

A RETURN TO BIRD HUNTING

HUNTING AT BLONHAVEN HUNT CLUB

BY TERRY BITZ OF
OUTDOOR CONVERGENCE

On an invitation, I recently visited Blonhaven Hunt Club which is located northwest of Beloit near Orfordville. Residing on over 300 acres, Blonhaven is the oldest continuous operating hunting preserve in the state. The club offers the opportunity to hunt pheasant and partridge from late September into early April.

My experience with pheasant hunting came in my youth and whatever skills I had were probably lost decades ago. Thankfully, the club offers people like me the chance to learn to bird hunt without having to contend or compete with other hunters who swarm public hunting grounds in the fall. With Blonhaven operating under a game farm license, people are able to hunt through a longer season than normal and they do not need a hunting license, even if they are not state residents.

“Bird hunting is not that hard to learn”; said John Mathews who manages the club. “And, we can supply everything a hunter needs, outside of the guns”.

Blonhaven has several hunting guides on staff to help provide hunting expertise as well as dogs for those hunters who do not have their own.

The club offers ringneck pheasants as well as chukar and hungarian partridges for the hunts which take place in one of many fenced hunting zones. A paid hunt includes three released pheasants for each hunter though hunters can pay to have more birds released into their hunting area. A unique feature of Blonhaven is that hunters can harvest more birds than they pay for. Many hunting clubs charge per bird harvested.

While amenities may draw some people, it’s the scenery and the club’s approach that appeals to many of the club’s members.

“This is the closest you can come to wild bird hunting in this area”; said Tim Gillman who is a member of the club. “It’s a very natural setting”.

The club graciously offered my two sons, Scott and Devin, the opportunity to hunt to see how a typical outing would take place. I followed along to take photos.

Dave Hill, who breeds and trains German Shorthaired Pointers, was our guide for the hunt. Hill’s dog Corky would be searching out the birds in the fields of milo and switch grass.



Corky points towards a bird hidden in a field of milo at the Blonhaven Hunt Club

Once we got into the hunting area, Hill released Corky from the truck. The Pointer took several long laps around the area as if to show us he was primed and ready to go.

Hill walked us to the edge of a rectangular field of milo and set Scott and Devin on the edges of the field. Hill

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provided instruction on how we would proceed through the field and stressed safe shooting in order to protect hunters and dog. He then sent Corky on his way and the hunt began. As we walked, Hill would provide direction to us and would issue commands to the dog.

We walked the length of one milo field without coming across any birds. However, just as we were exiting the field, Corky ran to the edge of the next milo field and stopped with his gaze locked forward and his tail pointing back.



We slowly entered the milo scanning for sign of the pheasant that Corky's sensitive nose said was hidden there. Hill began to step on the bent over stalks trying to flush the bird out of its cover. Just as we started to reverse course, the hen broke out of hiding and took flight like a rocket. It flew past Scott who took a quick shot, but cleanly missed.

A pheasant take flight over the head of Dave Hill at the Blonhaven Hunt Club

The same scenario would be repeated several times over the next hour where Corky would go on point and the pheasants would jump out of hiding and take flight. Unfortunately, none of shots found their mark.

Eventually Hill's son Scott joined the hunt to show us rookies how it's done and to maybe satisfy Corky who I thought might be getting a bit impatient with the lack of shooting prowess. Again, Corky tracked down a bird, went on point and the pheasant was flushed. This time, however, the bird did not escape and succumbed to birdshot from the shotgun. Corky retrieved the bird and proudly brought it to Hill's hand ending the hunt on a high note

Walking the fields brought back memories of pheasant hunting with my uncle three decades ago. I vowed as I left that day to not let so much time pass before hunting pheasants again.