

Dateline: Maine

Pheasants, Quail, Grouse, Woodcock, Waterfowl

- **Timetable:** October through December
- **Accommodations:** Fully-equipped cabins
- **Food:** Home cooked meals
- **Hunt:** Easy

After 40 years, I have found only two bird hunting preserves where the habitat is natural and the bird shooting is old school challenging. **Silverton Ranch, just off Interstate Route 95 and Route 23 in Canaan, Maine, is one of these.** Owned, operated and maintained by **Denise Murchison, a Maine guide, the ranch consists of 1,200 acres of typical New England grouse and woodcock cover with additional leases adding duck and goose hunting to the mix.**

Sporting clay and standard trap and skeet ranges give hunters a chance to practice their skills before a hunt, and Murchison, a certified shooting instructor, provides



shooting lessons and advice for those who are new to the game.

Hunters stay in one of several clean,

comfortable cabins that include bathroom and shower facilities, TV, microwave and a coffee pot. Dining arrangements are flexible. Meals, prepared and served by Murchison, are served in the main lodge, or hunters may cook their own food in any combination of breakfast, lunch and/or dinner.

Energetic and enthusiastic, Murchison offers pre-dawn and dusk duck and goose hunts as well as guided or do-it-yourself upland hunting. **Native grouse and woodcock are plentiful on the ranch's well-managed 1,200 acres, and pen-raised ring-necked pheasants are available year-round.** Hunters may bring their own bird/duck dogs or Murchison will accompany hunters using her own Labs and Brittanys.

Rates vary depending on which services a client requires, but

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Dateline: Washington

Wheat Country Huns, Quail and Roosters

- **Timetable:** October through March
- **Accommodations:** Ranch house or bunkhouse
- **Food:** BYO
- **Hunt:** Easy to moderate

In these days of corporate farms, when the old family names that settled the country are ensconced in suburbia instead of at the handle of the plow, it's refreshing to find a name on the road that matches the name on the mailbox that matches the name over the gate.

One hundred years ago, the Beckley family scratched out a living from the prairie. There are still Beckleys on the Beckley place today. And lest you think they are an anomaly in this corner of Washington State, stop at any of the ranches nearby. They call them *Centennials*, and this community has seven that have stood the test of time, marking 100 years of history and a love for the land.

Outfitter and hunting guide Jeff Miller of Field N Marsh Outfitters has assembled a co-operative of properties that collectively are called Blue Ridge Ranch, loosely grouped around the small eastern Washington town of Bengé.

Miller has organized the hunting opportunity around a hunting club concept that allows access to the property

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ground enables the timberdoodles to spread out and feed in other locations. In the late segment, however, the ground is colder and perhaps even frozen. The hard and/or frozen ground leads the woodcocks toward the thawed areas near the flowing (or even trickling) streams in Blackiston's lower-lying areas.

The few parking areas that surround Blackiston Wildlife Area are sufficient staging spots, but parking at the perimeter of the land tracts gives way to a great deal of walking and brush busting. Well-fitting, broken-in and waterproof boots are a necessity. Likewise, you might want to consider oil-finished hunting chaps or brush pants because dew, frost and/or moisture-laden muck will accumulate on your pant legs, which could lead to cold, uncomfortable hunts and long, chafing walks back to your vehicle. Even on the coldest days, the extended walks through Blackiston's bottomlands that attract and hold woodcock will increase your heart rate and stimulate your sweat glands. Be sure to dress warmly (January morning temperatures in Delaware can sometimes dip into the teens and single digits), but wear layers that you can easily shed and stuff in your bird vest while walking.

A note on shotguns: Every woodcock hunter has his or her favorite timberdoodle gun, and all of those guns are welcome at Blackiston. Unlike some woodcock hunting spots that are choked by super-thick briars and saplings, the woodcock hunting areas within Blackiston usually make for easy navigation and passage. **Therefore, shiny, expensively engraved, antique and heirloom guns are OK to use here as well.** But be aware that woodcocks found on Blackiston Wildlife Area during the late hunting season segment are typi-

cally packed into concentrated groups of two, three or even four or five birds. On one occasion my Vizsla locked on point with seemingly no birds in front of him. Knowing to trust a bird dog's nose, my hunting partners and I crept along cautiously. About 10-15 yards from the dog's nose, a timberdoodle flushed, followed by another after the first shot, then two more — a quick-shooting, multiple-bird opportunity that can



arise at Blackiston. **As such, I have found myself wishing for three shots instead of two** after I emptied both barrels of my side-by-side just to see a bogsucker seemingly laughing at me as he **headed toward Louisiana.**

