

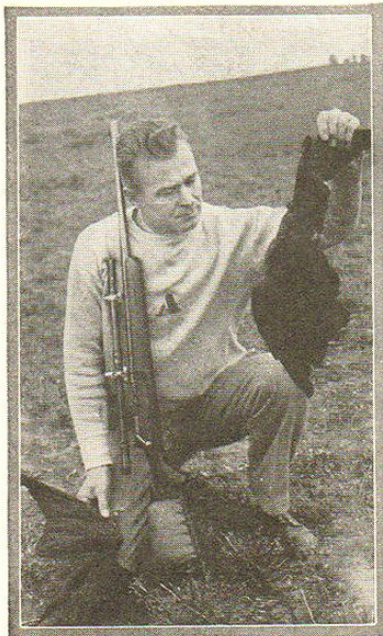
The All-America GAME BIRD

*A tip that will keep that shootin' iron—
and eye—working during off seasons.*

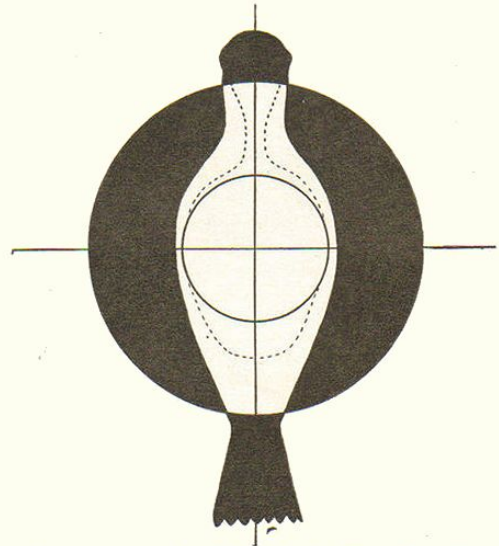
**By
BERT
POPOWSKI**

GETTING a firm grasp on the top-most limb of the tallest tree, I come right out with my nomination for the All-American game bird—Old Jim Crow. Crow shooting has always fascinated me. The more of it I do the more interesting it becomes, and the harder I work at trying to sell it to the other fellow. I've no especial grudge against the big black rascals except, perhaps, a natural resentment at being the butt of so many of their sly tricks when I'm in the mood to bag 'em instead of playing the game according to their rules.

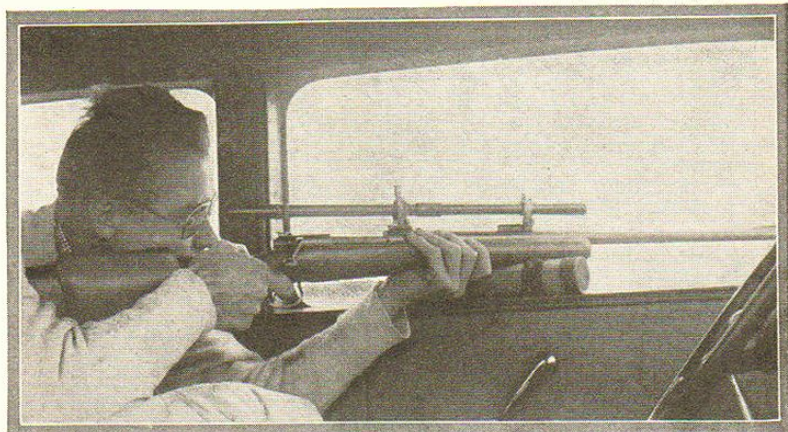
So, the end of the game-bird hunting season leaves me in a less depressed frame of mind than that of many of my fellow nimrods. My hunting season extends through all of the



The writer examines the effects of the 100-grain bullets.



Compared to the official 8-inch 200 yard bull's-eye, the 2½-inch area of a crow calls for some fine holding. Scale ¼-inch equals one inch.



It takes careful holding to hit 2½ inches of crow at 200 yards.

twelve months, curtailed only by the duties which butter my bread, and by inclement weather. The last day of the pheasant season wasn't the mad rush to bag a final limit of the gaudy gamesters. Instead I took time to note the clustering flocks of crows that thronged the cornfields and to lay plans for their entertainment—and mine. I knew just where to go for assistance with the job, too, and in fifteen minutes I had my partner of the afternoon on the wire.

