

# HUNTING GUIDE

## Fall 2023

Your Complete Guide  
to South Dakota  
Pheasant Hunting



The Huron Daily  
**PLAINSMAN**



MIKE CARROLL/PLAINSMAN

A hunter takes aim at a rooster pheasant as it flushes from a field during the opening weekend of the 2022 South Dakota pheasant hunting season near Huron.

# Pheasant hunting forecast looks promising for 2023 season

The 2023 pheasant hunting season is almost here! Like a large part of the Midwest, South Dakota had a winter to remember. The good news is, spring and summer rains across much of the state set the stage for ideal nesting and brood rearing habitat for pheasant production. Following strong pheasant numbers in 2022, which saw our highest harvest in five years, pheasant hunters can look forward to experiencing another year of hunting like nowhere else in the country.

## HABITAT CONDITIONS

Ideal spring weather has produced impressive habitat across most of the pheasant belt. Under these ideal conditions, our models indicate nest success and brood survival should be strong. Due to timely summer rain, hunters can expect to find great hunt-

ing cover this fall. These factors lead us to believe that another great South Dakota hunting season is just around the corner.

## PHEASANT HUNTING FORECAST

Pheasant population conversations start and end with good quality habitat. While Old Man Winter had a long stay here, quality habitat on the ground helped improve pheasant survival in many areas. Even with last year's good hunting conditions, we are in an even better spot habitat-wise, and reports of large size broods are common. Conditions are excellent in western, central, and northeast South Dakota. Hunters may see some CRP open to emergency haying and grazing in limited counties in Southeast South Dakota, but overall the available habitat left standing is

in great shape.

## PRAIRIE GROUSE HUNTING FORECAST

The 2023 prairie grouse season is expected to be better than 2022. Abnormally dry conditions were alleviated by snowmelt and timely rainfall in early to mid-spring in much of western South Dakota. The majority of central and western South Dakota has recovered from drought and grassland habitat conditions look wonderful. Although the lingering cooler spring temperatures and snowpack from the winter may have delayed nesting efforts in some areas, we expect the current grassland conditions to contribute to quality hunting cover and great prairie grouse production, resulting in increased hunter success. Game

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MIKE CARROLL/PLAINSMAN

A hunter carries a pheasant he harvested from a field during the opening weekend of the 2022 pheasant hunting season near Huron.

# Rooster Rush in Ringneck Nation

BY LAURIE SHELTON  
HURON CHAMBER & VISITORS  
BUREAU

The leaves are changing, the weather is cooling down and the hunt is on for the ever-popular Ringneck Pheasant. Pheasant hunting though, isn't all about the number of pheasants you can shoot each year, it is also the camaraderie of seeing old friends and meeting new friends? Seeing the out of town and out of State licenses drive through town is so fun to see. If you take time to visit and ask questions, we can learn so much from our hunting guests.

This year in Ringneck Nation – aka – Huron, South Dakota, we are doing a Tagged Pheasant Release Truck Give-away, sponsored by Iverson Auto of

Huron and Lankota. Brief details are that 99 pheasants will be released all around our area on the public hunting lands. If you shoot a bird with a band on it, you can turn it into the Huron Chamber & Visitors Bureau to win \$50 along with a chance to win \$60,000 toward a Ford F150 or Dodge Durango. The contest runs from October 21, 2023 to January 31, 2023. The drawing will be held February 5th, at the Huron Chamber & Visitors Bureau office. A registration box will be at Iverson Auto and the Huron Chamber & Visitors Bureau, you can also enter your name there, no purchase necessary. We will draw one name from the registration boxes combined for the 100th chance. If that band number drawn matches the pre-selected number, that

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MIKE CARROLL/PLAINSMAN

**Above: A hunter aims as a rooster pheasant is flushed during the 2022 Ringneck Festival on land, which was donated for the event, near Huron. Below: A hunter pulls up on a rooster after his dog flushed it during the 2022 Bird Dog Challenge.**



# Hunting tradition embodied in newly released song

*Kentucky hunter sings about his time searching for roosters near Huron*

BY MIKE CARROLL

OF THE PLAINSMAN

HURON — The experience of pheasant hunting in South Dakota, particularly in the Huron area, has led the creation of a song, which was released Monday on various music streaming services.

