

Kentucky Afield Outdoors

Improve your waterfowl shooting with helpful hints

It happens to even the most seasoned waterfowl hunter. At dawn on a mid-winter day, a gaggle of Canada geese comes honking into your decoys on a farm pond. They look like flying watermelons with wings, a long neck and a black and white head.

You pop up from your homemade blind and excitedly shoot three times at one seemingly close goose. Expecting to hear the thump that follows a successful shot, the big goose flies away instead.

You can't believe you missed something so big that seemed so close. "It is easy to misjudge the distance of a goose because they are so big, they look closer than they actually are," said Maj. Shane Carrier, assistant director of law enforcement for the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources. "Also, again, because of their size, they seem like they are flying slower than they really are."

Carrier, who often hunts Canada geese on farm ponds in Shelby County, said the culprit is an anxious hunter who stops their swing. "If you get excited and just point and shoot," he said, "you will miss them every time."

Failing to continue the swing of the gun is one of the common mistakes waterfowl hunters make during the adrenaline rush caused from incoming birds. Stopping the swing causes a miss behind the bird.

"When I swing through and cover the bird, pull the trigger and keep swinging, they crumple and fall down most of the time," said Rocky Pritchert, migratory bird coordinator for Kentucky Fish and Wildlife. "It is my belief if you put the pellets in the pilot house, they come down. If you hit them in the rear, they keep going."

When a hunter shoots a shotgun at a moving target, the load doesn't come out of the gun in the shape of pie pan, like on older cartoons. The swing of the gun's barrel makes a shot string that is thin on the ends with a bulge in the middle, like a snake that just ate a mouse.

Using too tight a choke restricts this shot string, especially when using steel shot. "Steel shot is harder than lead and tends to hold tighter patterns," Pritchert said. "If you use too tight a choke, it is like throwing a spear or shooting an arrow at the bird. It overly constricts the shot string."

Pritchert employs an improved cylinder choke tube for the vast majority of his

waterfowl hunting for both ducks and geese. "I shoot improved cylinder 95 percent of the time," he said. "Using an improved cylinder choke covers up a lot of mistakes. I've knocked down some tall birds using improved cylinder."

Pritchert uses a modified choke for longer shots over 30 yards.

The extended choke tubes that protrude beyond the barrel of the shotgun are growing in popularity. The extra length of these choke tubes allows a little more room for the shot to find its place before exiting the barrel, resulting in tighter, denser shot strings with fewer stray pellets, or fliers.

"I noticed a difference when I switched to them," Carrier said. "I can get a denser pattern with a lighter load, but they are expensive."

The belief that comes with using an extended choke tube may be more important than the actual performance benefits. "Anything that gives a person more confidence will improve their shooting," Pritchert said. "The most important thing is patterning the choke tube with the load you plan to use. Your load may have holes in it. This gives opportunity for birds to slip through those holes."

Even with the expensive extended choke tubes, there can be considerable variance in performance in shotshells from a different manufacturer within the same shot size or even different-sized shot from the same manufacturer.

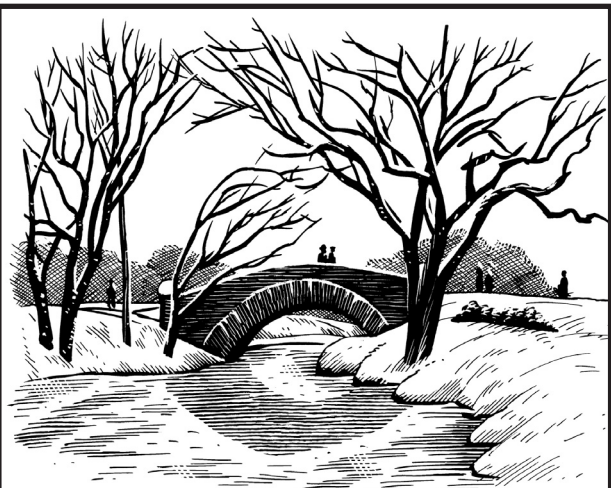
To quickly and cheaply pattern your load, take several pieces of 36-inch by 36-inch cardboard and draw a 30-inch diameter circle in it. Shoot the load at 40 yards and look for holes.

