



Skeet Simplified



Flip-on shoulder pad are adequate for
opt for a shooting vest as they gain
experience.

OF ALL THE clay target games, Skeet is without a doubt the easiest to learn. Unlike trap and Sporting Clays, where targets may take varying trajectories when released, the path of every Skeet target is fixed. Shooters know precisely when the target will be launched, what path it will take and how fast it will be going.

Once the shooter learns the proper body and gun position for each station, along with the required lead, he has all the information required to break every target consistently. This chapter will provide that information, but before that, let's take a moment to look at the two most effective shooting techniques: fast-swing and sustained lead.

Lead Techniques

With the fast-swing technique, the shooter begins with the gun behind the target. The barrel is then swung quickly through the target, at a speed faster than the target is moving. One shotgunner described it as "painting the bird out of the sky with the muzzle." As the muzzle catches, then overtakes, the target, the shot is triggered when the shooter sees the required amount of lead.

The advantage to the fast-swing technique is that it is the most effective way to handle almost any aerial target, including trap, Sporting Clays and feathered game. Because the gun must be moving much faster than the target, the shooter has an almost automatic, built-in means of compensating for targets moving at varying speeds: the faster the target is going, the faster the gun must be swung to catch it. On the Skeet field, the fast-swing shooter has the specific advantage of getting onto the target more quickly than the sustained lead shooter. This is a plus on windy days when targets sometimes dance to their own tune. The faster you can break it, the better off you are.

The disadvantage, if it could be called such, is that it is impossible to precisely explain what length of lead is required for each station because no two fast-swing shooters will see the same lead. Individual reaction times and swing speeds will vary. One shooter may swear he sees only 2 feet of lead at sta-

tion four, while the next may claim it takes 4 feet. Mastering the fast-swing technique requires practice and repetition in order to program your own mental computer. It is, however, time well spent because it will make you a better and more versatile shot. It will also be to your advantage should you take up trap or Sporting Clays, and will certainly increase your gamebird average in the field.

The sustained lead requires that the gun muzzle start ahead of the bird and never get behind it. Once there, the gun and target speed are matched while the shooter seeks a precise lead before triggering the shot.

This works out very well in Skeet because every lead is known in advance. The disadvantage (other than being a poor choice for targets of varying speeds whose precise lead is not known) is that it requires a bit more time to get onto the target than the fast swing. This doesn't at all hurt the shooter on the easy, lazy incoming targets and, indeed, many fast-swing shooters will revert to the sustained lead technique on them. It can result in the shooters' "riding" an outgoing target too long and may cause problems if there is a stout breeze. In doubles, this technique can't be used because you will have to fast-swing through the second bird.

If Skeet is the only shotgunning you will do, the sustained lead technique can make you a AAA-ranked shooter. I know, because I started with that method. Unfortunately, it caused problems in other wingshooting areas, and I had to go through the traumatic experience of "unlearning" this technique. Today, I shoot fast-swing for virtually everything except close-range incoming targets, where the sustained lead technique works very well.

With that said, I will now state that all of the leads given in this chapter dealing with the fundamentals of Skeet will be sustained leads, since those are the only leads that will be essentially the same for every shooter. For those wishing to learn the more effective fast-swing technique, just cut those leads in half as a starting point. You will quickly see if your body rhythm needs to be increased or decreased.

