

A person wearing camouflage pants and grey knee pads is holding a small, fluffy game bird in a snowy field. The bird is held in the person's gloved hand, and its wings are spread. The background is a blurred, snowy landscape with some evergreen trees.

THE ABCs OF SMALL GAME HUNTING



Fall is a season that stirs the passions of hunting enthusiasts, who flock to the rapidly changing forest to harvest precious trophies. But if you've never experienced this activity in nature, it's not always easy to know where to begin. Small game hunting is a great starter activity for wannabe initiates. Here are some introductory tips for fledgling hunters.

ORGANIZE YOUR HUNTING DAY

Essential things to bring with you

CLOTHING

- Clothing adapted to the weather conditions
- Rainwear
- Cap, toque, and gloves
- Walking boots
- Regulation orange bib

HUNTING ITEMS

- Firearm
- Ammunition
- Hunting licences
- Right of access for hunting in wildlife reserves
- First aid kit

MISCELLANEOUS

- Map of the territory
- Bag for transporting game
- Knife, rope, and compass
- Food
- Water

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW BEFORE SETTING OFF TO HUNT

Small game hunting is considered the best introduction to hunting for youngsters and the young at heart. However, it's essential to know the rules of sport hunting in Quebec before taking up this activity.

What you need to know:

- Any Quebec resident who wishes to hunt must first obtain a **hunter's certificate**. The certificate is obtained after you've taken and passed the training course provided for the category of weapon you wish to use. For more information or to register for a course, visit www.fedecp.com.
- In addition, anyone wishing to hunt with a firearm must comply with the federal Firearms Act. The Act requires a **Possession and Acquisition Licence (PAL) for firearms**, unless you are under the direct supervision of the adult lending the firearm.
- Residents who have obtained their hunter's certificate may purchase the required **hunting licence** for the species of game they are seeking. Hunting licences can be obtained from authorized licence agents or online.
- You must always hunt under a licence, whether your own or, for small game hunting, your spouse's. For all types of hunting, youths aged 12 to 17 and students aged 18 to 24 may hunt under an adult's licence. The quota will then be that of a single licence.
- **Any resident aged 12 or over can try this activity before being certified.** The trial run can take place in the company of a resident who is at least 25 years old and holds the appropriate certificate for the weapon used. The opportunity is available to all hunts for one year only. To obtain an introductory licence, contact the Ministère des Forêts, de la Faune et des Parcs (MFFP).

WHAT IS SMALL GAME HUNTING?

In Quebec, small game is hunted throughout the year, depending on the species targeted. The term “small game” covers some twenty species, from coyotes to woodchucks, including crows and ptarmigan.

It's important to check the regulations that apply depending on the species being hunted. For example, hunting migratory game birds, such as American woodcock, geese, and ducks, requires a federal permit in addition to a provincial hunting licence.

It's possible to download the “Zone chasse” mobile application developed by the FédéCP (Fédération québécoise des chasseurs et pêcheurs) free of charge to learn more about the regulations, the species hunted, hunting techniques, and much more (in French only).



American woodcock



Snowshoe hare

Although the name “partridge” is common in Quebec, the grey partridge, originally from Europe, is the only true partridge that is hunted in Quebec.



Grey partridge

RUFFED GROUSE AND SPRUCE GROUSE HUNTING

Ruffed grouse and spruce grouse are the most sought-after species when it comes to small game hunting in the wildlife reserves managed by Sépaq.

- This hunt generally takes place from mid-September to mid-January, but it's most popular in October.
- The hunting period begins half an hour **before** sunrise and ends half an hour **after** sunset.
- The **bag limit** for these species is **five per day**, and the possession limit is **15 at any time and anywhere**, whether on the hunting territory, on the road, or at home.*

The following sections will help you distinguish between these two species and learn about their favorite habitats.

*Subject to change.



Ruffed grouse



Spruce grouse

HOW TO RECOGNIZE AND LOCATE A RUFFED GROUSE

The ruffed grouse gets its name from the crest of feathers on its head. It has a short, strong beak; short, rounded wings; and a fan-shaped tail. Its colouring can be either reddish-brown or grey-brown.

Males are generally larger than females and have longer ruff and tail feathers.

The male also has a **continuous black band** near the tip of its tail, while the female has a **discontinuous band**.

