

## Etiquette in Hunting –

Etiquette, or courteous behaviour, in the shooting sports is rooted in a desire to combine both safety and respect for fellow shooters. When everyone understands the fundamentals of etiquette, the enjoyment factor for the activity increases markedly.

The following points are a representative, rather than an exhaustive, list of etiquette tips for bird game hunters. I am hopeful that after having read through the list, you will be able to add one or two more of your own.

**Carrying of the shotgun** – While there are several different types of hunting that can be undertaken with a shotgun, the two most popular types, and the focus of this article, are the hunting of upland game birds and the hunting of waterfowl.

Unlike clay target games, which are enjoyed on well-manicured grounds and with clearly defined areas where shooting is allowed, hunting is often done on uneven, rough ground, and with virtually no restrictions on where a shot can be taken. Hunters are therefore responsible for making sure that safety remains at the forefront in everyone's mind.

Shotguns are generally loaded as soon as the people are hunting, people will walk great distances with loaded firearms and frequently cross obstacles such as ditches and fences. While this may sound like an inherently unsafe practice, experience has proven that the well-trained, conscientious and alert hunter can perform these actions safely time after time.

Shotguns should always be carried with the safety on and the muzzle pointed in a safe direction, which is usually pointed upwards, at or near vertical. In limited instances, it may be allowable to temporarily point a loaded shotgun in a direction other than vertical for short periods of time, provided it is in a safe direction. For instance, the hunter on the left end of the line may, briefly, point his/her shotgun off to the left when there is nobody else in the downrange area. This kind of carry is not considered safe if used for more than a very brief period in time. Vertical or nearly vertical is the preferred method of safe carry. Hunters have to consider the safety of their fellow hunters, both the two-legged variety as well as the four-legged ones.

**Areas of fire** – When hunting, it is critical that everyone understand their area of responsibility. This is sometimes referred to as an “informal shooting line” and it is as simple as making sure that everyone understands where they can safely shoot and where they cannot. This normally takes just a moment and it can prevent both tragedy and conflict within the group.

If the shooters are arranged in any form of a line, which they should be for safety considerations, then it is a simple matter of telling the individual on the left that their field of fire is, for example, from 8 o'clock out to about 2 o'clock. The folks in the middle can safely shoot out in front and off to each side at a 45 degree angle – so from about 10 o'clock to about 2 o'clock. Finally, the individual on the right is able to safely engage targets from about 10 o'clock to about 4 o'clock. With this quick discussion, everyone has a good idea of what is a safe shot and if they stick with these guidelines, nobody will be upset with being shot over or having a loaded firearm pointed at them.

This is particularly important with new shooters, as things can happen rather quickly when hunting. This helps a great deal with the decision-making process for these new shooters. And it still a good idea to discuss with experienced shooters, just to be sure.

**Hunting Areas** – Hunters will often have a favourite place for hunting, and most are not anxious to share it with others. Some folks are quite generous and they will invite people to come with them to their favourite places.

One of the worst mistakes to make, after being invited to someone's favourite hunting place, is to go there later on by yourself, or to bring other people to that spot without the person who originally brought you there.

**Observing the Rules** – Hunting of game birds is done under the authority of either federal (migratory) or provincial (upland game birds) legislation. It is everyone's duty and responsibility to understand all the rules relating to the hunt, including weapons, ammunition, bag limits, hunting times and anything else related to hunting and firearms regulations.

**Leave no evidence of your visit** – Hunters are well advised to follow the old adage of "leaving things the way you found them, and leave nothing behind but footprints." This kind of conduct will usually get you back onto that particular piece of property in subsequent years. Conscientious hunters will pick up their empty hulls, take all their garbage with them, and they will not clean any birds brought to bag on the property. They are the type of folks who ask where to drive, making sure they can drive across a field or finding out they must stick to the margins. They will close every gate they open and they will leave every gate open that they find open.

Landowners prefer those hunters who are respectful of the property, and who do as the landowner has asked. Those hunters are usually welcomed back.