

Sports

Dove season open to hunters

Now that the heat of the summer is here and fishing has slowed down some, it is the perfect time to hone your shotgun skills and get ready for the upcoming mourning dove season.

I was always told that the mourning dove is the fastest bird in the air, and if a hunter could hit the darting and swooping doves, they could hit just about anything.

To my surprise, looking through a handbook I found a flight speed chart.

The mourning dove clocks in around 50 mph, far behind flight speeds of bobwhite quail at 55, the turkey which can hit speeds of 65, and pheasant at 75, so I decided to look through an old notebook that my father-in-law, the late Joe Shaw-Gees, left me.

Joe was an avid upland game bird hunter for over 50 years in southeast Kansas, around Hepler.

In his notes, he recommended five tips that I try to remember each time I head out upon the beginning of the season.

First of all, Joe said, the most important tip to taking more doves is having the proper positioning and using the proper shooting form.

"You can't sit on your rump and consistently be an accurate shooter," he said. "When I see a dove within my zone of fire, I adjust to it."

By adjusting to each dove in your flight pattern, he meant facing the bird in the direction of flight you believe it is going to take.

"First, I align my feet in good shooting position," he said. "Then I position my body as if I were shooting a trap."

Proper body position allows the shooter better accuracy.

"Then I rest my shotgun under my arm in the ready position," he continued. "As the bird closes in, I pick the spot in the sky where I plan on taking the shot, but I don't move my body or my shotgun until the bird is within range."

Most hunters fail to understand that the technique required to shoot clay pigeons accurately is the same

required for shooting dove, he said. "Secondly," he said, "when you mount your shotgun, place it in the 'sweet spot' of your shoulder."

By that, he means the most natural area on your upper body where the shotgun, shoulder and hands come together. Position your arm out in front of you, parallel to the ground, and raise the gun roughly to a 45-degree angle. The pocket area in your shoulder automatically becomes the natural sweet spot to place the butt of the shotgun.

After you have found the spot, it is easier to shoot accurately if you imagine not moving your barrel any wider than an average fish net. Any time you shoot outside that sweet spot, your accuracy rate drops because you and your shotgun are off balance.

Learn where your sweet spot is and learn its diameter before you ever hit the field. Practice hitting clays. If the dove flies out of that zone of fire, move your sweet spot by moving your feet and turning your body. Concentrate most of your shooting in that small zone where your body and shotgun are properly aligned for better results. Any time a hunter shoots off balance, he will see the results fly past him.

"Third, after you have located the dove in your zone of fire, continue to swing on the bird after you fire the shot. This is called the follow-through. All throwing or hitting sports use the follow-through method."

This strings out the shot so the pattern spreads through a greater area of the bird's flight path.

Few shooters realize that there is a fraction of a second between the squeeze of the trigger and the release of the shot. During that time, you have to keep the barrel moving.

The majority of bird hunters use the point-shoot method. This means



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they point the barrel of the shotgun at a spot in front of the bird where they expect the bird to arrive when the shot gets there. However, when you use the point-shoot method, your lead on the bird has to be much greater than the follow-through method.

"Fourth, remember that the incoming bird is always the easiest shot to make."

When you align on this bird, you need to put your body in the correct shooting position, then start moving the barrel from behind the bird through your sight picture so you no longer see the bird. Continue to bring the barrel up, but don't squeeze the trigger on the bird until it is in your sweet spot, or about 45 degrees above you.

The idea is to come from behind the bird. Continue to follow through raising your gun, blanking out the bird with the barrel. For a split second you will not see the bird, but continue following through, squeezing the trigger and pulling up on the barrel. This is almost always a kill shot.

If the bird is flying directly away from you, but directly in front of you, use what is called the "opposite lead." Point-shoot with the technique of finishing your shot directly under the bird. By shooting under a bird that is flying away from you, you actually spread the shot out in front of the bird so that it flies into it.

"Finally, never take a shot at a bird

that is low on the ground because it is unsafe if other hunters are in the area."

Remember that many birds will come in low to the field, spot the hunters, then pull up in a quick upward climb. If the bird comes in low from behind you, you should swing through the bird and shoot above it.

This is probably the toughest shot for the average hunter. A rule of thumb is, don't take a shot at birds that are too far away. If the bird is fairly close when it climbs, bring your shotgun barrel up from below the bird and pass the barrel through the bird's wings. As the barrel gets above the bird, squeeze the trigger and follow through.

