

# THE "HOW TO"

Talking crows in, Popowski holds two hands to modulate caller tones to be alluring to crows. His WRACo pump is cradled firmly by his side, ready for shooting crows on sight.

By BERT POPOWSKI



**M**ORE TRIPE has been written about crow shooting than on all other varmint-hunting sports combined. Much of this wordy windjamming stems from sheer ignorance of crow habits. The rest comes from folk-lore windies, which give the birds credit for unnatural, even super-human intelligence.

Let's be realistic. The crow is smart; has to be, if only because he spends most of his life in near proximity to humans, most of whom would dearly love to liquidate him. But the average crow is just average. And the stupid ones

are mere bird-brains. Therefore, the guy who admits that crows are too smart for him hasn't seriously put much intelligence to the wheel; or maybe he prefers to lean too heavily on luck instead of cool calculation; or maybe he just can't hit 'em.

No intelligent crow hunter expects success if he wears easily visible clothing, lets the sun pour into his misplaced hideout, or waves a glinting gun barrel above his blind; and not even the stupid crows are inclined to come where bursts of gunfire are interspersed with loud talk, triumph-

# OF CROW SHOOTING

SUCCESSFUL CROW SHOOTING IS  
JUST A MATTER OF COMBINING THE  
RIGHT TIME AND PLACE WITH  
GOOD SENSE AND GOOD SHOOTING

ant shouts, or other oral human advertisements. Yet many hunters commit all of these sins—then complain that crows “just too smart.”

There are six major basic tenets of successful crow shooting. The first one is—the *time of year*. In the late spring, summer, and early autumn, crows are mating, nesting, and raising the young birds to mobile independence. The adults, liberally intermixed with the young of the past year who are still learning crow lore from their elders, are then scattered in twos, threes, and fours,—small family groups head-quartering in choice bits of woodland that serve for nesting, keep the young birds fairly safe, and provide food.

The able crow hunter who goes abroad during these seasons will likely kill crows about such premises, but his total bag on any given day will be limited by two factors: there just aren't too many adult crows in a given area, and the young birds are still too immature and dependent to answer calling readily; and the amount of such cover the individual hunter can search in a day's hunting is limited.

In mid-winter, birds are ganged up in big roosting flocks, usually in relatively isolated timberlands that are difficult of access. Out of these hideouts, they fly as much as 30 miles in every direction in daily search of food, spending a great portion of daylight in scattered feeding flocks. Isolation of roosts, short winter days, and wide dispersal of the flocks handicap hunters during this season.

This leaves the spring and autumn migrating seasons. Food is most plentiful in the fall, in the wake of harvests. But it isn't in short supply in the spring, either. There are a lot of winter-killed carcasses, plus left-over grub that has been covered by winter's snows and under the previous summer's growth of vegetation. Sex enters into it, too, during the spring migration. The birds are in an excitable frame of mind, ready for fun, fight, or frolic, as ready to jump, orally, down a great horned owl's throat as to bedevil a hunting fox or house-cat. Or to come post haste in answer to a cunningly-manipulated call.

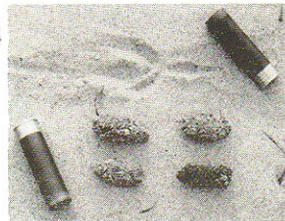
If I was limited to only one month of the twelve for crow hunting, I'd take that shotgun holiday in the spring. In spite of muddy side roads, scant vegetation out of which to contrive blinds, and uncertain weather, I still prefer



Over fifty dead birds in sight is called "lean shoot" by Nebraska hunters who seek crow migration flyways.

spring for crow shooting. The records bear me out, too. I've been crow hunting many times during every month over some 35 years of avid crow pursuit, and my kills have always been best in the spring. If all other factors are equal, spring is the best season for the hunter who is interested in high scoring.

The second basic need for big shoots is *flock concentration*. You can't kill birds that aren't there, or flocks you can't reach. I have known of huge flocks that couldn't be touched because they were in game refuges that were kept inviolate. And I've known of (Continued on page 56)



Mark of crow roost may be pelleted indigestible matter spit up by crows onto ground below nests, plus whitewash droppings on tree trunks. Left, author studies flyway for good spot.

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## "HOW TO" OF CROW SHOOTING

(Continued from page 25)

smaller roosts that were established within city limits, or in cemeteries or parks where no shooting was permitted. And I've known roosts located in such inaccessible or naturally protected areas that the fantastic labor involved was out of all proportion to the sport. The Missouri and Mississippi river bottoms are famous for the protection they afford crow concentrations. The birds may establish an extensive roost on one side of the river and, if they are called and shot there, may fly across the stream and roost on the opposite shore. Since bridges are few and far between, such a move foils hunters. The only solution is to attack the problem with two parties of hunters, going in from each side and synchronizing their invasion.