Late-season woodcock hunting at Blackiston Wildlife Area is not without risks and potential downsides. One, be aware that Delaware still adheres to archaic **“blue laws” that only allow hunting on Mondays through Saturdays**, so plan accordingly. Making Sunday a travel day is optimal. Two, scheduling late season woodcock hunts in snow-prone areas is risky. In 2011, I planned vacation days to coincide with Delaware's late woodcock hunting season segment. Although this was an exception rather than the norm, the area

was affected by several major January snowstorms that piled up nearly two feet of snow and put the kibosh on Delaware woodcock hunting.

Blackiston Wildlife Area is located in a rural area but is easily accessible via paved roads. Ten pet-friendly hotels are located in nearby Dover (Delaware's capital), with room rates ranging from \$59 per night to \$149 per night, plus taxes and fees. Various fast food establishments, national chain restaurants, diners, local eateries and upscale restaurants are located in the towns of Dover and Smyrna. **A folk tradition for Delaware hunters is to stop by Helen's Famous Sausage house for breakfast before or after their hunts.** Helen's, located at 4866 N. DuPont Highway in Smyrna, serves downhome breakfast sandwiches with unbelievably satisfying portions from 4 a.m. to 2 p.m. Mondays through Fridays and 4 a.m. to noon on Saturdays. Trying scrapple — a mush loaf made from pork scraps, for lack of a better description — is also a must when visiting the Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Jersey area.

For Delaware residents, hunting licenses are \$25 per year. Full nonresident firearm hunting licenses are priced on a reciprocal basis to coincide with fees that the hunter's state of residency charges, with a \$130 minimum fee. Delaware also offers a three-day nonresident small game license for \$50.

To obtain maps and hunting regulations for Delaware's Blackiston Wildlife Area: http://www.dnrec.delaware.gov/fw/hunting/pages/hunting_maps.aspx.

To obtain a Delaware hunting license: <https://egov.dnrec.delaware.gov>.

—Steven M. Kendus

Dateline: New York

Located in Salem, N.Y., the Dutch River Club provides an industry-best experience for driven pheasant, flighted mallards and wild bird hunting. The private club owns 1,200 acres, and an additional 1,000 acres is available for member use through long-term reciprocal agreements with other area clubs.

The Dutch River Club offers two types of shoots: driven and continental. For the driven hunt, early-released pheasant are driven from their feeding and loafing areas in a style similar to British shoots where the birds come from the terrain situated high above the guns. The birds are flown in the summer and early fall so they are hard

Private Club Offers Driven Pheasant, Flighted Mallards and Wild Bird Hunts

- **Timetable:** Sept. 15 – March 31
- **Accommodations:** 19th century style farmhouse
- **Food:** Gourmet New England
- **Hunt:** Various levels of difficulty

flying in every regard. In the continental shoots birds are released from a hidden tower located at the top of a hill, and with the combination of wind they are high-flying targets. **As a result of the impeccable attention to the birds, the Dutch River Club is positioned as the premier venue for authentic driven pheasant shooting in the eastern U.S.**

Members enjoy these high-volume shoots over 10 different drives designed to take advantage of prevailing autumn and winter wind directions and the club's hilly terrain. The layout and construction of the club's drives ensures an outstanding shoot with challenging, highflying birds coming over the shooting butts in virtually any weather condition. The butts are made from laid-stone or stacked logs and clearly — and tastefully — define a shooter's position. Each day's shooting is different with a near endless variety of presentations designed to keep things interesting and challenging members throughout the season. Shooters are assigned one of 12 pegs, and rotate periodically after each frame throughout the course. The stations are large enough to accommodate two shooters for large-scale presentations although one shooter may occupy a peg for smaller drives. **The shoots at the Dutch River Club offer a pleasant mix of wide-open shots where birds are viewed some distance from a peg and require ample lead, and closer "snap" shots where birds appear rapidly in openings over hedgerows to capture a gunner's attention.**