Another tip to remember is, don't overgun doves. The average hunter usually shoots a 12-gauge. For best results, switch to a lighter model. Professional guides recommend shooting doves with a 20-gauge with a 26- to 28-inch barrel.

Just remember, whatever you do, be safe and have fun. Dove hunting is an exciting sport, and with practice, it will be one of your favorite hunts.

Joe Shaw-Gees was featured in numerous newspapers and hunting magazines in the 1960s-'70s. He hunted every day during the upland game season for over 20 years, never missing a day, and was featured with many of his well-trained English pointers.



REBECCA HELM kept a steady pace during a recent cross country meet.

Cross country team improves times

The Decatur Community High cross country team continues to improve individual times and an Oberlin runner medaled at the Hill City Invitational on Thursday.

Andrew Richards finished seventh in 19 minutes, 20 seconds to win a medal.

The Oberlin boys finished 10th out of 12 teams. The girls did not have enough runners to qualify as a team.

The Ness City boys won the meet with 62 points followed by Norton, 67; Osborne, 97; Colby, 132; Hill City, 138; Quinter, 142; Victoria, 185; Wheatland/Grinnell, 195; Trego Community, 204; Oberlin, 230; Stockton, 279; and Phillipsburg, 291.

Osborne won the girls' race with 47, followed by Colby, 50; Norton, 52; Hoxie, 62; and Oakley, 136.

Becky Helm was top finisher for the Lady Red Devils, finishing 27th in 20:18 on the 2.5-mile course. Just behind her were Kayla Zodrow, 29th, 20:22; Bret Ashley, 46th, 25:17; and Rory Wendelin, 50th, 27:18.

After Richards in the boys varsity competition, Nolan Wasson finished 56th in 22:33; Jacob Helm, 65th, 23:02; Chris Larson, 66th, 23:12; Cole May, 67th, 23:16; Christian Rittmann, 77th, 24:33; and Dalton Paul, 79th, 24:54.

In the junior varsity competition, Gage Reichert finished 11th in 23:23 followed by Tim Larson, 17th, 23:57; Jeffrey Isbell, 21st, 24:12; Gatlin Reichert, 26th, 24:51; Chenaniah Langness, 28th, 25:06;

Girls finish second

Saturday, the Decatur Community High School volleyball "C" team hosted their annual tournament, finishing second in a hard-fought match against St. Francis.

Sainty won the tournament in two straight sets 25-11 and 25-21.

Oberlin opened play, knocking off the McCook Lady Bison in straight sets 25-20 and 25-21 to advance to the quarterfinals.

The Lady Red Devils then battled the Colby Lady Eagles winning two of three sets to take the match, advancing to play St. Francis in the finals.

Oberlin won the first set with Colby 25-7, but the Eagles bounced back to defeat the Red Devils in the second 25-20. In the final set, Oberlin players collected themselves to take a 15-8 victory.

After Colby lost to Oberlin, they defeated Quinter in the consolation round to take third place.

Rawlins County finished fifth, defeating the Colby No. 2 team who finished sixth; Goodland, seventh; and McCook ended the tournament without a win.

The "C" team was to travel to Bird City Tuesday to face Cheylin and St. Francis. Their next home action will be Oct. 2 against Atwood, Goodland and Brewster.

Jay Wessel, 33rd, 25:50; Andy Dempewolf, 37th, 26:24; and Cody Haas, 59th, 28:31.

"It was nice having Richards and Chris Larson back in the lineup," said Coach Dick Ahlberg. "I thought Jacob Helm ran a nice competitive race."

Tuesday, the Decatur Community High School was to hold the 40th annual Oberlin Invitational at the Oberlin Country Club.

Oberlin will run in the Phillipsburg Invitational at 4:30 p.m. on Thursday, Oct. 4.

— Scores —

- Norton over Hill City 53-6
- Oakley over St. Francis 20-14
- Logan over Northern Valley 56-6
- Brewster-Triplains over Healy-Western Plains 54-8
- Colby over Atwood 38-0
- Beloit over Southeast of Saline 54-14
- Hoxie over Ness City-Dighton
- Phillipsburg over Stockton 59-6
- Smith Center over Ellis 62-0
- Wheatland/Grinnell over Golden Plains 58-30

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