



*The*  
***Bird Hunting Report***

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Fax Number: 240-599-7679

Order Line: 301-528-0011

Website: [www.birdhuntingreport.com](http://www.birdhuntingreport.com)

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# Dateline: Delaware

## Late Season Do-It-Yourself Woodcock Hunting

- **Timetable:** Dec. 14, 2013, through Jan. 14, 2014
- **Accommodations:** Various hotels/motels
- **Food:** Various restaurants
- **Hunt:** Moderate to difficult

Often overlooked by even the most seasoned woodcock hunters are the late-season wing shooting opportunities available in Delaware. Delaware? Yes, Delaware. Delaware — the first state to ratify the United State Constitution — is also one of the smallest. Occupying a total area of 1,982 square miles, Delaware ranks 49th in the nation in size, with only Rhode Island trailing. **What Delaware lacks in size, however, it makes up for in woodcock habitat — and consequently, prime woodcock hunting.**

Situated on the East Coast between the Chesapeake Bay to the west and the Delaware River, Delaware Bay, and Atlantic Ocean to the east, Delaware continues to astound do-it-yourself traveling wing shooters who follow the southward migration of the timberdoodles.

As with New Jersey, vast numbers of migrating woodcocks in the Atlantic flyway have no option but to pass through Delaware. Because woodcocks



typically prefer to make many short flights rather than long-distance trips, the Delaware Bay presents an obstacle for hungry and tired birds. In many cases, woodcocks bound for the sunny Gulf Coast congregate near the cool eastern shore of the Delaware Bay to rest and eat before their flights across the bay. **Similarly, many woodcocks find the need to rest and refuel on the western side of the Delaware Bay after they fly across, which places them right smack in the middle of Delaware's Kent**

**County and in the walk-in public hunting grounds of Blackiston Wildlife Area.**

Located in Blackiston, Del., and near Delaware Route 6 and Road 131 (about an hour from Philadelphia and Baltimore and 45 minutes from Wilmington, Del.), Blackiston Wildlife Area consists of two large land tracts totaling more than 2,200 acres. Old-growth forests, managed grain fields, crop fields and small streams dominate Blackiston Wildlife area. The forested areas near the streams provide woodcock-holding habitat, especially in the colder weeks of Delaware's late woodcock hunting season. **It's important to point out that Delaware woodcock seasons vary by year, although they typically consist of an early segment and a late segment.** This year, Delaware's early woodcock hunting segment runs from Nov. 25, 2013, through Dec. 7, 2013, and the late woodcock hunting segment runs from Dec. 14, 2013, through Jan. 14, 2014. Through experience, **I've found greater numbers and larger concentrations of woodcocks at Blackiston during the late season segment.**

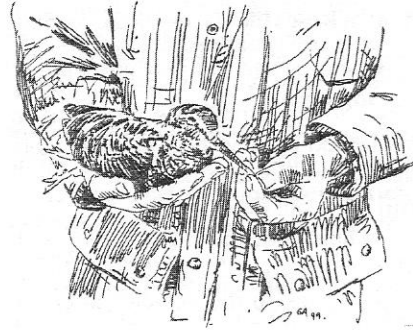
Temperatures are typically warmer in the early segment, so non-frozen

ground enables the timberdoodles to spread out and feed in other locations. In the late segment, however, the ground is colder and perhaps even frozen. The hard and/or frozen ground leads the woodcocks toward the thawed areas near the flowing (or even trickling) streams in Blackiston's lower-lying areas.

**The few parking areas that surround Blackiston Wildlife Area are sufficient staging spots, but parking at the perimeter of the land tracts gives way to a great deal of walking and brush busting.** Well-fitting, broken-in and waterproof boots are a necessity. Likewise, you might want to consider oil-finished hunting chaps or brush pants because dew, frost and/or moisture-laden muck will accumulate on your pant legs, which could lead to cold, uncomfortable hunts and long, chafing walks back to your vehicle. Even on the coldest days, the extended walks through Blackiston's bottomlands that attract and hold woodcock will increase your heart rate and stimulate your sweat glands. Be sure to dress warmly (January morning temperatures in Delaware can sometimes dip into the teens and single digits), but wear layers that you can easily shed and stuff in your bird vest while walking.

