

**OUTDOORS**

## ODFW hosts workshop to teach rules of hunting game

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Last week I went hunting — pheasant hunting to be exact. It was an all-day excursion that left me sunburned and cursing the fact that I didn't wear high socks to shield my exposed calves from high brush.

It also left me returning home empty-handed.

“So, what did you do all day then?” my friend and coworker asked me over dinner that evening after I told her a pheasant feast wasn't in the works.

Her query to me is the same question I once internalized every time a friend of mine would return home empty-handed from a hunting trip. If you didn't get anything, then what did you do all day?

Last Friday, I answered that question, thanks to an adult pheasant hunting workshop at Sauvie Island hosted by Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

I didn't bag a pheasant, but I did trudge through swamp-like fields for hours. I perfected a special jig to repeatedly untangle my ankles from a web of vines, and I carried a shotgun for several hours straight (an exercise that left my arms sore).

I kept my eyes on the direction of the bird dogs, and I joked with fellow hunters about our chances of spotting a bird on this particularly warm day, which some of the more experienced hunters noted was about 50 degrees too hot for pheasant hunting.

I did all of this in addition to, you know, hunting.

When I wasn't untangling my ankles from the brush, I kept my eyes peeled for birds.

The pheasant hunt was my first. Thanks to the workshop, I added fresh knowledge to my meager arsenal of hunting terminology. I've fired my share of rifles and handguns in the past, but I didn't know the first thing about holding, loading or effectively aiming a shotgun at a moving target — all things that were covered over the course of the full-day workshop.

The first hour of the workshop focused on gun safety, including a portion that detailed the anatomy of a shotgun. We learned how to select ammo and how to choose the correct choke (which determines the spread of a shot) for the type of game.

“Generally, modified choke is good for pheasants, but part of it is preference,” said Steve Crane, hunter recruitment specialist with ODFW. “You can ruin the meat if you choose the wrong choke.”

I also learned that shooting a shotgun is much different than shooting a rifle. In my experience with the latter, I took time to aim. Shooting a shotgun, I discovered, is more of an instant reaction to the moving target in front of you.

To make it more difficult, I'm left-eye dominant, but I'm right-handed. Of course.

What this meant for me is that I missed the first dozen clay targets by a long shot. It also meant I had to train both my eyes to focus steadily on the moving target and nothing else – easier said than done.

But the day's workshop included several hours for target practice, in which our group of about 20 hunters (most of them novices) split into smaller groups and took turns shattering the clay targets. Some hunters, like myself, were shooting clay targets for the first time. Others were more experienced, but were able to sharpen their skills through the warm up.

From there, we had lunch before we set out in our respective small groups of five or six for the hunt.

Each group was equipped with one or two experienced hunters and a bird dog, which was essential for pointing or flushing the birds and later for locating their carcasses.

My group was led by Russ Dodd, 63, of Portland and Norman Koshkarian, 82, of Beaver Creek, Ore. Both volunteered their bird dogs for their second season.

"It's an opportunity for the dogs to work and have some people to meet," Koshkarian said, whose bouncing Boykin spaniel led the first part of the hunt.

"The dogs don't care who shoots," added Dodd, who wore a shirt with a photo of an Irish water spaniel that read "When Irish eyes are smiling." His own Irish water spaniel joined for the latter half of the day's hunt.

Overall, the pickings were slim. The experienced hunters noted from the beginning that the day's heat – which crept into the mid-90s – wasn't ideal for the hunt. It makes it especially difficult for bird dogs to pick up a scent.

But no one minded. Every hunter echoed the same sentiment – that they all learned something new.

"I'd do it again," said Adam Hewette, 40, of Beaverton, as he rested post-hunt. "Even though it was unsuccessful, it was nice to have the guidance."

And so the day culminated, ultimately pheasant-less with a sweat-stained, hunter-orange hat that slightly mirrored my sun-burnt skin. But the real theme of the day wasn't lost on me – that hunting isn't really about coming back with a pheasant as much as it is about the thrill of the hunt itself.

Or at least that's what my left-eye dominant, pheasant-less self would like to think.



Norman Koshkarian's Boyken spaniel Scarlet leaps up out of the tall grain to get its bearings as it works to flush a pheasant for the students.

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