



A
CODE
OF
PRACTICE



RESPECT FOR QUARRY



The British Association for Shooting and Conservation

GOOD PRACTICE FOR SUCCESSFUL SHOTGUN SHOOTING

For sporting shooting to continue to be acceptable we must practise it in ways that are both wise and sustainable. This means it must also be humane.

The sportsman's aim is to achieve the instantaneous kill of each bird or animal that he or she shoots at, and then its speedy retrieval so that it is put to good use and not wasted.

Every bird and animal (including so-called 'pest' species) is a sentient creature and should not suffer unnecessarily as a result of our sporting shooting or pest control activities.

These principles are not new – they are embodied in long-established practice among responsible shooters, including:

- using appropriate pellet sizes for different quarry types
- 'patterning' the gun plus cartridge to ensure cartridge effectiveness
- using practical aids to range judging
- shooting 'within range'
- using gundogs for picking up shot quarry
- care with dead quarry so it can be enjoyed as food

In 1980 Lord Medway's Panel of Enquiry into Shooting and Angling acknowledged that "it is the aspiration of all shooters to kill their quarry instantaneously" although it recognised that it is not always achieved.

Over many years WAGBI/BASC, and other organisations, have continually encouraged high standards and produced codes to guide good shooting practice, including the current multi-organisational *Code of Good Shooting Practice*.



It is perhaps timely, however, to remind ourselves how, while enjoying our sport, we can show maximum respect for our quarry. This is important, as no-one enjoys knowing a bird or animal has been hit but cannot be retrieved. Furthermore, we cannot afford to let non-shooters think we do not care.

This code of practice is aimed at improving our shotgun shooting skills and effectiveness, and our behaviour in the field, so as to maximise our success while minimising unnecessary losses of our quarry. Other aspects of our 'respect for quarry', including the care of shot game for its use as food, and comparable guidance for rifle and airgun shooting, are dealt with in other BASC codes of practice.

A NEW APPROACH

There are many contributory factors in a good shot which results in the clean kill of our target quarry and its efficient retrieval, so enabling it to be enjoyed as good food. Understanding these factors and then applying them in the shooting field will increase our success and enjoyment of the sport while minimising any loss or wastage of shot birds and animals.

In summary we can say that - **Having positively identified your quarry as being legally shootable, you should then take a shot only if you are sure**

- a) it is safe to do so
- b) your gun/cartridge combination is appropriate for the type and size of quarry you are shooting
- c) the target quarry is within *your* personal shooting range capability
- d) you are confident of killing the bird or animal



- e) **you (or somebody else) will be able to retrieve the shot bird or animal.**

Each of these requirements could take several pages to develop fully - but a good starting point is to think about the *hardware* we use in our shooting (gun, cartridge etc) and then the *software*, i.e. how we use it, and how we behave, in the shooting field.

We need to develop our **shooting skills** – if we get these right then every bird or animal we shoot at should be killed instantly – and then our **quarry retrieval**, so that all shot quarry, of whatever type (including pest species), is recovered quickly, humanely despatched if necessary, and, wherever possible, put to good use. *We need to develop a sense of personal responsibility for the outcome of each shot we take - and not leave it to somebody else.*

Note 1.

The approach is appropriate to whatever shot type is being used – the principles are the same whether it is lead or one of the lead substitutes.

Note 2.

While the emphasis throughout this code is on birds (i.e. gamebirds, wildfowl, pigeons and others), the principles apply generally to all the quarry we pursue with a shotgun, and therefore include animals such as rabbits, hares and foxes.

SHOOTING SKILLS

1. Gun fit

If our gun does not fit us well (i.e. its stock is not suited to our shape or the clothing we wear) we are unlikely to shoot accurately and consistently.

A good shooting coach will soon determine how well a gun fits and what adjustments



may be needed (contact BASC or see our website for list of BASC coaches – www.basc.org.uk/en/departments/shooting-standards/basc-coaches/)

2. Gun mount

Similarly, if we are not mounting our gun correctly (i.e. bringing it into the shoulder) and consistently, our shooting accuracy will suffer.

Check your gun mounting when checking your gun fit. Practise regularly.

3. Appropriate cartridge/choke

A clean kill is caused by sufficient pellet strikes on the quarry's body, with each pellet being large enough (i.e. having enough energy) to penetrate and damage the well-protected and deep-lying vital organs. The size of pellet, in relation to the size and range of the quarry, is critical – the larger and/or farther away the quarry the larger the pellets need to be.

The number of pellets striking is mainly dependent on the cartridge and, to *some extent only*, the degree of choke (i.e. the constriction in a barrel to concentrate the pellets on the target) being used.

