportunity to win anywhere from \$100 up to \$1 million.

With an abundance of both upland game birds and waterfowl and a chance to win One Million Dollars while pheasant hunting, the Aberdeen/Brown County area is the place to be.

Because of the wetlands and Sand Lake Refuge, ducks, geese and swans pile into the area from the north during their fall migration. This and the public hunting areas, waterfowl hunting in the area is some of the best there is.

As mentioned earlier, the skies were filled with millions of remaining Snow geese, Specks, Canada's

and Mallards allowing us to pass shoot them or set up decoys in the surrounding fields to hunt them as they came off the water to feed and when they returned.

We'd easily gotten permission to hunt a harvested cornfield the geese were feeding in with Mark hunting along a section line while Casey and I chose to put a sneak down a drainage ditch the geese were flying over as they came into the field.

Because of the limited time we had, we opted to hunt out of the heavy cover adjacent to the wetlands areas and pass shoot the geese as they came into or departed the water on their way to feed.

On this trip, I'd man the camera while Mark and Casey did the shooting. The heavy cover gave us plenty of hiding place, allowing us to hunker down in ditch and field along the waters edge as we waited for the birds to pass over.

Casey and I picked an area just off the water while Mark chose to

hunt the ditch in an area the departing geese were flying over. Snow geese are known for moving around, as at anytime there may be hundreds of snow geese in the air, as they move from the outside of the flock to the inside, giving us shots at the geese as they pass over.

As I searched the sky, trying to pick out the one goose Casey would be firing at, he fired, not once but twice, with the first goose coming down a foot in front of me with another dropping just a few feet to my left.

"Nice shooting Casey," I thought to myself, as hundreds of other geese roared overhead only to maple leaf back onto the pond just feet from where they had just risen.

Throughout the day, ducks and geese poured into the area, resting and feeding before making their long trip south just ahead of the freeze up to winter in the warmer climates of the southern U.S.

When we weren't pounding geese, we were road hunting, seeing large numbers of brightly colored roosters feeding, picking up gravel along the road or fighting in the field.

Our plans are to come back and hunt the late season, when there isn't much hunting pressure with the South Dakota's Walk-In-Areas, Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), Controlled Hunting Access (CHAP), COOP Manage Areas, Waterfowl Production Areas, Game Production Areas as well as the School and Public Lands giving us and other hunters thousands of acres of open public hunting ground available at a time of the season when pheasants bunch up for winter, giving hunters some of the best hunting opportunities available found during the season.

The Aberdeen/Brown County area is a great place to spend a few days during the late season with friends or family hunting in one of the most productive areas for waterfowl and pheasants in South Dakota.

Gary Howey, Hartington, Neb., is a former tournament angler, fishing and hunting guide, the Producer/Host of the award winning *Outdoorsmen Adventures television series which can be seen on Fox affiliates in the upper Midwest. He and Simon Fuller are the hosts of the Outdoor Adventures radio program on Classic Hits 106.3 and ESPN Sports Radio 1570. If you're looking for more outdoor information, it can be found at www.outdoorsmenadventures.com.*

OUTDOORS DIGEST

S.D. GF&P Proposes Spring Turkey Season

MADISON — The South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Commission has proposed a slight reduction in licenses for the 2013 Spring Prairie Turkey Season.

The commission has recommended a reduction in one-tag "male" turkey licenses by 105 and reduce the two-tag "any turkey" licenses by 200 compared to 2012.

The commission also is proposing 10 resident archery turkey licenses for the Blood Run Nature Area and 10 resident archery licensees to hunt at the Adams Homestead and Nature Preserve through the issuance of "access permits" via a lottery drawing.

A modification of the spring unit boundaries for the Black Hills and 49A to be consistent with the fall turkey unit boundaries was also proposed.

The proposals will be finalized at the Dec. 6-7 GFP meeting at the Pierre Ramkota.

