

GUIDANCE NOTES FOR WALKED UP WOODCOCK SHOOTING

GENERAL

Woodcock shooting can take place in a wide variety of habitats with different exposure and altitudes. At higher altitudes the weather can change very quickly and at certain times of year flooding, ice and snow can be a significant risk.

Due to its nature, walked-up woodcock shooting usually takes place over rough terrain and therefore can be a dangerous activity. The shoot organiser will guide you and you should listen carefully to any safety talks prior or during the sporting activity. In the event of an emergency please seek immediate assistance from the shoot organiser or the head keeper.

Shooting will usually take place as a walking line of guns, often interspersed with keepers and their dogs. It is vital that you keep evenly spaced AND IN LINE at all times to enable you to shoot birds going away in front and behind you.

Please read the summary below to remind you of the main procedures and risks involved:-

1. CLOTHING

- Assess the weather and take suitable clothing and take additional layers of warm clothing.
- Suitable clothing for the weather should normally include a waterproof coat, leggings and headgear and an additional layer for colder conditions.
- Wear supportive walking boots or robust boots, as the ground will be rocky, uneven and wet in areas.
- Ear protection should always be worn and you might consider safety glasses. Please make sure that your ear protection enables you to hear instructions from Keepers and other guns.
- Always wear a hat!

2. THE ENVIRONMENT

- Be aware that a degree of physical fitness is required for woodcock shooting.
- Seek assistance if you have difficulty crossing a burn, negotiating a steep bank or crossing a fence.
- Use gates where possible and close them behind you.
- Avoid electric fences and barbed wire fences or seek assistance.
- Be aware of fire risk in dry weather and avoid smoking or lighting matches.
- Bring suntan lotion and drinking water on hot days to reduce the risk of sunburn or sunstroke.
- Be aware of power lines in close proximity.
- Move to lower ground or a protected area in the event of thunder and lightning.
- Avoid deep wading or risky river crossings and seek assistance from the keepers.
- Be aware of rights of way and public highways in the vicinity of the shooting area.

3. EQUIPMENT

- Only use shotguns if you have had appropriate training.
- Always make sure your shotgun is unloaded between drives and do not point the gun at anyone. Do not swing through the line of guns whilst in line.
- Make sure your equipment is kept clean and in good working order at all times.
- Check that your cartridges are appropriate for the shooting activity. Fibre wads are recommended, and on many estates cartridges with plastic wads are now forbidden.
- Carry your shotgun certificate with you, and any relevant insurance documents (third party/bad weather cancellation).

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4. PROCEDURES DURING THE DAY

- The day will commence with a Safety Briefing from the Head Keeper or estate representative. Please pay attention. Woodcock shooting by its nature is potentially dangerous.
- At the start of the shoot, you will be organised into a line with a clear axis of travel. You should strive to maintain this line and spacing at all times until the line is reorganised. Note your neighbour on either side of you and keep in visual or if necessary verbal contact with them. (There will be occasions when you may not be in view of your neighbour or the rest of the line).
- If you are in any doubt as to whether or not it is safe to shoot, **do not!**
- When birds are flushed and shots taken, the line will stop to allow birds to be retrieved.
- Always keep the muzzles of your gun pointed in a safe direction, and be aware of them at all times.
- If you have to cross any obstacle (fence, dyke, burn), unload your gun completely, and reload once the obstacle has been crossed.
- Guns should be unloaded at the end of each drive, and if possible, put in slips. Otherwise, they should be carried broken to indicate they are unloaded.
- Be aware that shotgun pellets can ricochet off water and stones.
- Regularly check that the barrels are free from obstructions. In the event of a misfire unload the gun with barrels pointed away from others.
- Mark your birds carefully and remain in the vicinity until your bird has been picked.

OVERAGE

- You should have a shoot contract from the shoot organiser or agent. Please familiarise yourself with the details, particularly the clause pertaining to overage (i.e. those birds over and above the number you have contracted for), which must be paid for as an additional charge retrospectively.

5. HEALTH HAZARDS

- If you have sensitive eyes take eye wash/lotion with you.
- On hot days please take water with you and avoid drinking excessive alcohol.
- If alcohol is consumed it will impair your judgement and could be a significant safety hazard.
- Hats are recommended and should always be worn by guns and guests during shooting. On sunny days they will reduce the risk of sunstroke. Later in the season they will prevent you from getting cold or wet.
- In cold conditions hypothermia or exposure can be a risk especially on higher ground. Please bring adequate waterproof clothing.
- Barrels can get hot on occasions and leather gloves (or equivalent) or a barrel guard can avoid problems.
- First aid kits stored in vehicles are worth considering.
- Do not light matches in dry conditions to avoid the risk of fire.
- Ticks are common on some moorland areas and should be removed from clothes or skin as quickly as possible. Ticks can cause infection or in some cases Lyme's disease and is a risk to be aware of. The best defence is to keep the skin covered and check your skin and clothing frequently.
- If you are on medication please bring it with you.
- If you are allergic to bee or wasp stings please remember to take antihistamine medication with you. Midge repellent can also be helpful and apply to exposed skin as appropriate.
- If you have sensitive eyes take eye wash/lotion with you.
- On hot days please take water with you and avoid drinking excessive alcohol.
- If alcohol is consumed it will impair your judgment and could be a significant safety hazard.
- Hats should always be worn. On sunny days they will reduce the risk of sunstroke. Suntan lotion may be necessary in August/September.
- In cold conditions hypothermia or exposure can be a risk especially on higher ground. Please bring adequate waterproof clothing.

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- Tetanus boosters are recommended as tetanus infections can occur through cuts, abrasions or puncture wounds.

6. VEHICLES

- If you are bringing a four wheel drive please make sure that you have suitable experience or training to drive on hill roads. If you are in any doubt please ask an experienced driver to take over. Please be particularly careful if you are driving a vehicle with a trailer on rough tracks.
- Please ensure that there is sufficient room between you and the car in front as hill roads can become extremely dangerous in wet or icy conditions.
- Please follow instructions clearly when going from one drive to another and park in the correct place.
- Please take advice from the shoot organiser or keeper if your vehicle has to cross a deep gully, ford or go up steep tracks.
- You should not drive any Estate vehicles unless specifically instructed or requested to do so.
- When travelling in an Estate vehicle please be aware that the ride can be uneven and uncomfortable. Avoid trailing loose clothing which could become entangled especially in Argocats or tracked vehicles.

7. WILDLIFE AND LIVESTOCK

- Please be aware of livestock and avoid disturbance or causing injury to sheep or cattle. Sheep are often in close proximity.
- Adders can be found on moorland areas and are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.
- Please make sure you are aware what quarry you are permitted to shoot on the day as some species such as black game, grey partridges, ptarmigan or brown hares may be protected by the Estate.

8. COMMUNICATIONS

- Be aware of instructions and advice from the shoot organiser or keepers during the day. Pass on any instructions to adjacent guns as quickly as possible.
- Whilst mobile telephones are helpful for communication and can be used in an emergency, they should generally be switched off during drives to avoid distraction.
- Be aware of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and communicate with any access users in the vicinity of a shoot.
- Follow instructions by Estate staff at all times. Ignoring instructions could jeopardise your safety or enjoyment of the sporting event or could even result in cancellation of the event.
- If you have any uncertainty as to the procedure on a shoot day do not hesitate to ask.

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The above is intended as a guide when you go woodcock shooting. Most of the comments are common sense but please do take time to read this guide and ask if you are unsure. Please note this document should be read alongside the Scottish Lands & Estates – Due diligence good practice guide and The Code of Good Shooting Practice documents available to download.

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