"Do you like white meat or dark?" I asked him.

"Dark," came his sleepy mumble. Evidently the pheasants had laid him low. Then he woke up. "Say, what is this?"

"One gilt-edged invitation to go crow hunting with me in the morning. I want to try them out with a rifle this time, and," I concluded magnanimously, "I'll take my car."

If psychologists know what they're

talking about it was approximately ten seconds before six o'clock the following morning when a big black crow alighted on a nearby fence post, where he employed his hand-like feet in obscene gestures while I blazed away without result. When the alarm went off he departed in considerable haste.

At seven I called for Joaquin Wilson and in fifteen minutes we were on our way. His eyes bulged out when he spied my pet leaning against the back seat.

"Say, that looks like a sweet outfit," he admitted, hefting the eleven pounds of rifle and scope. "Looks like a Winchester 54 with a heavy barrel."

"It's a .250-3000 fitted with a Marksman stock. The barrel is 24 inches long, tapered from 1 3/16 at the breech to 3/4 at the muzzle, with a rifling twist of 14 inches. The scope is a Fecker 3/4-inch six-power with 1/2 minute

clicks and number 2 cross hairs."

Just then we sighted our first bunch of crows and all other business was tabled. By the time I got the car twisted around in the best shooting position and Joaquin had climbed into the back seat so we'd both have more room they were all on their way but one. That crow looked mighty familiar and when he ducked his head and passed his foot over his bill in a familiar gesture I recognized him for the bird that had gotten sassy with me at dawn.

"Ha, you black rascal; I'll even it up with you now," I muttered, busily clicking off the windage and elevation. But he had other ideas and, bobbing his head to give additional im-

sat silent while I ran off at the mouth at what was going to happen to the next crow to thumb his nose at me at 200 yards.

"I UNDERESTIMATED the range on that first one. These flat fields are deceptive when it comes to guessing distances accurately. The wind must be higher than the 12-mile-an-hour velocity the airport anemometer registered, too."

"How much do you figure the drift at 200 yards?" Joaquin wanted to know.

"About four inches, so the wind must be closer to 15 miles an hour. A fairly steady wind of that speed will drift this 100-grain bullet 1½ inches at 100 yards, 4 inches at 200 yards, and 9 inches at 300 yards. Then my elevation should have been up two clicks more. Each click means an inch at 200 yards, you know."



Strip a crow of its feathers and you'll find that only half of him remains.

petus to a derisive "Caw! Caw! Caw!" he flew off to join his relatives.

"If we could only have broadcast those threatening clicks we'd have every crow in the bag by now," twitted Joaquin.

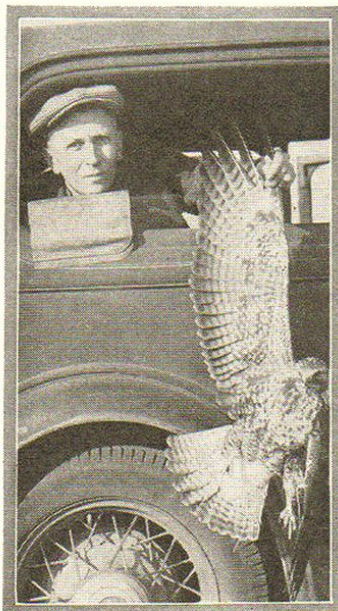
I LOOKED at those crows, busily going about the business of shelling Farmer Brown's fine corn some 200 yards away. I slapped a rubber pad over the window sill and laid the forearm across it. A cartridge slipped smoothly into the chamber and the bolt snicked shut.

"That one in the middle of the flock—right in front of that corn shock," I indicated the nominated victim. That crow was busily enjoying shelled corn and it was nearly a minute before I could get the crosshairs to settle firmly on him. A gout of dirt shot up and covered the bird and for a moment I thought I had him. Then he came out of that dust cloud, his wings almost meeting over his back as he set out for someplace else.

"Four clicks of windage and four of elevation would have done it," I muttered in disappointment. Joaquin turned a startled look on me and then



Lots of target here but only a fraction is a killing area.



The 100 grain soft-point bullet anchored them with scratch bits.



Joaquin's "double" frames a pleased marksman.

