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Pointing Dog®

J·O·U·R·N·A·L



The Heart of a Champion

by Robert Bertram



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Winter Chukar

Photo Essay

by Bob Farris

NEAL MISHLER PHOTO

The blizzard finally comes to an end. The south-facing slopes of the canyons accept the majority of the daily sun and have been swept clean by the frequent strong winds that have driven the snow into drifts at every low spot on this rugged landscape. In its wake, the bitter cold has taken over. But yet, here on these ridgelines and colder north-facing slopes, a covey of twelve chukar are buried beneath the snow, waiting out the wrath of the winter storm.

It's the insulation of the snow that helps them survive these conditions as they tunnel under its surface to create individual burrows. They have survived the brief periods of the annual hunting season and constant threats from predators, both coyote and hawks, but the biggest enemy is yet to come: winter blizzards, sub-zero temperatures, and the scarcity of food.





For now, the odds are stacked against these small red-legged partridges, and hopefully the warmer spring weather will arrive soon.

The south slopes near the sun-warmed ledges may provide the only food source for these birds. These massive outcroppings will absorb the sun's light and convert it into heat, yielding the first sprouts of cheatgrass. This will be their primary diet until spring, when insects will provide a greater source of protein.

December and January chukar hunting is of special interest to the avid Northwest bird hunter, as it is during this period that the most exceptional dog work can be observed. The cooler air allows the heat thermals created in the warming canyons to transport the birds' scent up to the ridgelines. Experienced dogs are often found standing



BEN O. WILLIAMS PHOTO

birds at startling distances in these conditions. It is also during this period that the cooler air allows for six- to eight-hour hunts without risking heatstroke or rattlesnakes.

For the chukar hunter, the winter season sees a variation of weather conditions not experienced with any other gamebird, making each hunt a new experience. These deep canyons can fill with ground fog or a winter blizzard that can diminish visibility to fewer than 50 feet. Be sure to pack your beeper collar; this is also when you need a good GPS and complete faith in its readings.

But when it's a cool, crisp day with a blue-bird sky and solid footing on frozen ground, it's perfect for extending the hunt to one of those special coverts that only you frequent.