- Large pellets (with 'large' energy) are needed to penetrate vital organs. Damage to vital organs is what kills – lots of small pellets (with insufficient energy to reach those organs) do *not* kill, as is widely believed, by 'shock effect'.
- Concentration of pellets in the pattern generally increases with choke from cylinder to half choke – *but is often unpredictable thereafter.* ['Pattern' describes the spread of pellets downrange of the gun.]

Guidance on which cartridge/choke combination to use for each type of quarry pursued is available from BASC.



David Mason

4. Patterning for lethality

In addition to using the appropriate size of pellet for the intended quarry (to ensure enough penetrative energy), it is essential to ensure *enough* of those pellets strike the quarry bird or animal overall so that at least one actually damages the (often very small) vital organs. Patterning each suitable cartridge type is needed to determine which one *in your gun* will *consistently* deliver the minimum number of pellets on the body to achieve that.

Patterning must be done correctly to be of any value – refer to BASC's Patterning information paper (also available on www.basc.org.uk/en/departments/research/publications/information-fact-sheets.cfm).

Guidance on the minimum number of pellets required to ensure lethality for each type of quarry is also available from BASC.

5. Range judging

It is notoriously difficult to judge range well, especially for birds against an open sky. We tend to under-estimate range, especially as it gets longer. We need to know the range to each bird or animal we intend to shoot a) to be sure we are *capable* of hitting it and b) to make sure the cartridge/choke combination being used *at that range* will be lethal.

Practise with objects at known range and with a rangefinder. Shoot clays at known distances. Use methods which relate the width of your muzzles to the size of a bird in the sky to indicate whether it is within your personal range limit. Use trees or other features of known height to judge quarry range.

6. Shooting accuracy

If we cannot place the 'pattern' accurately and consistently on our quarry then (if we do not miss it



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completely) it is likely to be wounded rather than killed.

Practise on clays on a variety of targets at, say, 20 yards, then 30 and 40 yards once you are consistently 'killing' them. Practise on clays, not live quarry.

7. Shooting within our personal shooting skill limits

If we shoot beyond the range at which we can consistently hit (ie kill) our quarry our shooting success will suffer, as will any birds (or animals) caught in the less effective fringe pellets of the pattern. Each of us has a maximum personal range limit within which we can *consistently* hit our quarry - *we should not shoot beyond it.*

The “might just hit it...” approach is irresponsible and does not show respect for our quarry.

Determine your own range limits for consistently hitting your target – and shoot within them. Practise on clays.

At a peg, flight pond or on the marsh, note features around you which define your personal shooting range capability, and do not shoot beyond them.

8. Shooting within the capability of our gun/cartridge combination to ensure lethality

[This paragraph may seem to duplicate previous points – but it does bring several of them together]

For each type (i.e. size) of quarry there is a minimum number of the appropriate-sized pellets needed to hit it and ensure a clean kill (*see para no. 3*). If we shoot with the wrong gun/ cartridge combination (which *cannot* deliver that minimum number – *see para no. 4*), or if we shoot at a range where the required pattern density fails (*see para no. 5*), we are likely to wound and lose, rather than kill and retrieve, our quarry.



Select an appropriate cartridge for your intended quarry, pattern it (properly) in your gun to make sure it delivers the minimum number of pellets at the likely range of your intended quarry, and do not shoot beyond the range at which it can deliver a clean kill.

QUARRY RETRIEVAL

This section relates more to our behaviour in the field. There are many things we should do in order to maximise our success and enjoyment when shooting but also to minimise the unnecessary loss and wastage of shot quarry.

1. Despatching wounded or possibly wounded birds

A flying bird hit by the first shot but not falling is likely to be lost (but wounded) if it is not shot again with a second shot. A fallen bird that is not dead may fly, swim, run or walk away and be lost (both wounded and wasted) if it is not retrieved immediately or despatched with another shot (if that is possible).

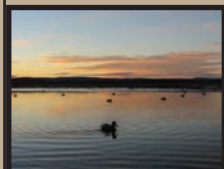
If in any doubt that a flying bird has been hit, shoot it again (as long as it is safe) to make sure. Do this before looking for another bird to shoot.

Retrieve by dog or by hand as quickly as possible and as long as it is safe to do so any fallen shot bird that is not, for certain, dead – and before looking for another bird to shoot.

If in any doubt that a fallen bird is truly dead and that it cannot be immediately retrieved by dog or hand, and provided it is completely safe, and acceptable, then shoot it again to ensure it will not be lost.

Despatch any retrieved but wounded quarry immediately, humanely and acceptably.