Two crows watched us sharply from the short stubble where they had been feeding. I drove on for a hundred yards and then turned the car around to quarter face them. They flew up at this maneuver but felt safe enough to alight on the fence posts some 50 yards further on. The range was the same as before and I hurriedly ran on the four clicks of windage and four of elevation the shot demanded.

"THERE you are; center the crosshairs on the bird," I offered, handing over the rifle.

"No, no! I'll just watch until I get the hang of this," he refused, with what I thought was a shade of irony. That crow wasn't doing any bobbing around, but it wasn't missing anything either. This time the gun blast rang out in the space of seconds and when I took my eye away from the scope it was to see only one crow hustling away on urgent wings. The other lay in a dark splotch beyond the post it had so recently occupied.

"Not bad at all! Let me take the next one," was Joaquin's way of admitting interest in the proceedings. He has been an outstanding rifle shot for years and I knew that the sporting aspects of this game would appeal to him. After all, when you strip a crow of its padding of feathers you haven't more than a 2½ inch square to get a killing bullet into. Compare that with the official bullseye at 100 yards and hitting the black birds call for accuracy beyond that achieved on many a target. (The official bull at 100 and 200 yards is 4 and 8 inches, respectively, for scope sights. With iron sights it is 6 and 8 inches at the same distances.)

Joaquin knew all this and wasted no time in telling me so. "That means that if your cross hairs are off dead center 1¼ (Continued on page 86)

setter disappeared from our sight. The draw curving toward the north, parallel to the ridge drew us steadily onward. Whiiiiiiiiiiii—flying low the single straggler swept up the slope. I ducked, looking frantically for the setter that I loved so dearly. Burrriiiiiiiii—two guns roared as one. The bird swerved in its flight, flying very low. Then I saw him. Racing down toward the sound of shots came my setter dog.

For a brief instant the fast winging bird crossed in front of the running dog. That fleeting atom of time was sufficient. Hook's gun roared. A dog screamed in anguish. A lover of dogs felt his heart grow big and rise in his throat as a courageous little setter in his last moments of life found his way to the feet of the master he loved so dearly.

In that moment I experienced all the anguish any man wants to ever endure. With my hand on his head my dog passed over the great divide. When once my emotion was under control I buried him there in the hills where he died. There you will find a carefully arranged grouping of stone to mark his grave, and it's there that I find my steps leading me each year. On that day I doff my hat to the memory of a beloved pal and for a long time my thoughts are filled in turn with fond recollection and grim reminder of that fateful day when my dog Buck went West.

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(Continued from page 33)

inches, or your windage or elevation setting is off the same amount you'll only scare the crow," he contended.

"That's right," I admitted, and then went on to amplify those figures. "It means that the average gun wouldn't kill a crow more than once out of 10 shots at 300 yards even if your sight setting was perfect and your holding likewise. At 200 yards it would give you about one hit out of five shots with perfect holding and sight setting."

"Then that crow you killed back there was an accident?" he queried. "And we'll have to fire an average of five shots for every one we drop at that range?"

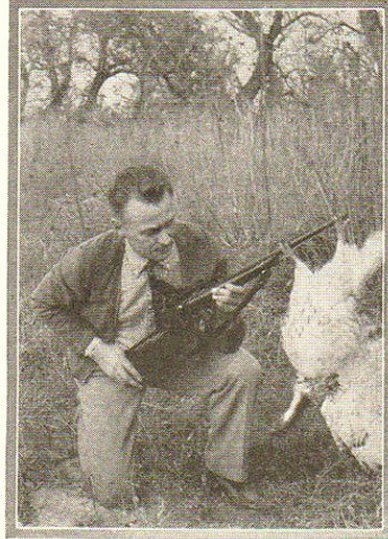
"Whoa up," I objected. "You're talking about the average rifle and this is a long ways from being that. I've made groups of 1 1/4 inches, center to center, at 300 yards with it. That's the only reason it's out here today. At 200 yards it frequently gives groups of 1 1/4 inches and that means if our scope-setting and holding is perfect we shouldn't miss a crow at that distance. Of course an occasional added gust of wind or a lull at the right time might turn the trick too," I admitted.