Average size:

40 to 48 cm (between a pigeon and a hen)

Average weight:

Male - 620 g; female - 530 g



Male ruffed grouse



Female ruffed grouse



HOW TO RECOGNIZE AND LOCATE A RUFFED GROUSE (*continued*)

Habitat

Ruffed grouse are found mainly in young deciduous and mixed forests, especially at forest edges, in clearings, ravines, and along alder - and willow-lined stream banks. Grouse are sedentary and generally solitary. However, females can be seen with their young until the fall; they are very protective mothers. In winter, individuals gather in small groups to feed in the trees. Also keep an eye on the roadside, especially in the early morning when the sun warms the ground.

Food

In fall and winter, they feed mainly on deciduous tree buds and small fruits.



HOW TO RECOGNIZE AND LOCATE A SPRUCE GROUSE

The spruce grouse has a short, strong beak; short, rounded wings; and a fan-shaped tail. Its legs are partially feathered. Its plumage is finely striped.

The male is generally darker than the female, with a black throat and breast edged in white, and is recognizable by a red skin protrusion above the eye called a **wattle**. The female's plumage is irregularly striped with black, grey, russet, and white.

Average size:

38 to 43 cm (slightly smaller than a ruffed grouse)

Average weight:

Male - 490 g; female - 455 g

Wattle



Male spruce grouse



Female spruce grouse

HOW TO RECOGNIZE AND LOCATE A SPRUCE GROUSE (*continued*)

Habitat

The spruce grouse is found in coniferous forests, especially black spruce and balsam fir, with dense undergrowth, and in bogs. This bird is very rarely pugnacious, even when approached by hunters. However, the female may be aggressive if her young are still under her protection. Like ruffed grouse, spruce grouse are rather solitary, except in winter when they form small groups.

In any season, this bird can easily be seen along roadsides or perched in trees.

Food

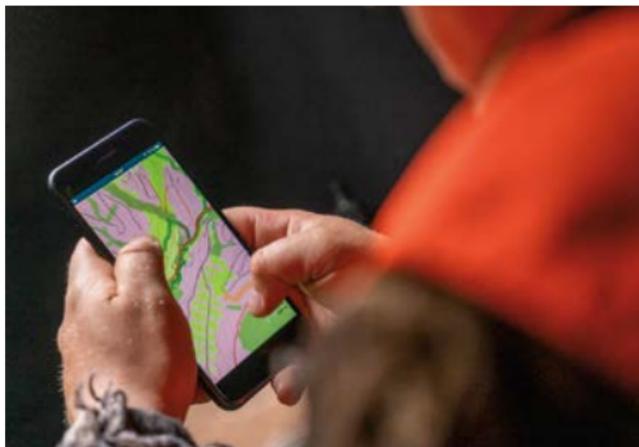
In the fall and winter, spruce grouse feed primarily on the buds and needles of conifers, particularly white spruce and tamarack.



MAPPING TOOLS

Hunting enthusiasts are well aware that a thorough knowledge of the territory is one of the key factors in tracking down sought-after game. If you hunt small game on the territory of one of the wildlife reserves managed by Sépaq, please note that several tools are available to you, including:

- **Paper maps** of the different hunting sectors by establishment.
- **KML** (Google Earth) and **IMG files** if you have a GPS.
- **Free georeferenced maps for your cell phone** to know your position at all times, even without a signal, thanks to the Avenza Maps mobile application. To read one of our maps with **Avenza Maps**, simply download the application on your cell phone, then find the map you want from the application Mapstore.



Consult the maps available free of charge on Avenza Maps to identify the favorite forest stands of the species you want to hunt.

TYPES OF HUNTING

Accessibility of a given territory is another factor that makes hunting easier. The forest roadways in the wildlife reserves have the advantage of allowing travel on foot, by bicycle, by car, and even by ATV (depending on the establishment).

Hunting in a motorized vehicle makes it possible to cover a larger territory, while hunting on foot or by bicycle allows you to be more attentive to the environment around you. The suggested speed for motorized vehicles is 5 to 6 km/h. However, it's mandatory to get out of the vehicle before firing.

Consult the Sépaq website to find out what types of hunting are authorized in each wildlife reserve.



FIREARMS AND AMMUNITION

Small game hunting is usually done with a firearm, but it can also be done with a bow or crossbow.

Shotguns

- .410, 20, 28, or 12 calibre firearm with shotgun shells 5.6 mm in diameter or smaller.