To comment, email wild.info@state.sd.us with your name and city. You can also comment in person at the December meeting. Proposals will begin at 2 p.m., CST on Thursday, Dec. 6.

40,301 Deer Harvested During Firearm Season

LINCOLN, Neb. — Preliminary reports reveal that 40,301 deer were harvested during the Nov. 10-18 firearm season, according to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. That is a decline of 27 percent from the 2011 record firearm season harvest of 55,400.

In addition to large numbers of deer lost to epizootic hemorrhagic disease, deer populations, permit sales and hunting success were impacted by a record drought and the elimination of Earn-A-Buck rules in some management units, where a doe had to be checked in before or at the same time as a buck.

The harvest total includes any type of hunting permit that was legal during the nine-day season.

Northeast Nebraska had the largest decline in harvest, while southwest had the least decline. Harvest by region, compared to 2011, was as follows:

Northeast — 8,040 deer (down 43 percent), Panhandle/Northwest — 5,505 deer (down 15 percent), Southeast — 10,870 deer (down 34 percent), Southwest — 15,886 deer (down 14 percent).

Antlerless Deer Tags Have Extended Season

PIERRE — The regular West River Deer season closes on Nov. 25, and the regular East River Deer season closes on Dec. 2. Nine additional days will be available to harvest antlerless deer, beginning Dec. 29 and ending on Jan. 6.

"We want to remind both West River and East River deer hunters that their 'any deer' and 'any whitetail deer' tags are only valid during the regular 16-day season, and that they will not convert to 'antlerless tags' like in previous years," said Tom Kirschenmann, chief of terrestrial resources for the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Department. "Only unfilled 'any antlerless deer' and 'antlerless whitetail deer' tags will be valid for the late-season dates."

The changes were made to accomplish additional antlerless deer harvest in areas of the state that need it most while curtailing the doe harvest where deer populations are at or below population objectives.

Proper Disposal Of Deer

Carcass Key Part Of Hunt

PIERRE — Deer hunters have enjoyed mild weather and beautiful scenery this fall, but suc-

cessful hunts also bring a responsibility to care for the landscape.

"Mission accomplished, your deer is dressed and ready for transportation, but there is still cleanup to take care of," said Emmett Keyser, assistant director for the Game, Fish and Parks Division of Wildlife. "Now you have a large gut pile, and if you process the deer yourself, you'll have legs, hide, bones and other leftovers to discard. How do you handle those remains?"

Keyser said the answer begins with respect for the land and landowners.

"Hunters hunting on private land should never assume they are OK to leave offal and other remains from big game in the field. Discuss it with the landowner before starting your hunt. He may be comfortable with scavengers cleaning up the gut pile, but then again he may ask that you leave no trace of your hunt behind," Keyser said.

Never leave cleanings from a big game hunt where people can see them.

While it is permissible to field-dress deer on public hunting areas and leave cleanings, leaving deer carcasses near boat ramps, along roads or dumping them at public hunting areas is not only unethical but illegal.

"Legally, you cannot dump the carcass along the side of a roadway, near a boat ramp, in a creek or on public property," Keyser said. "This is criminal littering, and you can be cited for it. Sometimes, people think it is OK to dump the carcass because it is an animal, but it is considered littering."

Dumping deer carcasses in that manner also reflects poorly on hunters.

If you live in town and need to dispose of your deer carcass, you do have options.

Many communities allow disposal at landfills. Check with your local landfill to see if it is allowed, and if it is, how best to bag the remains for disposal.

Another option for hunters is to have big game processed through a wildlife processing facility.

GFP Encourages Hunters

To Register For Winter

Depredation Hunts

PIERRE — South Dakota hunters will soon have an opportunity to submit applications for winter big-game depredation hunts if and when they are required.