"There's your shot," I reported a moment later, twisting the car around to a favorable shooting angle. The bird looked us over coolly and then went on about the business of pecking apart something he held under his claws on the top of the fence post. Two more of them were on the ground nearby and, as I watched, one of them flew up and tried to scare the diner away from his dinner.

Joaquin laid the forearm over the pad and squirmed into a comfortable position.

That pestering crow flew up again and made another pass at the diner and then sat down on the fence post with it. The two pushed against each other in an even struggle for possession of whatever it was one of them had been eating. The crow who first lost its balance and had to leave the post would lose the coveted morsel.

I was so intent on watching this piece of crow headwork through the field glasses that Joaquin's gun blast startled me. Then I clapped the glasses back to



A .22 is gun enough for hawks but crows are another story.

my eyes but could catch only one crow in frantic flight. I looked again and still I saw only one crow flying.

Joaquin wore a smug smile as I turned. Dreamily he extracted the shell and smacked his lips at it. Then he looked over at the empty fence post and grinned delightedly.

"A double," he murmured reverently. "A double on crows at 240 yards on one fence post. Wait till I tell the boys that one. Boy, if they don't vote me the presidency of the Liars' Club there ain't no justice!"

I still didn't believe it, but when we got there and found two crows three feet on either side of the post I gave in. Half a field mouse, the cause of the dispute, lay across the top of the post. Nothing short of having his picture taken with that kill would satisfy Joaquin so I knew he was sold down the river on crow shooting.

Before we traveled the next five miles we'd put another crow and four hawks in the bag, spending a total of seven shots on them. The two birds that got away lost feathers but nothing more valuable.

"You know I think I should have had that one," commented Joaquin, watching a blue-gray sharp-shinned hawk skim away, leaving only a trailing feather to mark his passing. "I held right on him and squeezed it off; but there he goes."

"Maybe it's these bullets," I suggested. "We're using a 25-35 U. S. Cartridge Company 100-grain bullet that is .2565 in diameter. They've always worked very well on jackrabbits for me but I wasn't sure how they'd expand on hawks and crows. Here are some soft-point bullets that were hand-pointed and trued up to increase their accuracy. They lost about 3/10 of a grain in the process but it hasn't

affected their accuracy."

"What kind of groups can you get with them?"

"The majority of five-shot groups will range under one minute at 100, 200, and 300 yards."

"That ought to be close enough," he conceded. "Let's see if they anchor them any better."

The next stop was another hawk and Joaquin centered him beautifully. I saw feathers and bits of meat fly thirty feet into the air as the soft-point bullet caught it through the shoulders.

"That does the business," he yelled triumphantly. "I don't believe those 100-grain bullets opened up so that scratch hits brought down the game. Say," he went on, "this gun really puts 'em where you hold. I've been shooting a run-of-the-mill rifle and I've been fairly sure of crows at 100 to 150 yards, if I held dead center. But usually they could see the gun barrel as I pushed it out the car window and be gone."

From then on the soft-point bullets continued to get them down with considerable regularity at all reasonable distances. We had to pass up many shots when the birds were perched on posts which would have allowed the bullet to fall into a cornfield or go over a rise where we couldn't see with our glasses. Even on comparatively flat shots we took no chances with farmhouses that were within a mile of the target. Instead, we moved so that we were out of line with them, or passed up the shot.

There you have my prescription for whiling away many of those dreary weekends between hunting seasons. The birds will give you shots calling for more precise marksmanship than any target range, and they'll vary the distances and



Joaquin with one that didn't get away.

shooting conditions sufficiently so that they'll keep you working all the time.

Whenever you drop a crow that thumbs his nose at you from 200 yards away you can rest assured that you've killed an old timer that has gobbled up thousands of game and song bird eggs, and you'll have contributed materially toward the day when these desirable citizens may hatch and rear their broods in greater safety. And, as Joaquin put it: "The only good crow is a dead one, anyway."

Of course if you're a "Sunday hunter," who bottles up all his zest for some chosen period of the year and then sprays lead with a lavish gun barrel when the closed season bars are let down, this won't interest you. You'll still pick out one oft-repeated story of your experiences and resort to it at the slightest provocation to give you the reputation as a "regular heller" in the eyes of your fellow beings. And, as you drive by the crows will thumb their noses at you—from 200 yards away.