"Cattail Moses," as the song is titled, was the creation of Russell Walker, who has joined his family and friends on the yearly trek from Kentucky to hunt roosters in South Dakota since 2011.

"I wrote this song while coming home to Kentucky from South Dakota a couple years ago," Walker said. "Every year since, I would rewrite or edit

when I got home, but never recorded it.

"It's about the tradition of bird hunting, specifically South Dakota pheasant hunting and more specifically how it feels to get back home and back to life," he said. "This has been a tradition for my family going back to 1992."

Walker's father Mike first drove to South Dakota from Kentucky in 1992, and has never missed a year since.

While during most of the years the pheasants were bountiful, the 2001 hunt proved very challenging for the group. However, it also was the year that what has turned into a life-long friendship was formed.

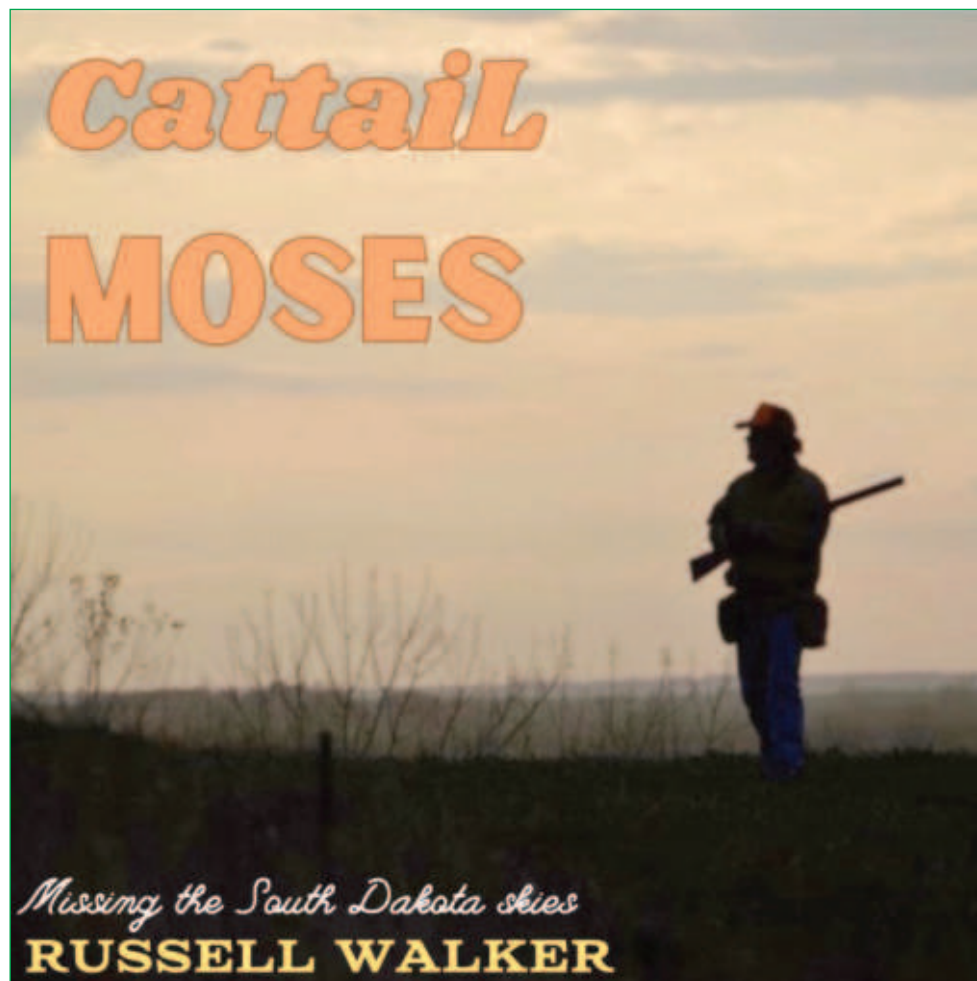
"While hunting road ditches, my dad and his party jumped two birds in a private field. A farmer and his son were working outside next to a barn

WALKER/Page 5



CONTRIBUTED

Russell Walker took these photo of the hunting party he has made the annual trip to South Dakota for pheasant hunting from Kentucky since 2011. What he experienced during those trips to the Huron area inspired him to write a song, *Cattail Moses* (above), which was uploaded Monday and is now available on Spotify/Apple Music/YouTube Music.