Members can also enjoy traditional walk up hunts in the adjoining 10 fields for pheasant, chukar and Hungarian partridge over pointing or flushing dogs. Some fields offer standing corn while others are planted with sorghum or contain a variety of natural cover. **In classic Northeast fashion, the fields are rimmed with hardwoods, and the combination of flight-conditioned birds spread across varying terrain makes for a terrific hunt.**

New for 2013 is the flighted mallard program which offers either pass shooting in eight pegs or with hunters in actual blinds which can offer decoying mallards or pass shooting. A series of blinds have been posi-

tioned to account for early, mid- and late season wind and weather patterns. In some instances the mallards are decoyed to the blind, but pass shooting at highbaling mallards is more typical. All waterfowl guides use golden and Labrador retrievers to fetch the harvested ducks.

Club members can participate in a wide array of additional activities at the Dutch River Club. **Guided walk up hunts**



on the property for wild ruffed grouse and woodcock are offered in season, as is seasonal waterfowling for wild mallards, black ducks, teal, gadwall and Canada geese using blinds and decoys. Hunts are arranged on the club ponds and also on some of the club's private rivers. In the spring, members can hunt for eastern wild turkey and in the fall there are opportunities for whitetail deer. Spring and summer is prime time for fishing, and the **Dutch River Club has access to nearly five miles of private trout water on the Battenkill, the Owlkill and the Hoosic rivers.**

Sport shooting, gun fittings and instruction are a big part of the Dutch River Club with all clay target games a short walk from the clubhouse. The main shooting course is a modified five-stand which offers nearly a dozen different target presentations. There is also a wobble trap station that is used for field hunt warm-ups as well as for instruction and a high tower that offers clay pigeons from two levels. The flighted clays from the lower level approximate driven grouse and those from the higher level simulate driven pheasant. The Dutch River Club also features a rifle and a pistol range.

Club shoots book quickly during the fall. Peak foliage is in October with temperatures ranging in the mid-50s to low 60s. Temperatures drop about ten

degrees during November. Attire is a mix of traditionally British and continental, with tweeds, plus twos or plus fours, flashings and Wellington-style boots found alongside boiled wool coats, knickers and Austrian style headgear. Waxed-cotton jackets get the nod on misty days. **For those in need of proper togs, the Dutch River Club owns and operates a sporting retail store, Covey and Nye, about 25 miles away in Manchester, Vt.**

Part of what makes the Dutch River Club unique and a cut above most clubs is its staff. The legendary Gary Hall has designed and built the club shooting courses, and they represent the sum of his total life's experiences. Hall has developed shooting programs for most of the major private wing shooting clubs in the Northeast, and the venues he has created at the Dutch River Club are his masterpiece. His attention to detail is seen in the exquisite laid-stone wall shooting butts and comfortable duck blinds complete with heaters. **What is best, though, are the flight-conditioned birds, and Hall's work is a tremendous part of what separates the Dutch River Club from other private clubs.**

The club is equally fortunate to have as its on-site gun expert, shooting instructor and gun fitter *par excellence*, Lars Jacob. Jacob has been teaching the fine art of wing shooting for over 30 years and has run instructional programs for many of the top shooting programs in the country.

The club's main campus features an original 1880s farmhouse, which offers rustic-elegant accommodations for seven members or guests. Leather couches are comfortably arranged around the fireplace in the living room, and the dining area is adjacent to an open kitchen. A wide front porch and stone patio overlook the rolling fields. Cellular telephone coverage is adequate for all major carriers and free Wi-Fi service is available.

Some club members have homes in the area while others prefer to stay at some of the many inns and bed-and-breakfasts in the Manchester-Dorset area. Members receive discounts when staying in off-campus lodging. Buffet-style breakfasts are prepared by Olive Branch Gourmet, a local catering ser-

vice, on the mornings of an organized shoot and/or hunt. A buffet-style lunch is served from the highest elevation at the club with some of the most scenic views of the mountain range. Try the skeet and skillet breakfast, which is a scrambled egg and cheese breakfast burrito served with sausage links and smoked bacon for breakfast or the

pheasant stew with homemade buttermilk biscuits for lunch.

The Dutch River Club is 45 minutes from Saratoga Springs, N.Y., and four hours from Manhattan or Boston. Fixed base operator (FBO) services are in Rutland, Vt., Saratoga County and Albany, N.Y., and in addition to runways the FBOs have storage hangers,

jet fuel, and onsite mechanics. There is also an onsite helipad.

