

High Altitude Upland Game

By Martin Olson

How high or far would you be willing to climb for the chance to hunt one of Nevada's most challenging upland game birds? Would you be willing to climb to remote places where the air is thin and peaks rise over 10,000 feet? This is exactly what you'll have to do if you want any chance of harvesting an exotic Himalayan Snowcock.

The Himalayan snowcock is a large grouse-sized bird native to central Asia. It was first introduced into Nevada in 1963, when the Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW) released 19 birds from Pakistan into the Ruby Mountains. From 1965 to 1979, the Department released



a total of 2,025 Himalayan Snowcock into the wild. The first open hunting season was held in 1980 with an initial bag and possession limit of a single bird. That has since increased to two. The very first hunting season was limited to just nine days but has since grown to 90 days due to the difficult terrain, and extreme challenges that the snowcock hunters face.

In Nevada, the Himalayan snowcock is found only at the highest elevations in the Ruby Mountains southeast of Elko. A hardy bird, the snowcock lives at elevations around 10,000 feet, and is fond of steep, barren hillsides and boulder-strewn high altitude meadows. They fly down slope in the morning and feed uphill on seeds, grasses, and insects as the day progresses. The rough terrain in which these birds are found makes success difficult for the upland game hunter. Even bird watchers find spotting one of these elusive birds from a distance a rare feat.

In order to help track hunter participation and their success rates, NDOW established a free-use hunt permit system in 1997. Prior to hunting snowcock, a person must first obtain a free-use permit from the wildlife department. The permit is free and does not affect bag or possession limits. Included on the permit is a questionnaire the hunter uses to report his activities and document bird sightings while in the field. At season's end, the completed questionnaire must be returned to the department. You can obtain the free-use permit questionnaire at regional offices and some field offices.

"We have a pretty limited opportunity to observe snowcocks, so this permit-questionnaire can provide us with important information about the bird's locations, broods, and even the birds themselves," said Tony Wasley, biologist for NDOW.

BECOME A VOLUNTEER

The Nevada Department of Wildlife is always looking for volunteers. Wildlife volunteers are involved in projects such as fish stocking, fish sampling, nesting surveys, check station assistance, angler education, hunter education, data entry, and office assistance.

For more information or to register as a volunteer, go to the NDOW website at www.ndow.org