# Sportsmen Against Hunger continues game donations

BY RON FOWLER  
FIELD DIRECTOR,  
SPORTSMEN AGAINST  
HUNGER

Donations of game meat to families in need through Sportsmen Against Hunger (SAH) again included a variety of game this past year. The largest amount of processed game meat came from donated deer but also donated were antelope, elk, Canada geese, pheasants and even walleye. In the past, turkey and bighorn sheep have also been donated.

In terms of numbers of game donated in 2022, there were 455 deer, 1,499 pheasants, 2,466 Canada geese, 2 antelope, 2 elk and 518 walleye. Processing of the deer, antelope and elk by the 25 participating game processors resulted in 13,164 pounds of venison burger, and processing of the Can-

ada geese resulted in 3,030 pounds of goose burger. When adding in the 842 pounds of cleaned pheasants, 356 pounds of cleaned wall-eye and 630 pounds of game meat from a food drive and from processor unclaimed meat, the grand total was 18,022 pounds of donated game meat. This translates into over 72,000 meals of meat provided to families in need through food pantries associated with Feeding South Dakota.

Not only have a number of different kinds of game been donated but it has come from a variety of sources. The donated deer came from not only hunters but also city deer reduction programs in Sioux Falls, Rapid City and Ellsworth Air Force Base. The Department of Game, Fish and Parks provided salvageable deer from game viola-

tion confiscations and depredation control programs. Donated Canada geese were taken by hunters during the August and September Canada goose seasons while pheasants were donated by private shooting preserve hunters and hunters in the Governor's Pheasant Hunt. Fishermen and fisherwomen in the Governor's Cup Walleye Tournament donated all of the walleye. Other donated game meat was provided by a game meat food drive in Rapid City and from game processors who provided unclaimed processed meat.

As SAH continues to look for a variety of donated game from a variety of sources, the primary focus of SAH is still to encourage hunters to donate game, especially deer and Canada geese. In cooperation with the Department of



Game, Fish and Parks, incentive for hunters to donate harvested antlerless deer and Canada geese is provided by having processing certificates available from SAH game processors for hunters to fill out and give back to the processor to pay for most or all of the processing fee. For any charge above the value of the processing certificate, or for donated bucks and other game, the hunter will need to pay the fee.

With hunting seasons



CONTRIBUTED

Ron Fowler, left, who is the field directory for Sportsmen Against Hunger, standings with an FSD Food Bank employee, as they take deliver of a load of big game meet.

approaching, SAH anticipates another successful year of game donations. The donated game meat is in great demand and much appreciated by food pan-

tries and their clients who depend on the pantries as a source of nutritious game meat.

## WALKER:

and permission was granted to find the birds," Walker said. An invitation was extended to return the following year, so mid-season in 2002 the Kentucky hunters came back and over the years the friendships grew and the invitation was made for opening weekend.

That farmer and his son were Bob Reilly and Lance Reilly of rural Huron.

As he ventured to South Dakota for the first time in 2011, Walker was awaiting the birth of the first of his three

sons. His brother Ryan, who had previously made the trip, has also grown to cherish the annual pheasant hunting adventure. Since that time, both have taken the opportunity to have their sons join them on the trip.

"This tradition is special, and all that happens there is difficult to explain to a person who's never done it. A few years ago on the return trip I had an idea for a song," Walker said. "Nobody needs a song about bird hunting when they're in the field. But

it's the return, getting back to life, when you look around and miss it. You realize all the good that it did you.

"This recording was made as a 'thank you' to the pheasant hunting tradition, to the hunters, the farmers and the dogs," he said. "And for the people who let us go off and do it — maybe the song is a way we can explain ourselves for the whole ordeal."