A Station-By-Station Look at Skeet

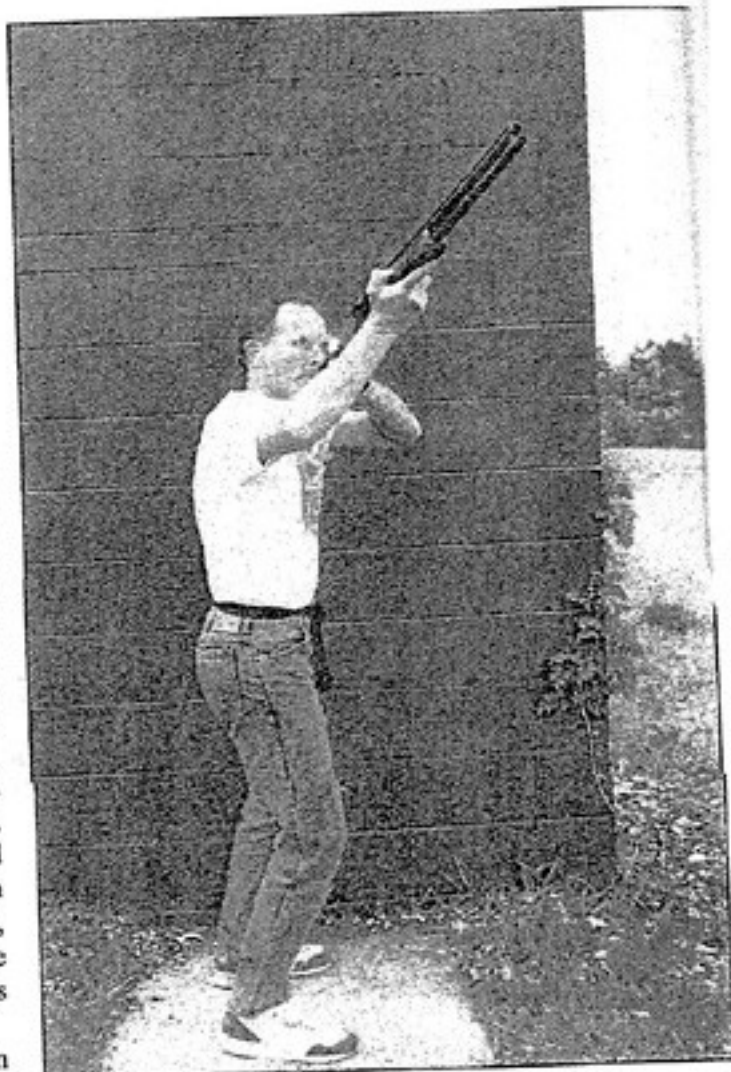
Station One

This station positions the shooter directly under the high house. Four targets are presented at this station, high and low house singles, and one pair of doubles (one bird from each

throw).

The high house target is easy but deceptive. It appears to be a straightaway shot, but because it is launched from above the shooter, and has a slight upward angle, it is not. You must actually lead this target by shooting underneath it. If you shoot it like a straightaway, you will miss it by going over and behind it every time!

To break this target, take a comfortable shooting position that aligns gun and body on the Eight Post. This advice will hold for virtually every station on the field, because it is advantageous to have your body set for the best shooting position at the point at which you will actually break the target. Since every target on the field is calibrated (if the trap machines are properly adjusted) to send the bird directly over



High house one requires the initial gun position to be at an upward angle so the barrel can be swung down and through the bird. The shooter fires when the muzzle is about six inches below the target.

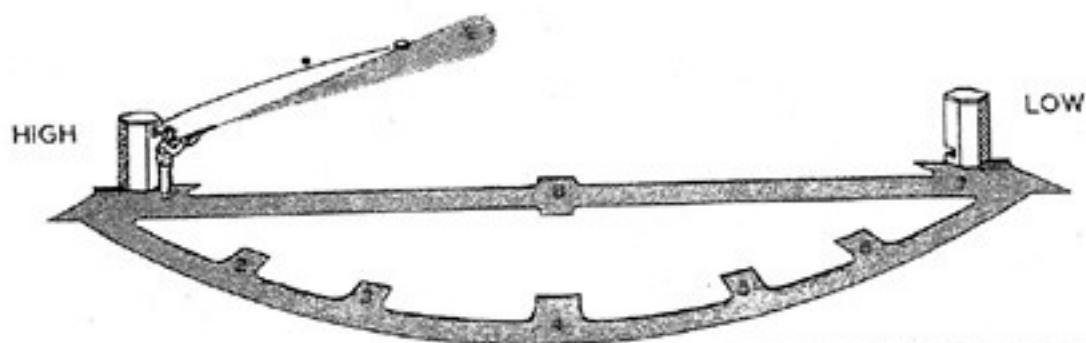
the Eight Post, it makes sense for this to become your focal point. If the Eight Post is where you set up, you will be in position to break every station, with the possible exceptions of high house two and three, low house five and six, and station eight, which will all be explained as we reach them.

Once you are positioned, bring the muzzle up to about a 30-degree angle above horizontal and call for the bird. As soon as the bird appears over the muzzle, swing down and through the bird, triggering the shot when you see a faint lead below it. Take this bird as quickly as you can, because if it is allowed to get beyond the Eight Post, it starts to drop rapidly and becomes a much tougher shot. "Riding" this bird will cause you to occasionally break the low house bird also, with the one shot, when shooting doubles at this station.

If you are having trouble with high house one, increase the gun angle to 45 degrees. This will cause you to swing faster to catch the bird, and often helps.

Low house one is easy. Again, align your body on the Eight Post and then bring the gun back to a point about four feet to the outside (left) of the house. On any incoming Skeet target, never align the gun directly on the trap house opening where the bird will emerge—it will temporarily blot out the

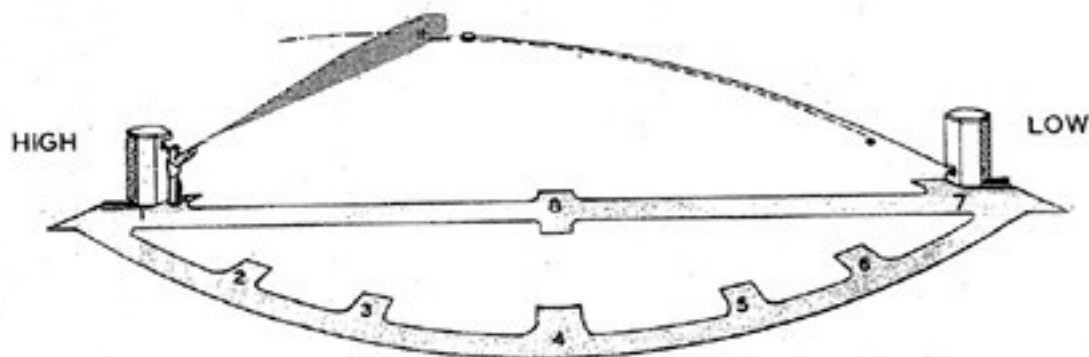
STATION ONE HIGH HOUSE



This deceptive target looks like a straightaway, but shooters must actually trigger the shot with the barrel below the target if they are to score.

