

Of The Outdoors | Gary Howey

Hunting The Ringneck Pheasants Of Platte

BY GARY HOWEY
Outdoorsmen Adventures

PLATTE — The shorthair locked up, solid, as guide Tom Steinhauser brought his two labs over to make the flush.

As the Labs moved in, several brightly colored roosters, cackled, erupting from the food plot as the hunter closest to the bird hollered "Rooster", letting the

other hunters know it was a shootable bird. The shotguns of the four hunters came up at the same time, zeroing in on the birds, all four shots rang out as one and the first birds of our Platte, South Dakota hunt were added to our game bag.

Team Outdoorsmen Adventures member Larry Myhre, cameraman Andrew Zak and I had arrived at Kings Inn, our headquarters for this trip just before noon, unloaded our extra gear and made our way west of town where we would be filming and hunting with Joe Tegethoff of South Dakota Ringnecks "www.southdakotaringnecks.com." Joining us on this hunt would be hunters from Florida, Texas, North Carolina, Tennessee and New Mexico, all who had hunted with Joe during previous seasons.

Anyone who has spent much time in the field pursuing pheasants can tell you habitat is the key to a healthy pheasant population. At South Dakota Ringnecks, there are over two thousand acres of land available, on the trip we would be on four hundred of those acres; prime habitat consisting of Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) grasslands, Milo/Corn food plots, Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) sloughs and shelterbelts.

The CRP was thick and lush, tall enough to conceal the birds yet short enough to allow Tom's dogs to cover the ground and allowing the hunters to see the dogs when they were getting birdie or



TEAM OUTDOORSMEN ADVENTURES PHOTO
Larry Myhre, Sioux City, Iowa, and Gary Howey with several of the birds they bagged on a recent pheasant hunt near Platte.

going on point. Food plots located at South Dakota Ringnecks lay out beautifully, with two to three rows of corn between five or six rows of Milo, giving walkers clear shooting lanes out in front.

Upon arriving at the farm, the wind was blowing hard, gusting to thirty plus miles per hour, which meant, our shots would have to be quick as once the birds gained altitude, catching the tailwind, they were "Gone" sailing off into parts unknown.

Our first push would be through a healthy stand of CRP grass, with the dogs pushing out in front, covering it from one side to the other out in front of the hunters, methodically pin pointing the birds in the huge field.

No matter where you hunt, private or public hunting ground, dogs are a huge part of

hunting success, locating birds and retrieving wounded and downed birds. Tom's well-trained dogs did an excellent job of locating the birds and finding the wounded runners.

Even though it was early season, we were using late season hunting tactics, with wingmen, out 20 yards ahead of the walkers, preventing the birds from blowing out of the cover beyond shotgun range. Posted on the end of the field were our blockers, preventing those birds running out ahead, from escaping out the end. As we approached the end of the field, we paused. This allowed the dogs to work the area slowly, locating those birds in the last twenty-five yards of the field. Once the birds were located the hunters moved in, where the dogs forced the birds to take wing. The birds burst from the cover going airborne in every direction, sev-

eral of them were roosters, gaining altitude, grabbing air while being pushed by the strong tailwind, as they attempted to escape the danger.

Several shotguns barked in unison as the hunters did their best to catch up with the fleeing birds, not an easy task in the wind we were facing.

On each drive, there were birds in the air; both roosters and hens winging their way out of the field, indicating down the road, in the Platte area, there was a good chance the area would have good pheasant reproduction.

At the start of that afternoon hunt, we had to wonder how the wind would affect our hunting, as once the birds gained altitude, they were moving quickly, we'd need to use a huge lead out in front of the birds in order to bring them down.

The strong wind and a brief

sleet storm made the day challenging, which is the way pheasant hunt can be. In a couple of hours, our 10-man-hunting party was able to bag our limits, allowing us to get the birds to the processor, grab a few winks and then head to a bed and breakfast just south of Platte where we enjoyed a great meal put together by four of the hunters we'd hunted with that day.

The following morning, as the sun made its way into the eastern sky, it looked as if the weather conditions on day two would be ideal, a sunny, warm day with just a slight breeze.

After hunting the west end of the section the previous day, we'd be making our way through the CRP, shelterbelts, sloughs and food plots located of the eastern edge of the farm.

Pushing the fields as we had did the day before, we came across sign other wildlife

was taking advantage of the habitat as buck rubs and scrapes were located throughout the shelterbelts in the field.

The birds were getting up all around us and it was a craps-shoot as to where the best filming and shooting would be; at times, our blockers would just get set up hearing the cackle of the rooster, followed by the shots of the walkers, long before the birds reached their location. While on other occasions, walkers would be just starting into the field when the blockers opened up at the birds coming out the end of the field far ahead of the walkers.

Flush after flush rose from the cover, with the hunters putting the hurt on the birds. One thing was for sure, the boys we were hunting with were not newbie's at pheasant hunting, and they were excellent shots with few birds that got up within range would be able to fly another day.

