

GAME FARM MALLARDS - TOWER SHOOTING

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by

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### Game Farm Mallards, - Tower Shooting

The shooting of game farm mallard ducks along a well prepared course has been described as the nearest thing ever devised to pass shooting of wild waterfowl. With ducks flying at about 60 miles an hour it is just about as sporting a shoot as can be imagined. The most logical species for this type of controlled shooting is the mallard because they are easy to propagate and are widely available at reasonable cost. This system is based on the principle that the mallards conditioned with the procedure of walking from a pond to a feeding area and then returning from the pen by way of a tower back to the pond. During the initial stages they walk this course but as they become older, they fly on the return trip from the pen to the pond over a distance of approximately 400 yards. It is on this return course that the blinds are situated and the mallards are shot as they fly from the tower downhill to the pond.

Ducks alone seldom provide enough revenue to maintain this type of a shoot exclusively and for that reason it is usually associated with an upland shooting area.

One of the major hangups in this type of operation in Canada relates to the identification or delineation of wild versus domestic stock. At the present time there is no criteria by which a wild bird can be separated from a tame bird or domestic stock. It is usually agreed that if the bird is capable of sustained flight then it is considered wild; if it is not capable of flight it is then pinioned and considered domestic.

In the United States the situation has been resolved by removing the ducklings hind toe at four weeks of age and this designates it as a domestic bird.

The carcass taken from the shooting area or reserve area is stamped to indicate that it is domestic stock. This system seems to be working quite well in the States and is one we may wish to consider for use in Canada.

The season on these birds is limited by the states under laws that are similiar to those governing upland shooting preserves in some provinces. Care is taken to ensure that the birds are not acting as live decoys. It was found that after some experimentation the areas used in 'tower' shooting very rarely, if ever, attract wild birds.

The possible use of this system in Canada is also open to some question because the shooting of birds which have been released is restricted by Section 402(1)(f) of the Criminal Code of Canada.

The location most suitable for this operation on the shooting preserve is in the area of the roughest terrain. If possible the holding pen is placed on a higher piece of ground than the pond. The pond itself is two or three acres in size and provides waterfowl with a resting area. The edge of the pond should be surrounded by shade trees. This not only provides the birds with shelter from the summer heat but it also encourages them to fly higher on their return trip to the pond. This is a major resting and loafing area for the birds and it should be protected by a five or six foot high fence. It has been emphasized that this area should be made as predator proof as possible, especially for racoons and mink.

The pond shore area, in addition to the trees, should have wide, grassy expanses allowing the birds to move up on the shore for resting. The grass area also allows a landing area for flying birds from the tower. Care should be taken to ensure that the pond is quite clean of aquatic

vegetation. In this way the birds will know no other feeding than the artificial food which is provided for them at the pen.

Stock of young mallards may be purchased at any age from a variety of locations in North America. Usually young ducks start walking by way of a corridor bordered with 1" chicken mesh by 24" high. The stock will walk reasonably well at 6 weeks but it has been found best not to start them until 11 weeks since they are not usually strong enough prior to that time. The distance from the tower to the lake as indicated is approximately 400 yards.

When the birds have reached 16 weeks it will be easy to determine which birds are walkers and which birds are flyers. It is advisable to cull the walkers and commit them to the freezer immediately to encourage birds which are capable of fast, strong sustained flight to make the return trip.

The feeding of the birds in the pen should be limited because if they are allowed a surplus of food they will simply gorge themselves and become too heavy for flight, and thus these are considered non-productive birds in terms of flying mallards. It is recommended that they too be committed to the freezer.

The blinds are built to simulate hunting conditions in the marsh by surrounding them with corn or bulrush stalks. They are usually situated with the sun at the back of the hunter thus providing easier shooting. Each blind has enough room for two hunters; usually an attendant is in or near the blind to watch for crippled birds and each blind is provided with a dog. Birds shot near the blind are retrieved by the dog.

Care should be taken to ensure that all wounded birds which do not drop and make their way to the pond, will be retrieved and dispatched immediately and included in the hunter's bag.

With two hunters per blind, it is suggested that the taking of about 4 ducks over an hour in the morning per man is adequate to provide good sport. Twelve guage, high brass #4 shot shells are recommended since it has been found by experience that shells of lesser magnitude produce too many cripples. All birds retrieved for the clients are cleaned and packaged in clear plastic bags for freezing, for storage or transportation by the customer.

If a waterfowl shooting area is conducted along the lines described it is possible to assume an 80 to 90% return on stock. The average cost to place a flying bird over the hunter's blind to the operator is approximately \$3.00, thus in order to defray other costs the rate for the hunter is usually equated to approximately \$5.00 to \$6.00 per bird. With this fee the operator can maintain the area and ensure a degree of profit.

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Literature Cited

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GROUND SKETCH . . . DUCK INSTALLATION