Winter roosts are notorious for being established where access is difficult if not impossible. Large islands in streams and lakes are popular roosting sites that are frequently difficult of access. Small islands, or stands of trees that have "wet feet," are seldom used for roosts. Crow roosts in mountain country are always in the deep valleys and canyons.

The selection of a shootable roost is based on the roost's accessibility, or the accessibility of the flyways leading to it. Actually, the latter is far preferable, since it gives the caller-gunners a longer period of shooting time; from the time the first roost-bound arrivals show up until it's too dark to shoot. Shooting the flyways does not break up the roost, whereas, if the shooting is done in the roost proper, it is quite likely that the birds will abandon the premises.

The third factor in a good shoot is *wind and weather*. Wind is especially important, because it may reflect flyway routes away from the normal. Crows don't like to work any harder than they have to, nor do they enjoy being buffeted by winds, especially upsetting tailwinds. Thus they're very susceptible to air-flow, seeking out and following the line of least resistance, even if it's the long way home.

They're also fully aware that air at different elevations moves at varying velocities and may even be in a different direction from that prevailing at ground level. That's why, on occasion, they'll approach a roost 100 or even 200 yards high and then descend in a series of circling glides or dives. That's especially true when the birds have to go a long ways for food and are then faced with a strong head-or tail-wind at ground level for the return trip. Setting up in a tail-wind flyway under such conditions is a direct invitation to an exceedingly poor shoot.

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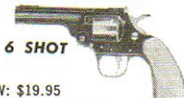
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Ordinarily, when wind is light, crows fly out to feed in all directions. Then the observing hunter can set up in a number of flyways, whichever suits him best for cover. When the wind blows at upwards of 15 miles-per-hour, setting up directly to leeward of the roost is often the best bet. It would seem that, although the calling would then carry directly toward roost-bound crows, the gunfire would do likewise, warning and alerting them long before they're in calling or shot-gun range. Actually, that is seldom exactly true. The stronger the wind, the narrower the cone of sound directed to its lee. Also, the roost-bound birds rarely fly directly into the wind; they come in at an angle. However, two flights may intersect or overlap when they're 100 yards from home, and that is the point at which they should be called in. Crows further out generally will not be disturbed by this, and they too can be called in when they reach the same point. That intersection of two or more flight lines is very important, since it multiplies the number of birds the caller and gunners have to work on.

Of course, there's a point at which all the flight lines converge—at the roost. But that's not the best spot to set up for a shoot. Disturb them too much at the roost and they'll leave it. The hunter has to find the new roost. Disturb them there and they may bounce back to the first roost, or they may locate a third one.

The fourth requisite of a top shoot is the expert use of calls. Crow voices have a moderately narrow range of tone. If a call is pitched too high or too low, it will still get crows, in limited numbers. A good caller can compensate somewhat for such tonal faults, but not completely, and not without exhausting effort. So I always carry at least a pair of calls, one pitched high and the other low, but both well within the preferred crow range. There's a second and very important reason for that high-low range. In heavy air, fog, rain, or wind, the high-toned call will cut through the aerial turbulence much better than its low-toned twin, thus reaching crows at greater distance. When the air is light, dry, and quiet, I prefer the low-tone.

The fifth requirement for a successful crow shoot is proper blinds and proper use of concealment. That doesn't mean the hunter is to be so snugly hidden that he can't shoot freely and precisely. Too much blind is worse than too little.

The perfect blind is one over which crows ride with no finching, either at its bulk or shape or because the hunter has to make excessive motion in it. Thus hidden, a hunter will kill perhaps 10 per cent of his birds before they know they're in danger. The remaining 90 per cent of the kill have some warning—the bang of the first shot, some

*(Continued on page 60)*

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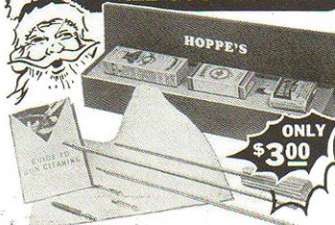
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(Continued from page 57)

slight motion of the hunter, or something—but this should not occur, in most cases, until they are within range. Shoot them! Crows that see the gunner and get not downed can be the very devil to get back into shotgun range.

The final requisite of a good shoot is being able to hit the birds. Good blind deportment, as cited above, will help greatly; but good gun handling is even more important. The gun should be held across the body, so that a single forward thrust and lift of the stock to the shoulder mounts it. It should be a single, continuous, flowing motion. Then pause just long enough to get on target and—shoot. Jerky or slow motions in getting the shot away catch the crow's eyes, allows it to assess the hazard, and give it the opportunity to offer a needlessly tough target.