Walker, who is now 41, is currently a self-employed painter/handyman in Chicago. In addition to his most

recent single "Cattail Moses," he has an EP (musical recording that contains more tracks than a single but fewer than an album) titled "Windy City Handyman," which was released earlier this month on Spotify and Apple Music.

Walker said he will be promoting his newest single with cards he intends to hand out at various locations throughout South Dakota en route to his pheasant hunting destination. Listeners can also find newest single on YouTube Music.



Russell Walker

From page 4

## Hunting Safety

Being outdoors in the autumn can be a great way to get fresh air and exercise. For many, fall also means hunting season which can pose dangers, sending hunters to the hospital or worse. Heart attacks, injured backs and broken bones are among the most common medical emergencies in hunting. Hunting can be a sport for all to enjoy. But we need to make sure that time outdoors isn't spoiled by some unfortunate accident.

Hunters should make sure they are properly educated about their surroundings and remember these tips:

### 1. Watch for heart attack warning signs.

The activities inherent to hunting — walking over rough terrain, shooting an animal and dragging its carcass, for example — significantly increased the heart rates. Although opinion varies, many health care providers caution that exercising at more than 85% of a person's maximum heart rate increases the risk of heart attack. Hunters unaccustomed to the strenuous hikes involved should take several breaks to rests.

### 2. Know that falls tend to be the most common cause of injuries.

Falls often happen when a hunter is startled by animals. Pay attention to your surroundings at all times.

### 3. Avoid alcohol.

Hunters are more susceptible to injuries if they've been drinking.

### 5. Let family members know where you'll be hunting, and take two-way radios or loud whistles along in case help is needed.

A surprisingly large number of hunting accidents involve family members and friends who have gone out together, but they do not remember or know where their party has gone.

### 6. Learn some basic first aid before heading into the fields.

Basic first aid that you should know includes how to administer hands-only CPR, which consists of chest compressions, should a hunting partner have a heart attack.

#### Keep these basic rules of safe firearms handling in mind:

#### 1. Treat every firearm as if it is loaded.

Never assume a firearm is unloaded. Place your finger on the trigger only when you're ready to shoot.



#### 2. Always control the muzzle.

Keep your muzzle pointed in a safe direction, and remember that wherever the muzzle points is in the crosshairs. Don't overlook the possibility of a ricochet.

#### 3. Be sure of your target.

You're responsible for knowing what's in front of your target, near your target and beyond your target. If you aren't certain about any of the three, don't take the shot.

#### 4. Wear protective gear.

Hunters' eyes and ears are vulnerable to a number of potential hazards while hunting, so it's important to protect them. Firearms create a high-decibel sound that can damage hearing. The firearm also discharges small particles of the projectile, burning gas and other residue that can damage your eyes. Always wear safety glasses and ear protection.

#### 5. Don't forget the blaze orange.

Blaze orange has made hunting safer. Spotting a hunter wearing camouflage is hard, but wearing blaze orange makes you visible to others hunting in the area.

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## RUSH:

person will be the grand prize winner. For complete details you can go to [www.hunthuronsd.com](http://www.hunthuronsd.com) or contact the Huron Chamber & Visitors Bureau 605-352-0000.

We all understand that pheasant hunting has a huge economic impact on our community and the state as a whole. Of course, that is awesome, but money does not overshadow the thrill of the hunt when our bird dogs point or flush up the wild pheasants and when we get the opportunity to hopefully bring down our limits. Or for some, it is about the cajoling that goes along with the hunt and the shot that missed its target. It is about long dinners afterwards replaying the days events for those that weren't there, or



reminding those that were of the awesome shots taken or missed. Friendships that have been forged through hunting are second to none and that is what we hope you experience

when you come to Huron.

