



Learn to Hunt

Small Game Hunting Overview

On your outdoor journey, the Pennsylvania Game Commission can help you [Learn to Hunt](#).

Small Game Species

Huntable in Pennsylvania:

- Squirrel
- Cottontail Rabbit
- Pheasant
- Snowshoe Hare
- Woodchuck
- Grouse
- Crow



Small Game Species

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- Squirrel
- Cottontail Rabbit
- Pheasant

We'll cover these popular species in more detail.



Biology, Habitat, Behavior

Knowing this information will help you hunt a species.

- What does the species look like?
- What does it need to survive?
- Does it see in color? What is its range of vision?
- Does it rely heavily on its sense of hearing or smell?
- Where does it live?
- How does it act?





Squirrels





Squirrels

- Gray, black, fox, and red squirrels can be hunted.
- Grays are the most common of Pennsylvania squirrels.
 - Gray squirrels also occur in a black color phase.



Gray squirrel

- 1-1.5 pounds
- 18-20 inches,
- half of which is tail



Fox squirrel

- nearly 2 pounds
- 21 inches
- 10-inch tail



**Black phase
gray squirrel**

Red squirrel

- 5.5 ounces
- 12 inches



Flying Squirrels

- Protected species
- Not a huntable species
- Unlike the other squirrel species, most active at night (nocturnal)



Squirrel Biology

- Eat nuts, berries, fruits, mushrooms, seeds, corn
- Sight
 - See shades of black and white
 - Excellent at detecting movement
- Movement
 - Fast and agile, use their tail for balance
 - Excellent at scaling trees and leaping from branch to branch



Squirrel Habitat

- Woodland species
- Grays prefer mixes of maples, oaks, hickories and beech trees
- Fox squirrels need woodland edges where trees border crop fields
- Good squirrel woods has diverse tree and shrub species



Squirrel Behavior

- Most active in early morning and late afternoons
- Bark or “chuck” alarm calls





Squirrel Behavior

Early Season

(Sept.-Oct.)

- Spend most of their time in trees, where they may be difficult to see

Mid-Season

(Nov.-Dec.)

- Spend most of their time gathering and caching nuts

Late Season

(Jan.-Feb.)

- Spend coldest parts of day in nest
- Concentrate activity during the warmer parts of the day
- May feed less



Squirrels

Learn more about squirrel biology, behavior, and habitat in the [Squirrel Wildlife Note](#)

Squirrel Hunting





Squirrel Hunting

STATIONARY HUNTING

- Best times of day are early and late in the day (post-dawn, pre-dusk).
- Sit quietly with your back against a tree or on a comfortable stool, for 15 to 30 minutes. Wait patiently for the squirrels to come to you.
- Listen for chewing of nuts, rustling of leaves and scratching of bark as squirrels feed and move around in the forest.



Squirrel Hunting

MOBILE HUNTING



- Walk and sneak slowly through the woods, pausing occasionally to listen.
- Alarmed squirrels may *bark* and hide on the backside of a tree.
- If you are hunting with a partner, one person can walk around the tree to encourage the squirrel to shift position and present a shot to the person standing in place.



If you harvest a squirrel, CONGRATULATIONS!

This Squirrel Pot Pie recipe from *Artemis* is simple and yields welcome comfort food at the end of a long winter.

You can use just about any meat; turkey and pheasant are good substitutes.

[Artemis Squirrel Pot Pie recipe](#)