"You can refine this by drawing a duck-sized outline in the middle of the circle and see how many hits it has," Pritchert said.

The recent cold snap froze the surface of many smaller waters in Kentucky. "Once this cold snap breaks, it will loosen up the water," Pritchert said. "Birds will start looking for new food sources and that will improve hunting."

When this happens, you will bag more ducks and geese by keeping your gun swinging, using a looser choke and patterning your load.

Author Lee McClellan is an award-winning associate editor for Kentucky Afield magazine, the official publication of the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources. He is a life-long hunter and angler, with a passion for smallmouth bass fishing.



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Obamacare's strain on Medicaid

Op-ed by Senator Mitch McConnell

Obamacare has proven to be a disaster for Kentucky. It has caused 280,000 residents to lose health insurance plans they already have. And Obamacare is taking away the ability for many to visit the doctors and hospitals they like. Now to that list of problems, add one more: Obamacare's Medicaid expansion. It very likely will cost the taxpayers of Kentucky dearly in the years to come and degrade access to care for many in the Commonwealth.

Medicaid was created with the noble goal of providing a health safety net to the disabled and the poorest of the poor. Eventually, however, it has come to place an enormous strain on taxpayers across Kentucky and America.

Governor Beshear didn't help matters when he chose in 2011 to move Kentucky's Medicaid enrollees to a managed-care system. As a result, in the months that followed, patients were denied treatments and forced to travel long distances for care. Doctors and hospitals went for months with unpaid bills by health plans. Many Kentuckians in the Medicaid managed-care system have had difficulty getting dental care because dentists can't get the prior authorization they need. Not a good omen for Medicaid expansion.

Now with the enactment of Obamacare, a bad problem is about to get worse. A major component of the Obamacare law permits states to expand Medicaid, and this past May Governor Beshear announced a second decision, this time to add 300,000 Kentuckians to this failing Medicaid system.

The big spenders in Frankfort and Washington are spinning this as "free" health care. But there's no such thing as a "free" government program. One hundred percent of these costs will be picked up by the taxpayer—and that means you.

The more of Kentucky's budget that goes to pay for the costs of these new Medicaid enrollees, the fewer dollars will be available in years to come for other priorities like schools, roads, and law enforcement. Even Governor Beshear has previously conceded, "I have no idea how we're going to pay for it." No idea.

What's more, because Medicaid is financially unstable, the number of doctors and hospitals willing and able to participate in the program is declining. In fact, the state auditor's office released a report that discovered a 57-percent reduction in general hospitals providing care to Medicaid patients from the time of the governor's decision in 2011 to July 2013.

On top of this, our state already faces a shortfall of 3,700 doctors. That means we already needed 3,700 doctors for the Commonwealth just to meet the demand for health care prior to Obamacare.

Now, with hundreds of thousands of Kentuckians newly eligible for Medicaid, major questions arise: How will these newly eligible recipients access doctors under Obamacare? What good is it to offer hundreds of thousands of people the promise of coverage if Kentucky's Medicaid system cannot even provide timely access to care for the existing Medicaid population? Raising the hopes of so many new Medicaid enrollees in Kentucky and then squelching them is not what I call progress.

Enough is enough. We need to fix Medicaid for Kentuckians with serious medical conditions and those who truly need it—not stretch it past its breaking point by adding more people to an already over-burdened system at added cost to taxpayers.

Christmas Greetings

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Front Row From left: Kenny Adams and David Collins.
Back row from left: Lisa Norris, Michelle Coffey, Angela Coffey, Howard Saylor, Kevin Begley and Matthew Burkhart.

Not pictured:

Cheri Collins, Graham Fay, Megan Randolph and Becky Saylor.

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