

Montana Sharp-tail Hunt '07 By Kirklan Oler

My cousin Bob, two brothers Ty and Trey and I hit the road for Montana for 9 days of hunting sharpies and huns in the Big Sky state, Montana. After driving through the night, not including a few hours lay over at my parents place in Idaho, we arrived at our destination around 2 in the afternoon. It was a small ranching and farming town off the beaten path where we were to hunt for the next few days.

When we got into town, we called some friends of ours who were going to show us around and give us a quick crash course on hunting sharpies, a quarry none of us in the group had hunted before. Unfortunately it was 94 degrees when we pulled in, so we decided to go find a motel room, catch some much needed sleep and wait for it to cool down for an evening hunt. By 6:00 PM we finally headed out to a 7,000 acre parcel of land that our friends had exclusive access to.



After the drive out to the property, we only had about 45 minutes of huntable light left. We quickly put on game bags, dropped all 6 of the dogs we brought on the ground, (Darko DD, Jax ES, Chaco WPG, Chaser WPG, Scout lab, and Daisy lab) and set about hunting some sharpies. My cousin and his labs kicked up the first 2 coveys of sharpies and Bob quickly added 2 sharpies to his bag. Darko and Jax were working hard for me, but the temps were still well above 80 and Darko is pretty much worthless in any temps above 60. Jax being a 4 month old pup was just excited to be somewhere besides the backyard. After about 40 minutes and a mile or two loop, Bob and Trey had added a couple more birds in the bag and I had 1. I was working some cover about 300 yards from the others when I heard a sound coming behind me, I turned just in time to see a covey of about 20 sharpies flying right at me in the dwindling twilight. I quickly shouldered my 12 gauge and dumped one more bird on a crossing shot. The

group ended up with 6 sharpies in the bag for the first quick 45 minute hunt in Montana.

Sunday started out very much on the warm side and windy. It was 75 degrees and the wind was blowing at a good 20-30 miles/hour when we reached the desired BMA area that we were to hunt that day. We had spoken to the landowner before heading out and he directed us to a nice section of land that had 4 different coulees snaking through it. Bob once again got into birds right away about a hundred yards from the truck. He dumped 2 birds on the first flush and my brother Ty dropped another on the re-flush.

We continued to work the coulees for another hour or so before Chaco kicked up a single sharpie that flew across directly towards me. I quickly spun around, gave the bird a couple feet lead, as it was really cruising with the wind and dumped it on a nice crossing shot. I had my first and what turned out to be only sharpie of the day! We continued along the coulee and Darko flushed about 10 pheasants. I was starting to get a little frustrated because he really wasn't getting all that birdy or pointing. He was rooting around where the pheasants flushed when he burst out of the brush with a face full of quills. After a quick 5 minutes of pulling quills, we were back in business and Darko was none the worse for wear. I ended up with 1 more bird for the day, a hun. We called it quits as the heat was way too hot for the dogs to work in.



Monday started out slightly cooler, but it heated up very quickly and by 9:00 AM it was getting too hot to run the dogs. My brother Ty managed 1 sharpie out of a covey of about 20 birds and we decided to call it quits on the first area of the trip. We loaded the dogs, gear, checked out of the motel and headed north to try and get out of the heat. As we drove further north, it quickly became apparent that we were not going to get a relief from the heat anytime soon. We arrived at our destination around 3 PM checked into a motel and decided to head out to a BMA about 15 miles outside of town.

We were in a completely foreign area to us and it took us a bit of driving before we actually pulled up at a location that looked like it would hold a covey or two for us. As we pulled into the designated parking area, we noticed a covey of sharpies in the shade behind a straw stack 20 yards away. We flushed them into what we thought was good cover to hunt them in, but little did we know there was a creek between us and our quarry.

Bob and I headed north along the creek while Ty and Trey headed south looking for a place to cross. It wasn't long before we heard Ty and Trey shooting and we were nowhere near the action. What we didn't know was Ty had tried to cross in what he thought was a shallow spot and ended up to his waist in mud and actually had to use his gun sideways in the mud in order to get out. He still got to the other side, but Chaco was unable to find the downed bird. To say he was displeased would be putting it lightly. The day ended with a covey of huns and I was able to add 1 bird to my bag for what turned out to be a very long day.