A note on shotguns: Every woodcock hunter has his or her favorite timberdoodle gun, and all of those guns are welcome at Blackiston. Unlike some woodcock hunting spots that are choked by super-thick briars and saplings, the woodcock hunting areas within Blackiston usually make for easy navigation and passage. **Therefore, shiny, expensively engraved, antique and heirloom guns are OK to use here as well.** But be aware that woodcocks found on Blackiston Wildlife Area during the late hunting season segment are typi-

cally packed into concentrated groups of two, three or even four or five birds. On one occasion my Vizsla locked on point with seemingly no birds in front of him. Knowing to trust a bird dog's nose, my hunting partners and I crept along cautiously. About 10-15 yards from the dog's nose, a timberdoodle flushed, follow by another after the first shot, then two more — a quick-shooting, multiple-bird opportunity that can



arise at Blackiston. **As such, I have found myself wishing for three shots instead of two** after I emptied both barrels of my side-by-side just to see a bogsucker seemingly laughing at me as he **headed toward Louisiana.**

**Late-season woodcock hunting at Blackiston Wildlife Area is not without risks and potential downsides.** One, be aware that Delaware still adheres to archaic "blue laws" that **only allow hunting on Mondays through Saturdays**, so plan accordingly. Making Sunday a travel day is optimal. Two, scheduling late season woodcock hunts in snow-prone areas is risky. In 2011, I planned vacation days to coincide with Delaware's late woodcock hunting season segment. Although this was an exception rather than the norm, the area

was affected by several major January snowstorms that piled up nearly two feet of snow and put the kibosh on Delaware woodcock hunting.

**Blackiston Wildlife Area is located in a rural area but is easily accessible via paved roads.** Ten pet-friendly hotels are located in nearby Dover (Delaware's capital), with room rates ranging from \$59 per night to \$149 per night, plus taxes and fees. Various fast food establishments, national chain restaurants, diners, local eateries and upscale restaurants are located in the towns of Dover and Smyrna. **A folk tradition for Delaware hunters is to stop by Helen's Famous Sausage house for breakfast before or after their hunts.** Helen's, located at 4866 N. DuPont Highway in Smyrna, serves downhome breakfast sandwiches with unbelievably satisfying portions from 4 a.m. to 2 p.m. Mondays through Fridays and 4 a.m. to noon on Saturdays. Trying scrapple — a mush loaf made from pork scraps, for lack of a better description — is also a must when visiting the Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Jersey area.

For Delaware residents, hunting licenses are \$25 per year. Full nonresident firearm hunting licenses are priced on a reciprocal basis to coincide with fees that the hunter's state of residency charges, with a \$130 minimum fee. Delaware also offers a three-day nonresident small game license for \$50.

**To obtain maps and hunting regulations for Delaware's Blackiston Wildlife Area:** [http://www.dnrec.delaware.gov/fw/hunting/pages/hunting\\_maps.aspx](http://www.dnrec.delaware.gov/fw/hunting/pages/hunting_maps.aspx).

To obtain a Delaware hunting license: <https://egov.dnrec.delaware.gov>.

—Steven M. Kendus

## Dateline: New York

Located in Salem, N.Y., the Dutch River Club provides an industry-best experience for driven pheasant, flighted mallards and wild bird hunting. The private club owns 1,200 acres, and an additional 1,000 acres is available for member use through long-term reciprocal agreements with other area clubs.

The Dutch River Club offers two types of shoots: driven and continental. For the driven hunt, early-released pheasant are driven from their feeding and loafing areas in a style similar to British shoots where the birds come from the terrain situated high above the guns. The birds are flown in the summer and early fall so they are hard

### Private Club Offers Driven Pheasant, Flighted Mallards and Wild Bird Hunts

- **Timetable:** Sept. 15 – March 31
- **Accommodations:** 19th century style farmhouse
- **Food:** Gourmet New England
- **Hunt:** Various levels of difficulty