In Ringneck Nation this year, we are celebrating our 26th year of hosting the Ringneck Festival 6 man competitive hunt and the 21st Anniversary of the Bird Dog Challenge. Every November teams from across the country meet in Huron for the Ringneck Festival. The Competitive Hunt consists of 6 member teams competing to bring back 18 pheasants, with just 24 shells per team. Man's best friend also competes in the Bird Dog Challenge, which tests the skills of both hunters and their dogs to retrieve the maximum amount of pheasants with 5 shells and 15 minutes. As you can

### Pheasants Forever Banquet today

Heartland Region Pheasants Forever Banquet will be held at 5:30 p.m. today at the Beadle County Sportsman's Club. This chapter encourages all hunters to come with your best stories, encouraging tips, and donations ready! Pheasants Forever continues to be the leading conservation organization primarily because every dollar raised stays local; thus, every dollar raised at the Huron banquet will stay and be spent in the Huron area.

### From page 3

imagine, there have been many memories made during the years. The competitive hunt is held the first full weekend of November, this year November 2nd through the 4th. Teams who wish to compete in the Ringneck Festival register each year by August 31st. The Bird Dog Challenge deadline is October 15th. If you are interested in learning more or want to participate in 2024 go to [www.hunthuronsd.com](http://www.hunthuronsd.com) for more information.

Thanks for coming to Huron and supporting our businesses while you are in town. We appreciate your respect for our public and private hunting areas and we hope that you will continue to come here to make memories each year. After all, our memories are what can carry us through the bad times and the good times.

The Huron Chamber & Visitors Bureau encourages hunters to share their field pictures with us by tagging #RingneckNation on Facebook. Visiting hunters can stop into the Huron Chamber & Visitors Bureau, Monday through Friday between 8:00 am to 5:00 pm for a welcome bag of goodies.

Wishing all our hunters a memorable and safe hunting season!



MIKE CARROLL/PLAINSMAN

**A group of hunters flush a rooster pheasant from a field near Huron during the 2022 opener.**

## FORECAST: From page 2

### HABITAT AND ACCESS

Pheasant populations, along with all wildlife populations, respond positively to abundant habitat, especially perennial grass habitat. Establishing more habitat and providing additional acres of public hunting access is the number one priority for GFP. We are working hard with landowners through programs and initiatives, at both the state and federal level, to provide pheasant habitat and hunting access. Among the highest priorities are enrolling the James River Watershed Conservation Reserve Program (CREP) to the fully allocated 100,000 acres and enrolling 25,000 in a new Big Sioux Watershed CREP.

### WHERE TO HUNT

Great hunting land means great pheasant hunting. South Dakota has incredible amounts of quality public land across the landscape, with plenty in the primary pheasant range. Pick up a copy of the 2023 Public Hunting Atlas or visit our website at [gfp.sd.gov/hunting-areas](http://gfp.sd.gov/hunting-areas) to begin planning your fall hunting trip.

### BLAST AND CAST IN ONE TRIP

After trekking through the grasslands chasing roosters, relax your legs and spend some time fishing on any of South Dakota's great water bodies. There's not many places where you can experience world-class hunting and fishing in one trip. Find great walleye fishing on rocky shorelines along the Missouri River and in Northeast South Dakota.

### PLAN YOUR STAY

South Dakota State Parks offer a wide variety of options for hunters looking to stay right in the heart of the best hunting. Options include year-round camping in state parks and multiple parks offer more modern options as well. These include lodges, modern cabins, and suites. Traditional camping cabins are also available across the state. Find your perfect place to stay at [gfp.sd.gov/camp](http://gfp.sd.gov/camp).

