



By Eric Miller
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What Should I Be Doing This Month?

NOVEMBER will almost always find me walking through young forest and shrubland habitats waiting for the bell to go silent, marking my dog's location. November, to me, is the prime time to be following my pointers in search of grouse and woodcock. Depending on weather trends, I spend an even amount of time pursuing grouse and woodcock. If weather is conducive to a late migration, I'll be running dogs on old strip mines or dogwood and alder bottoms where woodcock might be resting or feeding during their migration south. The pre-migration shuffle of resident birds has long since ended and they have, for the most part, departed for the winter, while birds trickling down from New England and Canada drop into their covers. Even though woodcock are my target, grouse often can be found in these same areas.

If early snows or freezes force woodcock south, I then head to young, recently cut forests, or older forests in a shelterwood (a silvicultural system in which overstory trees are removed in a series of cuts designed to achieve a new, even-aged stand under the shelter of remaining trees) stage of regeneration, in search of grouse. As with clearcutting and seed trees, shelterwood gives rise to even-aged stands.

In the earlier part of November, mast may still be present, so I'm always sure to check out orchards and shrublands for feeding grouse. Broods may still be hanging around together in early November, so a solid point could result in several flushed birds. As weeks go by and we near Thanksgiving, I concentrate efforts in the previous mentioned young forests or those stands going through a shelterwood treatment, as both provide outstanding structure now that leaves have fallen from the trees. Grape and greenbrier tangles begin to hold birds as we near deer season, because other food sources have been consumed by other forest wildlife.

The keys to finding grouse are quite simple, put miles on your boots and look for the appropriate structure that will provide protective cover and/or food. Once you key on the seasonal changes in habitat and requirements of these wonderful game birds, the toughest part will be having your shotstring intercept them.