N.B. Traditional driven game and flight pond shooting practised in the



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company of others may make immediate retrieval and despatch difficult. In pigeon shooting, wildfowling and some rough shooting, however, it is much easier. We owe it to our quarry to retrieve and despatch it (*always provided it is safe for all involved*) in the shortest possible time. Consider the image that much current retrieval practice creates for the non-shooting public.

2. Watching birds known or thought to have been hit

Failing to watch birds hit but not immediately falling, for where they do come down, together with poor marking of fallen birds, results in the loss and wastage of both wounded and dead birds.

Watch any bird known or thought possibly to have been hit and mark carefully where it falls to ensure its retrieval. Do this before looking for another bird to shoot. Accept this as your responsibility.

3. Dropping birds where they are unlikely to be retrieved

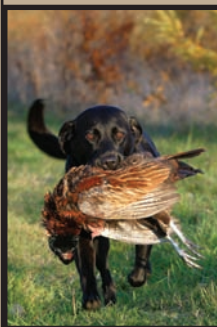
Unretrieved and unretrievable dead birds are a waste. Unretrieved wounded birds suffer unnecessarily. Dogs may not be able to retrieve birds from, for example, dense reedbeds, standing crops, ice-covered water, fast-flowing rivers or tides, big waves, busy roads, or even private land.

Before starting to shoot decide which shots will not be taken due to a risk of falling birds not being retrieved.

4. Using a competent dog

A dog is essential for the rapid retrieval of wounded birds so they can be despatched quickly; for the retrieval of wounded birds before they disappear and become lost; and for the retrieval of dead birds so they are not wasted.

If you do not have your own, make sure that one or more competent gundogs are available before you start shooting.



Wherever possible, but only where it is safe, and acceptable, have a dog retrieve a wounded bird before you take the next shot.

5. Shooting into groups of birds

Aiming a shot at a specific bird is the most likely way of killing it. Shooting into a group in the hope of hitting any one bird is likely to miss most and wound several of them.

Shooting at the leading bird of a group may well result in birds behind it also being struck by pellets (because of shot dispersion and stringing - the way pellets spread out as they travel down range), and so being wounded.

Shoot at a specific bird when faced with a flock or group of birds.

When shooting birds flying in flocks or groups, shoot individual birds either at the back or the side of the group.

6. Shooting at departing birds

In both waterfowl and gamebirds the gizzard (a large, dense digestive organ) can effectively protect the vital organs (heart, lungs, spine, brain etc) from pellets fired from behind and below – i.e. at the ‘going-away’ bird. Pellets are often stopped by that dense muscle. The gizzard will be damaged and the bird only wounded, often to be lost and die later.

Shoot going-away birds no further than 30 yards away.

7. Shooting with companions

Shooting in close proximity to another person can be not only unsafe but also can create pressure on each ‘Gun’ to take shots which otherwise might not be taken. The firing of a gun nearby can distract you and cause your shot to go wide and only wound. You may be distracted from paying proper attention to hit or falling birds. Guns paying for shooting can be under pressure to shoot or achieve a given bag, thereby taking unwise shots.



Maintain a reasonable distance between yourself and other shooting companions both to ensure safety and enable you to concentrate on effective shooting. Never have two people shooting in the same hide or butt.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

In Denmark the hunters themselves have adopted some measures which they find beneficial to their sport and the way it is viewed by non-hunters and campaigners. They recommend shorter ranges for shooting (25m for geese, 35m for duck), because they find that wounding increases with range. They recommend that if your cartridge-to-kill ratio rises above 3:1 you need to improve your shooting skills at a clay ground. They also recommend that the second barrel be used to ensure a first-barrel bird is dead, rather than for shooting another bird, and risking only wounding and losing it.

Practising on clays is not only enjoyable but responsible. Regular practice, and certainly before the shooting season, will improve shooting skills and show shooters in a good light. *Remember, though, that clays can be broken far further than birds can be consistently killed.*

A shotgun is for short-range shooting. An occasional 'lucky' shot at long range is not justification for shooting at that range. Confine your shooting to the range within which you can consistently kill your quarry.

Finally.....adopting any one of the measures in this code should improve your shooting success (and enjoyment) and reduce the wounding and loss of shot quarry. The more measures you adopt, however, (and the more you encourage your shooting friends and associates to do the same), the more benefit there should be to you, our quarry and our sport.



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**The British Association for
Shooting and Conservation**

**Always follow the appropriate code of practice
for the type of shooting you are engaged in.
These can be obtained from BASC Head Office
by sending a stamped addressed envelope to
the mailing/sales administrator.**

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**BASC is a representative body
for sporting shooting.**

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