Tuesday started with a lot of promise, we had scouted some likely areas on the BMA and had a game plan for the morning. We started the day working a long ridgeline with a huge cut grain field on the top. It should have been a great place for huns and sharpies, but we only managed 2 huns on one covey flush. By the time we got back to the truck it was 10 AM and was nearing 80+ degrees. We decided to go back to town, get some lunch, rest, and head about 40 miles to hunt an area that I was advised to be a sharpie haven.

We arrived at the parking area around three in the afternoon with the truck saying 94 degrees. Not wanting to hunt in the heat we decided to get the dogs out for a water them. It before Chaco down by a 150 yards away. along with 12 thinking she on some scent. minutes later gun belched and sharpie of the We quickly



stretch and to wasn't long disappeared coulee about Ty followed gauge in tow may have been It wasn't 2 when his scatter he had the first day in the bag. unloaded the

rest of the dogs and 1 ½ hours later we had completed a 16 sharpie limit for

the 4 us just before a cold front brought wind and rain that would cool us down and provide fantastic hunting for the remainder of the trip.

Wednesday started found us unloading the dogs to a cool 45 degrees and a north wind blowing down from Canada. We had a 3-4 mile ridgeline we were going to hunt with numerous coulees and cut grain fields above and below. This day ended up being the single most productive day of hunting I have ever been involved in. With the wet, cool conditions, the dog work proved to be exceptional. The birds held like I have never seen, especially for huns, peeling off in 1's and 2's all morning.

Darko, having been stuck by the porkie and the with the cooler weather, had finally decided it was time to start where he had finished last year off and



pointed numerous covey of huns and sharpies. Including three exceptional points where he worked scent from off the top of the ridge to 200+ yards below before going on point. Jax even got into the action with 3 covey finds of his own including a covey of huns that he stuck in a group of bushes. I don't think that I would be exaggerating to say we flushed

20+ coveys of huns and 10+ coveys of sharpies. To recount all the points and retrieves would take too much typing. Total bird count for the day was 37 sharpies and huns not including a few birds that, unfortunately, we were unable to find.



Thursday found us in the same area scouting for other likely areas like we had found the 2 days before. We hunted a couple of good areas and received permission to hunt on a few private farms and ranches. While working the edge of 1 particular grain field, we flushed 4 separate coveys of huns and 1 covey of sharpies in 300-400 yards. On one of the coveys I went an honest 4 for 4 on huns. I have never been in the zone like that when wing shooting. Everything slowed

down and when I pulled the trigger, a bird folded and fell to the ground. Trey said it was disappointing to see every hun he was about to shoot fold up right before he was going to pull the trigger. The day ended with another banner day of 34 birds. I wound up with limits of both sharpies(4) and huns(8).

Friday was to be a short hunting day as we were driving home most of the 15 hours that day. We headed to the same general area as before and set about hunting for a few hours before we had to leave. Darko having been run hard for 6 straight days was starting to feel a little foot sore. His and Daisy's pads were starting to get a little swollen and bother them. I decided to keep Darko kenneled and put Jax on the ground by himself.



Now, let me tell you, Jax is a birdy son of a b****. He doesn't slow down at all and already runs bigger than all the other dogs. Too make matters worse he decided he had had enough of listening to me and was just going to hunt up some birds on his own. He was all over the place and finding coveys of huns and sharpies too. The only problem was he had decided he doesn't need to point them any more or at least not for very long. I just about blew a gasket trying to hopelessly gain control of him, but it was to no avail, he was simply all over the place. He did have a couple of good covey finds, but has yet to retrieve a bird. He is more concerned with destroying the vile birds than retrieving them. I have no doubt that as soon as he settles down and hunts birds for me and not himself that he'll turn into a fantastic gun dog.

Even after all the chaos was over, the group finished with 23 birds in 3 hours of hunting. We loaded up the dogs, said goodbye to the best 4 days in our meager upland hunting careers and headed south down the road under a not so little place fondly called the Big Sky.

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