Rabbits





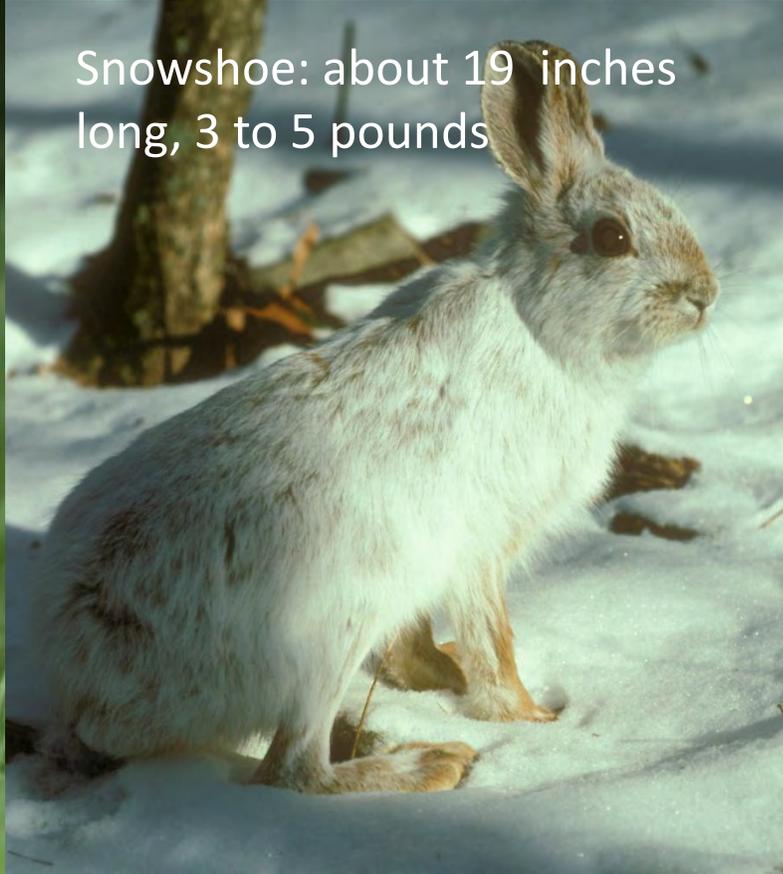
Rabbits

Cottontails and snowshoe (varying) hares are lawful small game.

Cottontail: 15 to 18 inches long, 2 to 3 pounds



Snowshoe: about 19 inches long, 3 to 5 pounds



Snowshoe: pelt may change twice a year



Rabbit Biology

- Keen senses of hearing and smell.
- Eyes set on sides of head providing a wide field of vision.
- Snowshoes have larger ears and feet than cottontails.
- Snowshoes molt may occur in a patchwork fashion over 10 weeks, usually starting with feet and ears and moving upward and toward the rear until the pelt changes between white and brown (except ear tips, which remain black).



Rabbit Habitat

- Prefers dense ground cover of thickets, briar patches, weedy fields, brushpiles, overgrown fencerows and brushy gullies.
- May shelter in old groundhog dens.
- Foods include a variety of green vegetation. In winter they rely on wood plants: blackberry and raspberry canes, bark, buds, tender twigs of bushy plants and poison ivy vines.



Rabbit Habitat

- Snowshoes reside mostly on the high plateaus of northwest and Pocono regions in brushy areas, hemlock groves, and swamps.



Rabbit Behavior

- Crepuscular—meaning most movement occurs around dusk and dawn.
- Rely on a burst of speed and zigzag running pattern to evade predators.
- Circle when chased.
- Cannot run for long distances.
- Can jump or leap more than 8 feet.





Rabbit Behavior

Early Season

(Oct. and Nov.), rabbits prefer to feed around agricultural fields, weedy meadows and hedgerows. They will hide most anywhere.

Late Season

(Dec. thru Feb.), rabbits seek thicker cover like brush piles and deadfall trees to keep warm and safe.

Rabbits

Learn more about rabbit biology,
behavior, and habitat in the
[Cottontail Rabbit Wildlife Note](#)
[Snowshoe Hare Wildlife Note](#)



Rabbit Hunting



Rabbit Hunting



- To flush rabbits and encourage them to run and provide a shot, hunters spread out in a line and move slowly through good rabbit habitat.
- Walk through thick brush and “kick cover” by stepping through the thicker places where rabbits may be hiding.





Rabbit Hunting Tactics

WITH A DOG

- A dog can work the cover methodically and use its nose to scent rabbits and get them running.

If you harvest a rabbit, CONGRATULATIONS!

[Four Yummy Rabbit Recipes](#)
from Georgia DNR, Wildlife Resources Division



Photo credit: Holly Heyser, [Hunter Angler Gardener Cook](#)



Pheasants

Ring-necked Pheasants

- Most ring-necked pheasants hunted in Pennsylvania are raised on game farms, then released for "put and take" hunting.
- The loss of sustainable populations of ring-necked pheasants in Pennsylvania is attributed to habitat loss, caused by multiple factors in the farmland landscape.



male



female

Male, rooster, cockbird:

- 2½ - 3½ pounds
- Stands about 1 foot tall
- About 36 inches from tip of beak to tip of tail
- Distinctive crow, loud cackle when flushed



Female, hen:

- 2 pounds
- Slightly smaller than male



Pheasant Biology

- Eat weed seeds, grains, fruits and berries, leaves, grasses, and insects. Find food by scratching ground litter.
- Keen hearing and sight.
- Strong fliers over short distances.



Pheasant Habitat

- Farmland and overgrown fields of grasses, sedges, and cattails
- Dense grassy stands in winter



Pheasant Behavior

- When pursued will run rather than fly.
- Seek thick protective cover.
- Flush when cornered or surprised.
- In winter, may form flocks and travel in small groups.