"GFP's Wildlife Damage Management Program assists landowners with depredation problems, and winter depredation hunts are a valuable tool to alleviate wildlife damage to livestock feed supplies," said Keith Fisk, Wildlife Damage Program administrator in the Game, Fish and Parks Department. "During mild winters, few hunters are needed; however, when extreme conditions cause wildlife to congregate near farmsteads and livestock feed, depredation hunts are more common."

South Dakota residents may register for potential depredation hunts for deer, antelope, and turkey starting Dec. 1 at <http://gfp.sd.gov/hunting/depredation-hunts.aspx>.

Applications put hunters in a pool of people who may be called upon if GFP, working with farmers and ranchers, determines that a big game hunt is necessary to alleviate depredation issues.

"Depredation hunts are time-sensitive, and winter weather can sometimes make travel difficult for participating hunters," Fisk said. "We need those hunters to be available at the hunt location within a day or two. Consequently, we encourage hunters to choose locations that are within close driving distance."

Registered hunters are selected through a random drawing process when a depredation hunt is authorized.

For more information, please visit <http://www.gfp.sd.gov/hunting/depredation-hunts.aspx> or contact GFP at 605-223-7660.

Kansas Pheasant Opener Kicks Off In Clouds Of Dust

BY MICHAEL PEARCE

(c) 2012 The Wichita Eagle (Wichita, Kan.)

STAFFORD COUNTY, Kan. — Saturday morning for the 28th consecutive year, game warden Phil Kirkland drove afield for the opening day of the Kansas pheasant season.

A look in his rearview mirror, where thick clouds of dust trailed like vapor trails behind a jet, reminded him it was going to be a slow day.

"Last year was really tough," Kirkland said. "This year is going to be tougher. It's just been so dry. I can go days without seeing a bird. Some hunters say they're (hunting) just because it's a tradition, but I don't expect to find much."

For several months Kirkland's Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism said pheasant numbers were down in many regions for the second consecutive year because drought left hen pheasants few places to nest, and pheasant chicks few places to hide and feed.

Kirkland said as recently as

2010 pheasant numbers were impressive in his region, which includes Edwards, Pawnee and Stafford counties.

"That year I was checking guys that were averaging about two birds per hunter," he said. "Years like that most of the locals were limited (with four roosters each) by noon because they've been raised hunting pheasants and know where to go."

Those were the days. Miles and minutes rolled steadily as Kirkland drove back roads through what's usually good habitat without finding any hunters.

It was nearly two hours into the season when Kirkland finally found a group of about 10 hunters pushing a field towards the road.

The hunters, all from southeast Kansas, were happy to show Kirkland their licenses, and even happier to be afield.

"I come every year as much for the camaraderie and so I can let my dog work. I'd come rather there are any birds or not," said Scott Shaw, who'd been hunting the area for about 20 years. "Last year was the worst. We've killed two birds al-

ready, but I think we've already seen more birds this year than last."

Kirkland left the group and eventually found a father leaving a field with his two young children. They'd seen no birds in a few minutes of hunting.

Four hours into the season Kirkland had checked just the two groups. "During good years I'd have seen 250 to 300 hunters by now, honestly," he said.

Eventually dawn's light breeze changed to a full-fledged gale that had dust blowing from fields and roads, and tumbleweeds streaking across the landscape in 20-foot bounds.

Kirkland was driving slowly through dust clouds when he spotted the orange dots of hunters working a weed patch at the corner

of a field of irrigated corn. Kirkland predicted such places would hold more pheasants, because they'd had access to water through the summer.

The group of eight hunters had about as many birds as when they walked to Kirkland's truck to talk and show their hunting licenses. They also blamed the conditions for not shooting more birds.

"The wind is killing us," said Phillip Fyffe, of Manhattan, Kan., "We can't hear the birds, and we had quite a few flush behind us. The birds can really gain altitude and fly away a lot faster."

As Kirkland and the hunters headed in different directions, he predicted few hunters would be as successful as that group, which was hunting with a local farmer.

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