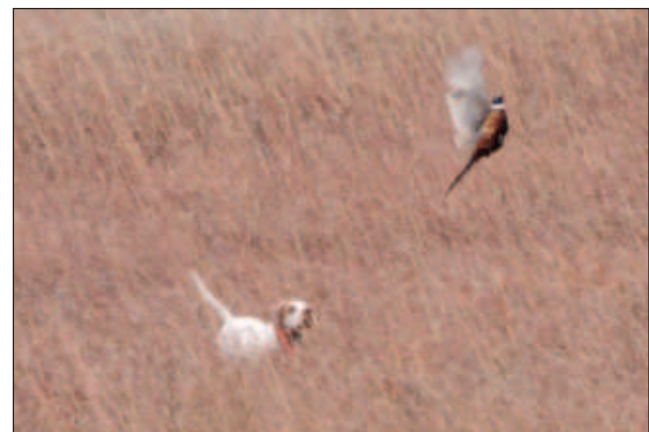
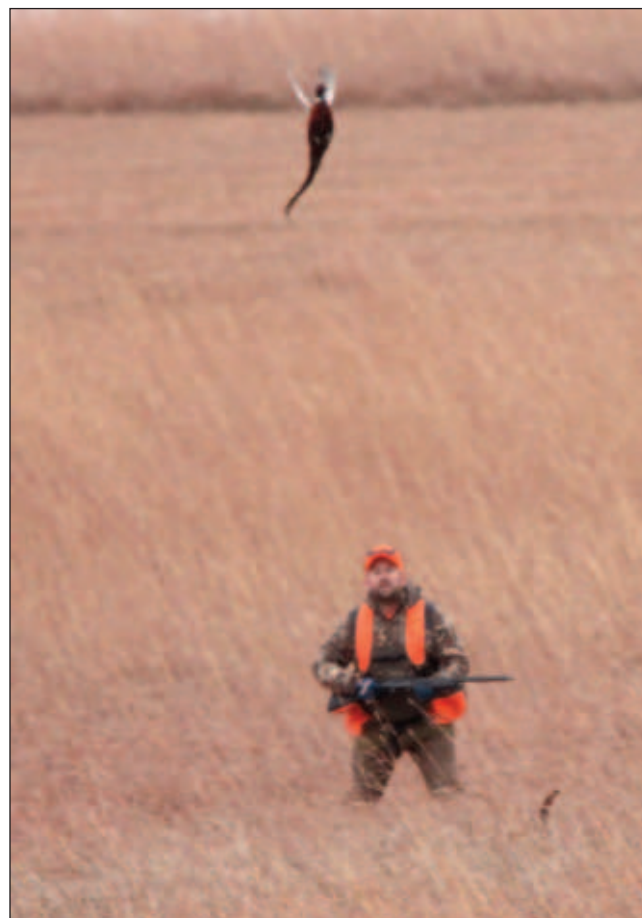
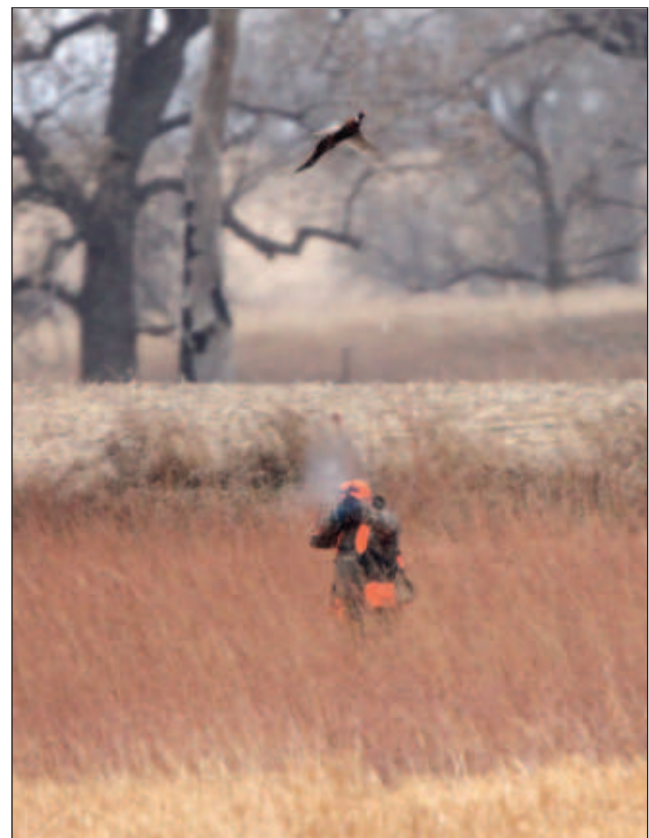
*Courtesy of the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks.*



MIKE CARROLL/PLAINSMAN

**A hunter looks to harvest a rooster as a scorekeeper looks on during the 2022 Bird Dog Challenge.**

# Blast from the past in Ringneck Nation



*Photos by Mike Carroll  
of the Plainsman*