

## Winter Harvest

*Game Farm means off-season hunting, dog work*

By Dick Ellis



*Less than one year old, English Setter Lucy is learning fast. Dick Henske makes Lucy sit although all her instincts tell her to run in search of more birds at the Wern Valley Sportsmens Club January 29. (Ellis)*

The white tails of English Setters Maggie and Lucy blended with the January snows on the Wern Valley Sportsmens Club landscape and rose like fluttering surrender flags above the slop-



*Dick Henske of Manitowish Waters works the broom grass of the Wern Valley Sportsmens Club with his English Setters; Maggie and Lucy, for more pheasants. (Ellis)*

ing grasses promising more wild roosters. Surrender? Not these girls. 11-year old veteran Maggie and adolescent Lucy would rather collapse in their tracks than give up on the scent intoxicating this frantic journey to make the pheasant bust cover.

The chase carried down into the standing corn near a creek still partially open and babbling despite the single digit temperatures. Dick Henske of Manitowish Waters read the behavior of his dy-

namic duo, then wrote the last line of a rooster breaking for freedom with one well placed shot from an over-and-under Browning.

Henske had traveled 300 miles from northern Wisconsin with his wife Mariel on an annual over-winter pilgrimage destined for St. George Island in Florida. In his wake, Henske had left months of some of the best big woods ruffed grouse hunting Wisconsin has seen in years. Not only had Lucy been born into a great grouse

state, behind a tenacious mentor like Maggie, she had hit the earth running at near-peak time for the grouse's 10 year population cycle.

Fall duck and wild rooster hunting in North and South Dakota had found places on the Henske calendar. It was a dog's life for both man and dog and a darn good one, with only time for rest to ease the aches and pains of the field. And then to start again.

"I didn't make it to Iowa this January to hunt pheasants, which was rare," said Henske, a 74 year old retired Milwaukee area elementary school principal who compares favorably in field time to the Energizer Rabbit. "The landowners where I have hunted for years told me not to even bother. Two consecutive hard winters and wet springs left the pheasant numbers really down."

In route south, Henske asked me if I knew of any game farms in southeast Wisconsin where the bird hunt and dog work might continue. Game farms are licensed so that hunters may purchase Pheasants, Hungarian Partridge, Chukars, Quail or other game birds even after traditional seasons have closed. Game farms are also often the site of corporate events, much as businesses use charter fishing services to thank clients in the outdoors.



*A bitter cold day with temperatures in the single digits is still a good day to hunt for pheasants January 29 at one of Wisconsin's many game farms. (Ellis)*

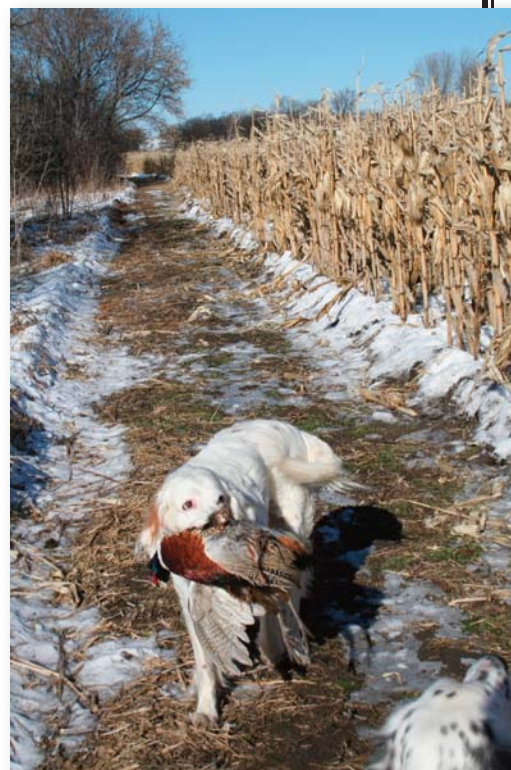
Although I have never personally hunted a game farm, I was at least familiar with very reputable establishments Wern Valley in Waukesha County, Milford Hills Hunt Club in Jefferson County and Mike Norton's Fishing & Hunting Adventures in Green Lake County. A 60 second Google under "Wisconsin Game Farms" immediately brought up approximately 100 additional licensed hunting facilities from Washburn in Lake Superior Country to Lake Geneva near the Illinois border. Henske settled on Wern Valley and I followed with my camera; my only concern being batteries dying in five degree temperatures.

"For a hunter like me in retirement, think about what I would spend going to Iowa with bird numbers down, compared to staying close and spending my money on a good game farm," Henske said. "Every year I use a lot of gas, a couple nights lodging, meals and an out-of-state license in the western states and Iowa. I love that. But, although I wouldn't say a game farm hunt is the same as hunting birds in those states, it's pretty darn good, and Lucy needs the work."

Henske had purchased from Wern Valley via the phone three wild Jilin strain pheasants imported from China. The birds are flight conditioned in over 20 acres of holding pens. Purchase prices per bird and strain of birds to be hunted are part of the chore of doing your own homework on farms near your Wisconsin residence when deciding where to go. When we arrived at Wern Valley, Henske was greeted by Administrative Assistant Joni Knoll and assigned a piece of 80 acres cultivated with crops and grasslands for pheasant.

Bitter cold temperatures and biting winds became tolerable, like any Wisconsin hunt, after we walked the acreage in pursuit of roosters for twenty minutes or so. The cold had kept many hunters away on this day, and only one other group was seen in the distance with the occasional muffled shotgun report broadcasting their success.

It soon became apparent that the hunt would be no cake walk. After an hour, we had not flushed a bird although the two English Setters know this game well and seldom lose. Bird scent once or twice did trigger the patented "Birdie" behavior in the dogs coveted by the upland




*English Setter Maggie returns with the wild rooster strain of Jilin pheasant dropped by hunter Dick Henske on the Wern Valley Sportsmens Club on January 29. (Ellis)*

bird hunter, but we experienced no flushes.

The second hour brought more never-say-die dog work and good action in the standing corn and surrounding terrain. Two birds fell to Henske's scattergun, with the highlight being Maggie's steadfast point on a windswept grass ridge until the bird busted cover just inches from her nose. Two other roosters also flushed and a lone quail that had escaped the guns of another party on another day.

Three hours after we had taken to the fields of the Wern Valley Sportsmens Club, both dogs and hunters were ready to hang it up, file another Wisconsin hunt to the memory bank, and look for a hot cup of coffee. A Wern Valley brochure "spoke" of wild birds and quality hunting on spacious fields of quality cover.

After being a first time observer on a game farm hunt...I agree. Contact the Wern Valley Sportsmens Club at 262-968-2400 or [hunt@wernvalley.com](mailto:hunt@wernvalley.com). Connect with [www.wernvalley.com](http://www.wernvalley.com).

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