A small calibre shotgun is preferable for the beginner, both for comfort (weight and recoil power) and for the shooting technique. The use of non-toxic shot (containing no lead) is to be preferred in order to prevent lead from getting into the environment, especially near bodies of water.



Shotguns



Rifles



Air gun

Rifles

- Rifles with rimfire cartridges (.22 and .17 calibre).
- .177 (4.5 mm) or .22 (5.5 mm) calibre air guns, developing a velocity of at least 152.4 m/s (500 ft/s).

The use of a rifle requires more practice in order to shoot and aim correctly, as the projectile has a much greater range.

For small game, the .22 calibre is more appropriate.

FIREARMS AND AMMUNITION *(continued)*

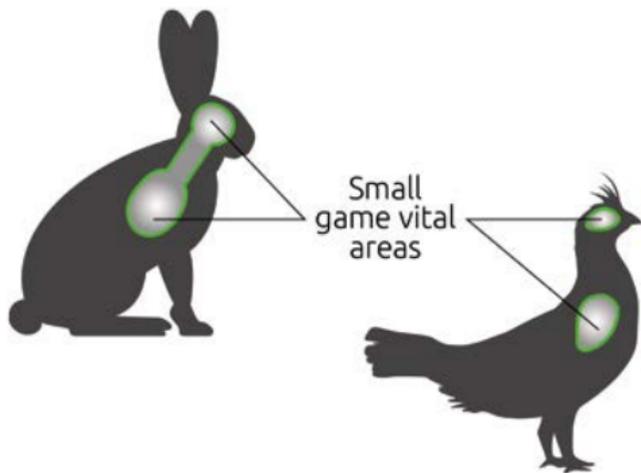
Before your first hunting expedition, it's important to practice shooting at stationary targets as well as at moving targets, such as clay pigeon shooting, a simulation of firing at birds in flight.

Before you fire, always ask yourself these questions:

- Is the target species clearly identified?
- Is it at a reasonable distance and well placed?
- Is the firing line clear?
- In this situation, is my shot legal and safe?

If you've answered yes to all these questions, you can then aim at the vital area of the target game.

Depending on the strength of your weapon, the vital area can be the head, neck, or heart and lung area.



Always be very careful and follow the rules when handling and transporting your weapons.

HOW TO PREPARE AND PRESERVE HARVESTED GAME

Unlike large game, the preparation of small game is very simple and doesn't require the expertise of a professional. However, you're strongly advised to wear single-use gloves during handling and evisceration, and to wash your hands and all instruments used for these tasks. Evisceration, or removal of internal organs, should be done as soon as possible after the animal's death.

Here's a quick and easy way to gut a ruffed or spruce grouse:

1. Place the bird with its back to the ground and place your feet on either side of the body, on the open wings.
2. Grab the feet firmly and pull them toward you, which will pull out the guts, neck, and head of the game.
3. All that's left to do then is to remove the wings and residual feathers.

You can then choose one of the following options:

- Cook and eat the fresh meat.
- Keep it for a maximum of 48 hours in the refrigerator at 0°C to 4°C.
- Store it in the freezer at - 18°C for a maximum of three to four months.



Looking for inspiration? Check out the blog section of the Sépaq website for recipes featuring small game!

HUNTER'S ETHICS

The practice of hunting goes far beyond the harvesting of an animal. A hunter's ethical behaviour must be applied at all stages, from preparing for the activity to consuming the meat.

1. Be respectful of the environment, the game, and the territory

Keep the environment pristine by collecting your empty cartridges and waste. Make sure you identify the game before firing and eviscerate it quickly to avoid any loss of meat.

2. Respect the regulations in force

Hunters must know and respect the laws and regulations at all times. It's a hunter's duty to learn the specific rules that apply to the time, place, and chosen hunting activity.

3. Adopt a safe attitude at all times

Handling firearms is not to be taken lightly. When travelling in a vehicle, make sure weapons remain unloaded (empty of all ammunition). When walking, the safety catch on your firearm should be on and the barrel pointed at the ground. Never point your weapon at anyone.

4. Consider other land users

Sharing the territory is essential when hunting small game. For example, make sure not to block the entrance to trails with your vehicle and respect the peace and quiet of the area.

Don't forget to record your catches at the end of your hunting day! This data is essential to ensure sound management of the species.



Fédération québécoise
des chasseurs et pêcheurs

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