Pheasant Behavior

Early Season

(Oct. and Nov.),
pheasants prefer to feed in agricultural fields, weedy meadows, and along hedgerows

Late Season

(Dec. thru Feb.), pheasants seek thicker cover to keep warm and evade predators: These birds may cattail marshes, shrub/bramble thickets and other dense vegetative cover



Pheasants

Learn more about pheasant biology, behavior, and habitat in the [Ring-necked Pheasant Wildlife Note](#)

Pheasant Hunting



Pheasant Hunting Tactics

WITHOUT A DOG



- Walk slowly through the field, zig-zagging and pausing to make the pheasants uneasy and encourage them to flush.
- With a group of hunters, spread out 20 to 30 yards apart and walk carefully through cover, paying close attention to thicker areas where pheasants may be hiding.
- Check brushpiles, hedgerows and other places where a pheasant could escape to while being pursued.





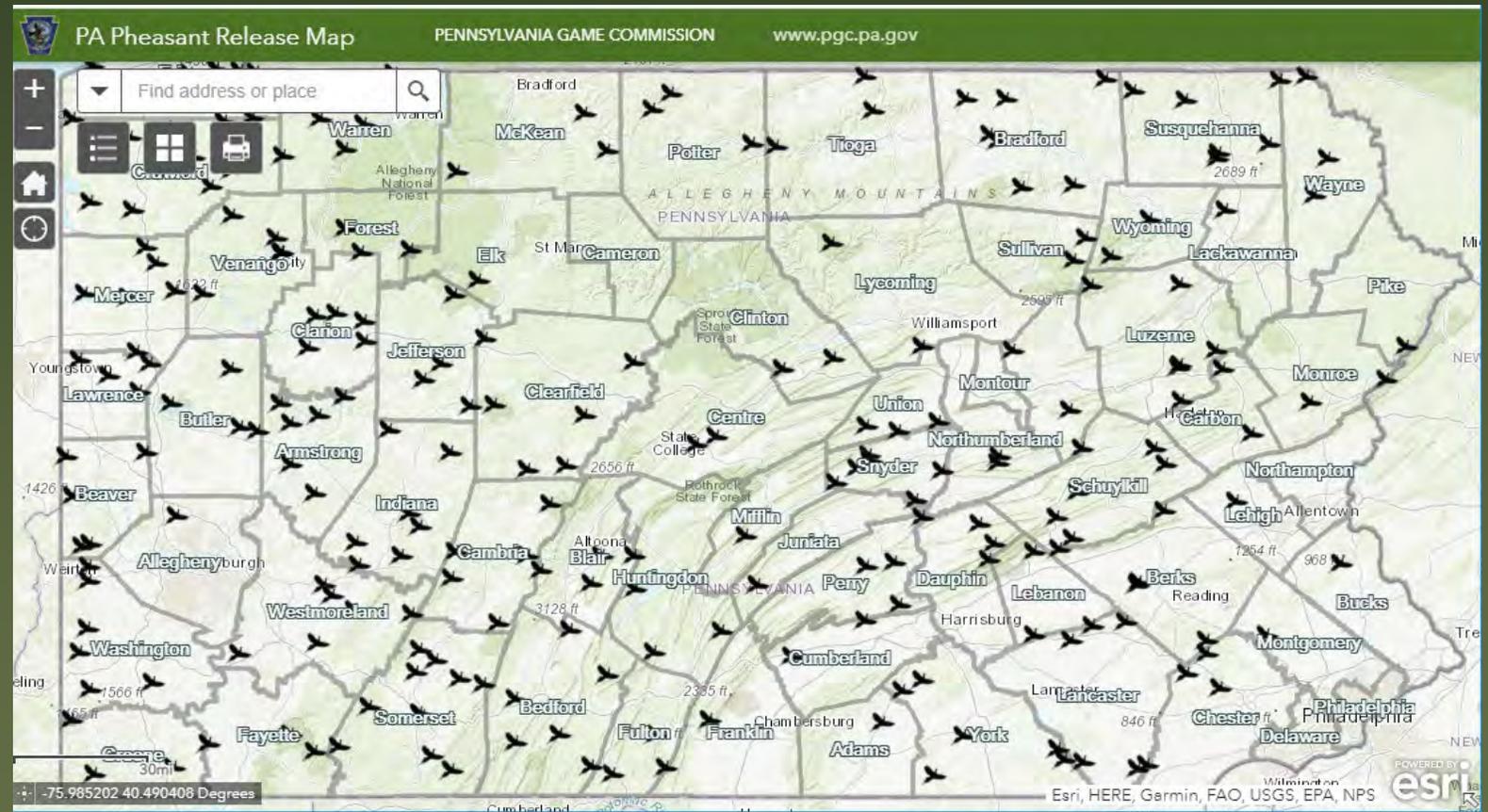
Pheasant Hunting Tactics WITH A DOG

- Utilize the dog's ability to scent game to help you find pheasants.
- Hunt into the wind or quartering into the wind, to allow the pheasant's scent to drift towards the approaching dog.
- Work with a group of two or three hunters for each dog.

Pheasant Stocking Map



The Game Commission provides information on where pheasant stockings will be taking place each fall.