For membership information or to schedule a tour of the property: **Dutch River Club Concierge Lauren Towslee, 518-361-3383, www.dutchriverclub.com.**

—Tom Keer

Quail Hunting 2013–2014

State Forecasts from Quail Forever

(Note: Some states aren't mentioned because their data were incomplete by press time.)

Arizona — Worth Hunting, Not Worth Writing Home About

According to Jonathan O'Dell, small game biologist with the Arizona Game and Fish Dept., 2013 is a year worth getting out for, but it may not be one to write home about.

"In Arizona, it's all about the rain when it comes to quail. Gambel's quail need winter rains for breeding while scaled quail use spring rains for breeding. They both rely on summer monsoon rains to survive into autumn. Additionally, Mearns' quail in Arizona need the monsoons for breeding," said O'Dell. "Arizona started with good winter rainfall, but it ended too quickly which may explain the lower call count numbers for Gambel's quail. On the upside, the summer monsoons were very good this year in all areas of the state."

Birds in southern Arizona hatch peaked in the typical late May early June time frame, the birds in central Arizona had a later peak hatching near the first week of July. However, the 2013 spring call count surveys for Gambel's quail indicated a small decrease in breeding activity over last year.

Arkansas — Hunt Hard to Find Bobs

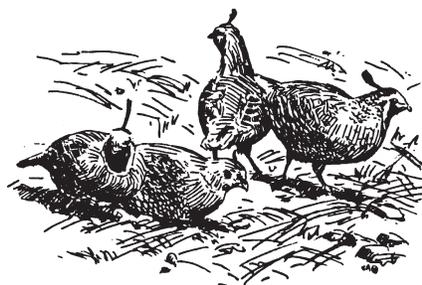
Arkansas experienced weather seemingly conducive to nesting and brood rearing; however, the state's brood survey data was not good and did not reflect an increase in quail populations. "I believe that quail still need time to recolonize some areas that are actively being managed to be quail-friendly

habitat," says Clifton Jackson of the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission.

Jackson expects the 2013–14 quail hunting season to be comparable to the 2012–13 season. Hunters should point their bird dogs towards The Ouachita National Forest.

California — Extremely Dry As Summer Came to a Close

California experienced above-average early season rain in November and



December of 2012, but unfortunately record dry conditions prevailed in the late winter and early spring months leaving much of the state extremely dry as summer drew to a close.

"Quail population status entering 2013 was deemed poor, and coupled with the dry conditions observed over much of the state in 2013, we judge that the state of quail populations for the 2013 season will be poor," says Matt Mershriy, environmental scientist for the California Dept. of Fish and Wildlife.

Colorado — Severe Drought Impacted Quail

The 2013–14 season looks to be a fairly difficult one for quail hunters in Colorado, although there have been some reports of late quail hatches in southeast Colorado once drought conditions mediated in late summer,

reports Ed Gorman of the Colorado Div. of Wildlife.

Severe drought has impacted nearly all of Colorado's core quail range, particularly during the nesting and brood rearing season in 2013. In September of 2013, Colorado's core bobwhite range of the South Platte River was inundated with floodwaters, further impacting populations and habitat.

Hunters will likely see numbers similar to or slightly improved in some localized areas from 2012 for both bobwhites and scaled quail. In northeast Colorado, it is likely hunters will find fewer bobwhites than in 2012 because of the severe drought that encompassed the breeding season and the impacts of the flood that inundated the South Platte River in September.

Georgia — Good on Intentionally Managed Lands

Georgia experienced above average rainfall during spring and summer 2013, which has resulted in an abundance of food and cover across landscapes being managed for bobwhites. This should result in increased survival and above average hunting this fall and winter. Reggie Thackston, program manager for the Georgia Dept. of Natural Resources, thinks there will be a good quail hunting outlook on lands intentionally managed for bobwhites.

Idaho — Look for Areas That Received Moisture

Jeff Knetter, upland game and waterfowl staff biologist for the Idaho Dept. of Fish and Game, noted winter weather was very mild and drier than average, so over-winter survival is expected to be high. Most of southern Idaho has been very dry during the spring/summer nesting season, so there