When the crow is within range, there's a point in its flight where it is an easy target. Taken too soon, it isn't as easy; and taken too late, it is even more difficult. But that precisely perfect split-second, 75 per cent of the targets should be downed as one-shot kills. Practice will teach you the timing that is best for your style of shooting.

Successful team shooting depends on superb coordination by every member in any given blind. On single birds, this requires a pre-determined order of rotation of shots. If a gunner knows that one crow is his sole responsibility, he doesn't have to hurry his shot, will usually make the kill. On multiple shots, each gunner takes only the birds in his lane of fire, or on his side.

A crow that has been over-led usually sits back on its tail as the shot charge sizzles past its beak. One that has had a shot charge whizz past its tail assembly tends to speed up in flight while making its getaway turn or fall-away dive. If the gunner notes the behavior of the birds he has missed, the next shots at similar targets can then compensate for such errors in lead. But if his attention is on firing a second or third shot he loses that basic training, misses a lot of crows before he begins to catch on to the timing that produces respectable scores.

There seems to be a pretty general belief that, during a big shoot, shot crows fall out of the sky like rain. Believe me, they do not. The big kills are scored exactly like the small ones—one or two crows at a time, out of handfuls of crows that are very briefly in range. The difference is that the target-producing bunches come in more frequently in the big shoots—and are greeted by good gunners.

Fast or slow, it is an exciting, rewarding sport—the best way I know to shoot as well as you like, whenever you like, at tricky game targets that everyone who knows them will thank you for killing.

## LONG SHOTS WITH SIXGUNS

(Continued from page 21)

high-speed in any of our good 6" target .22 autos or revolvers. Shoot either over water or dry dusty ground, so you can see the splash of the slugs and thus "walk" your shots onto the target. A super-accurate .22 target gun will do good work on still days out to 400 yards. Smith & Wesson are now boring and chambering their excellent K-22 for the new Winchester .22 W.R.F. Magnum with a 40 grain jacketed bullet at 1600 feet from revolvers, and this will be a very fine long range pistol to use as an understudy for the big guns. Be very sure of your background and never attempt long range shooting unless you know you have a safe bullet-stopper. Heavy sixgun slugs, and even the lowly .22, will skip along for a mile.

The finest long range guns I have used are the .38-44 Outdoorsman, the S & W Triple-Lock Target 6½" .44 Special, the .357 S & W Magnum with 6½ or 8¾" barrel, and—king of them all—the S & W .44 Magnum with 6½" barrel. I have also done very good work with the 6½" Ruger .44 Magnum to very long ranges, and I have two .45 Colts and four .44 Special worked-over single action Colts that will shoot with any gun of similar calibre to long range. The Ruger .44 Magnum Blackhawk and the Colts in .44 Special with my heavy loads are more accurate to long range than either my fine old 4¼" reworked S.A.s or my 12" barrelled Buntline. I believe this to be true to the cartridge rather than the guns, as the .44 Special and the .44 Magnum are both more accurate long range loads than any load I have ever been able to cook up for the .45 Colt. If the Colt Buntline was made in .44 Special and fitted with target sights it would be a fine long range gun, but I believe would be better with a 7½ to 8" instead of the 12" barrel, as it is very hard to hold that much barrel with one hand and maintain a perfect sight picture while the hammer falls. The little Buntline Scout Colt shoots very well to long range, and would be a perfect long range .22 if fitted with target sights. It should also be brought out for the new .22 W.R.F. Magnum.

Long range sixgun shooting requires a good, solid, steady gun platform. Learn to assume the steadiest possible position, and always use both hands. Grip the gun high and normally with the shooting hand, then bring the other hand up to support and steady the shooting hand. Do not grip the shooting hand or the gun with the other hand; use it merely as an additional support. Shoot with arms fully extended if possible, so that the sights are as far as possible from the eyes. Take advantage of any rest offered. Right-handers can help eliminate body sway by resting the left shoulder against a building, tree, or post; left handers, vice versa. Reclining over the hood of a car or over its front fender is also a very good steady two handed position.

When you have to shoot off hand, when no rest is available and grass or weeds does not permit a lower position, spread the feet wide enough to eliminate side sway and face the target squarely, using both hands, gun fully extended. This is a very good game-shooting position for the sixgunner. When it is possible to sit down with back against a boulder, tree, or building, this is the steadiest of all sixgun positions. Learn well

(Continued on page 62)

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