If you harvest a pheasant,
CONGRATULATIONS!

[Pan-roasted Pheasant](#)
from Meateater



COOK / RECIPES

PAN-ROASTED PHEASANT RECIPE

Before Heading Afield...

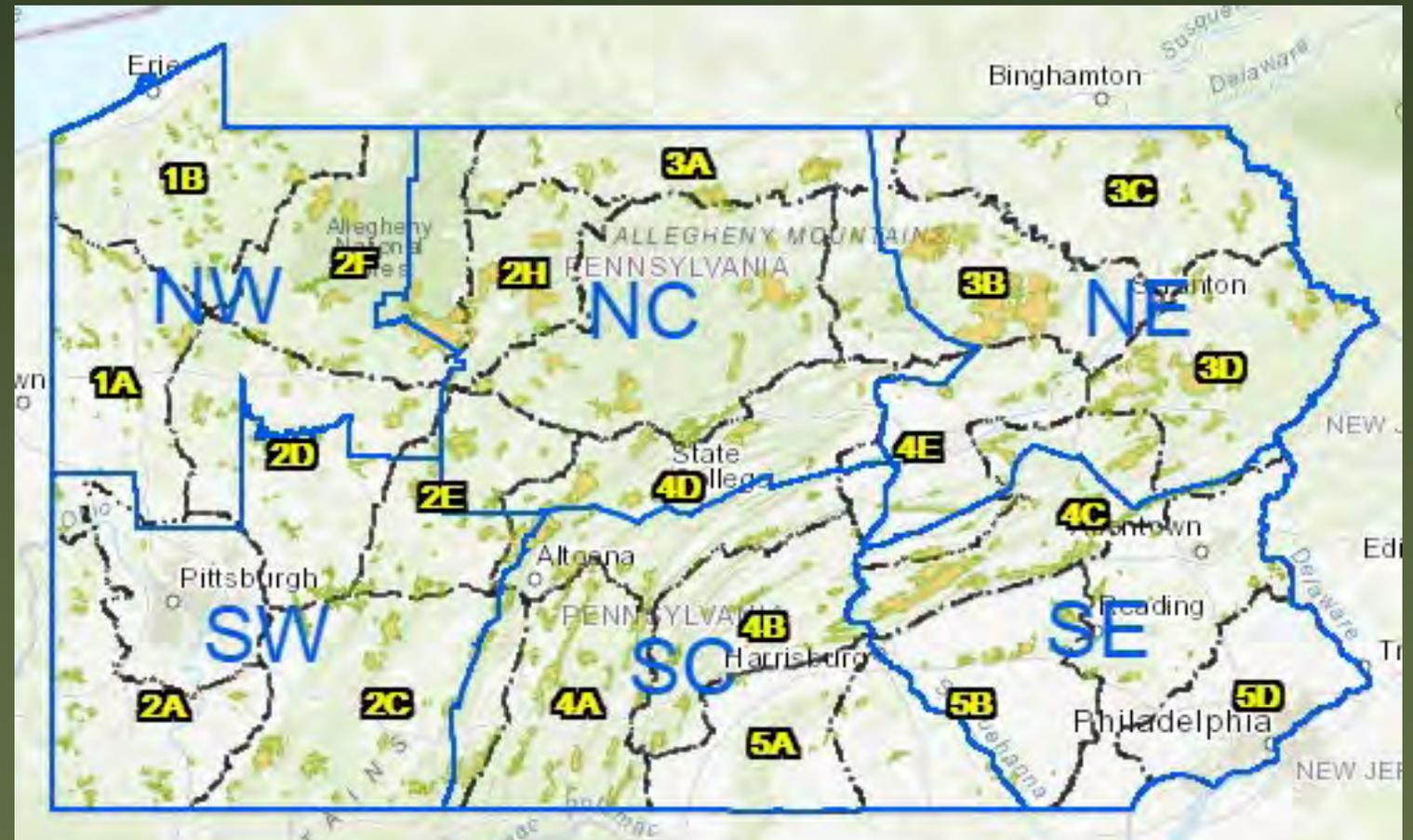
- Have the proper hunting license (general license for all small game) and a pheasant permit (to hunt pheasants)
- Practice with the equipment
- Tell someone where you're headed and when you expect to return



Public Hunting Lands



Use the Mapping Center at www.pgc.pa.gov to find state game lands and other public properties to go hunting.



Caring for Small Game Meat

- In warm weather, be sure to field dress carcass (remove entrails) to prevent spoilage of meat.
- Meat should be cooked thoroughly to at least 160 degrees F.
- If storing in a freezer, be sure to double wrap or vacuum seal to prevent damage to meat.



We hope you're able to get outside
and enjoy some of Pennsylvania's
great outdoors.

On your outdoor journey, the Pennsylvania Game
Commission can help you [Learn to Hunt](#).