We had a great time; hunting in an area with good numbers of birds, had the opportunity to meet and spend time with some great people, that's Platte, a great experience.

The Platte area has a lot to offer, superb fishing just down the road on the Missouri River along with excellent hunting opportunities. For more information on all Platte, South Dakota has to offer, check them out at www.platted.org

More information on pheasant hunting with Joe Tegethoff at South Dakota Ringnecks you can contact him at 605-680-3269.

Gary Howey, Hartington, Neb., is a former tournament angler, fishing and hunting guide. He is the Producer/Host of the award winning Outdoorsmen Adventures television series, which is seen on Fox affiliates throughout the upper Midwest. In the Yankton area, it airs on local channels 2 & 98 Saturday at 6:30 pm and Sunday at 7:00 am. He and Simon Fuller are the hosts of the Outdoor Adventures radio program Monday-Saturday at 6:45 am on Classic Hits 106.3 and ESPN Sports Radio 1570. If you are looking for more outdoor information, check out www.outdoorsmenadventures.com and like Outdoorsmen Adventures on Facebook.

Pheasant Hunter Comes Up With Ideal Way To Honor Late Father

BY BRENT FRAZEE
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CIMARRON, Kan. (MCT) — When Rob Peterson waded into a sea of grass Saturday on his land in southwest Kansas, he couldn't help think about his late father.

Three years ago, Peterson made a pledge to his dad as he lay on his death bed. His inheritance would go toward buying land in southwest Kansas that he could turn into a pheasant paradise.

And in father's honor, Peterson would donate the land to Pheasant Forever's legacy program. Under that agreement, Peterson could use the land as long as he was able. When he either became too old to use it or died, it would go to Pheasants Forever, a national conservation group that promotes pheasant hunting and restoring or preserving the habitat the popular gamebird needs to survive.

"When I told him, he was in the end stages," said Peterson, who lives in Peyton, Colo., but has been hunting Kansas since

the 1980s. "He couldn't talk. But he gave me a big smile and his eyes sparkled.

"The outdoors always meant a lot to him. He loved to hunt and fish, and he passed on that love to me."

Peterson paused as he looked out at the expanse of grassland on his ground and added, "Dad would have loved this. He would have been proud."

For Peterson, this represented the culmination of a dream. He has hunted pheasants extensively since 2002 with his longtime friend, Kevin Perry of Gladstone, whom he met at the Air Force Academy. Both went on to become

fighter pilots and served in Middle Eastern conflicts.

Once they left the Air Force, they continued their friendship through pheasant hunting. They would meet somewhere in Kansas for the season opener, then spend several days there.

"There are very few counties west of Salina that we haven't hunted," Peterson said.

But when Peterson heard of a 640-acre piece of land coming for sale in southwest Kansas he jumped at the chance to buy it and put it in a trust in his father's memory. Later, he and a friend bought another 640-acre tract just two miles away.

The east side wasn't much when Peterson bought it. In fact, he said it looked like a desert. "It didn't have much cover at all," he said. "It just looked like a sand dune."

But Peterson put the land in the Conservation Reserve Program (a federal program which compensates farmers for idling marginal land and putting it into conservation practices). And when late summer rains ended a prolonged drought, "the cover just exploded," Peterson said.

That's what awaited Peterson and Perry, lifetime members of Pheasants Forever,

when they got together Saturday for the Kansas pheasant opener. Native grasses, sorghum, tumbleweeds and abundant brush all covered the landscape.

There was only one thing missing: the pheasants.

After three years of crippling drought, the bird population has crashed. Peterson and Perry held out hope that the good habitat on their land would at least partially offset the drop in pheasant numbers, but it hadn't.

On the same land in which the longtime friends normally shoot their limit by 1 p.m.,

pheasants were a rarity. Peterson's German shorthairs, Lancer and Skadi, raced across the expansive landscape, hoping to pick up the scent of birds, but it was largely an odorless day.

Perry did shoot one rooster, and there were several others spotted. But all in all, it was an opener to forget.

"I can't remember a time when it's been this bad," Perry said. "But you take the good with the bad."

"We've already had some great openers on this land. And I'm sure we will again."

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Dr. Hathaway completed his undergraduate degree at Mount Marty College, Yankton, SD; his Doctorate degree from the University of South Dakota, Vermillion, SD; and his post-doctoral fellowship at the University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA. Dr. Hathaway graduated from the University of South Dakota School of Medicine, Vermillion, SD. His urology residency was completed in Augusta, Georgia at the Medical College of Georgia.

Dr. Hathaway joins Dr. George Fournier, Jr. in the medical and surgical treatment of urologic conditions for adult and pediatric patients. He will provide care for concerns, conditions and diseases associated with the kidneys, bladder, prostate, urinary incontinence, and male sexual dysfunction.

Dr. Hathaway began seeing patients at the Yankton Medical Clinic, P.C. October 28th, 2013.

Appointments can be made by calling 605-664-2742.

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