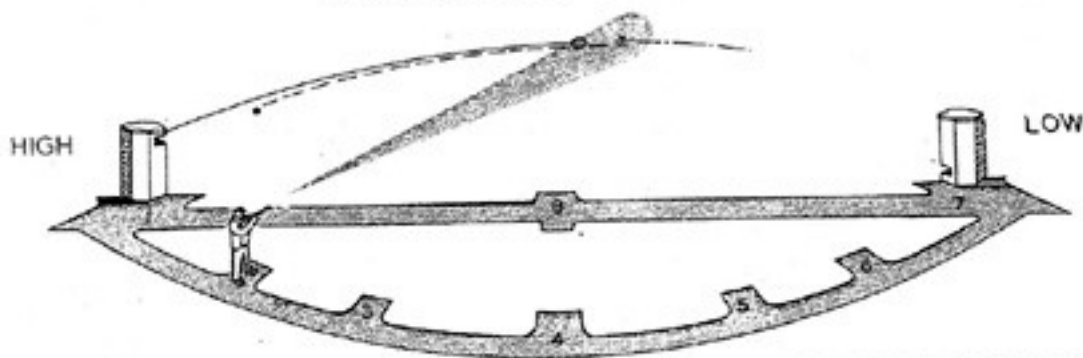
Drawings Courtesy Winchester News Bureau

STATION ONE LOW HOUSE



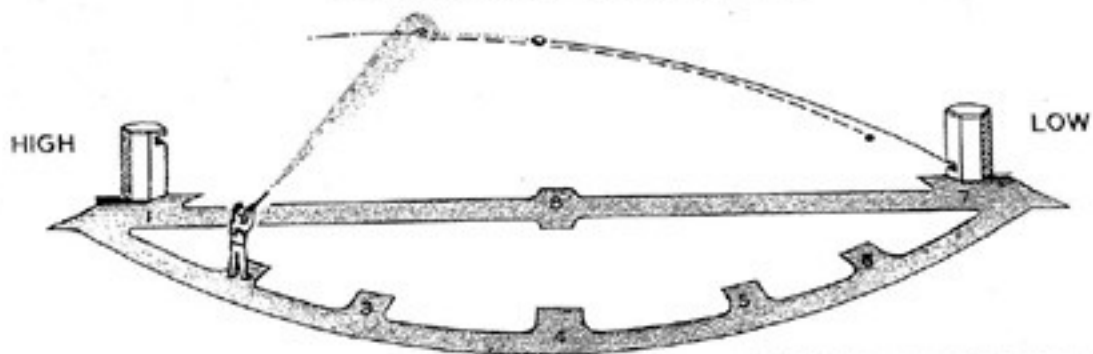
Smart shooters are in no hurry to break this easy shot and allow it to reach the same point where they will shoot it as a double. It's easier to find it when you always look for it in the same place.

STATION TWO HIGH HOUSE



A tough shot for right-handed shooters, this requires a lot of lateral body movement and the shooter must drive forcefully through the target. Get sluggish here and you'll miss.

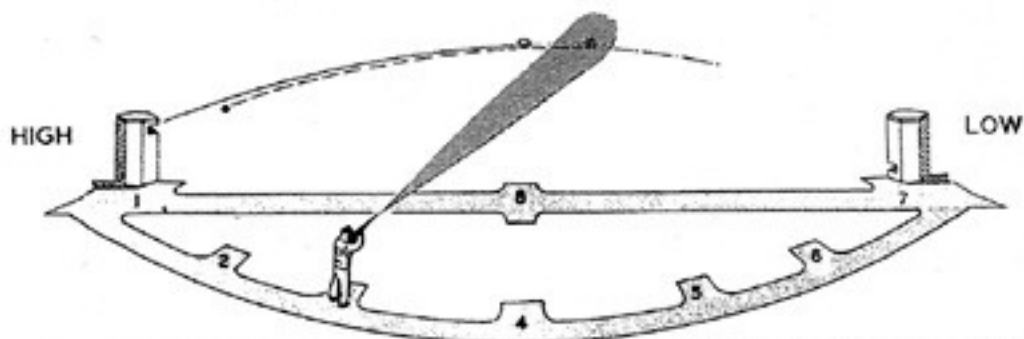
STATION TWO LOW HOUSE



This is very similar to the low house target from station one. Shoot it in the same place with just a slight increase in lead.

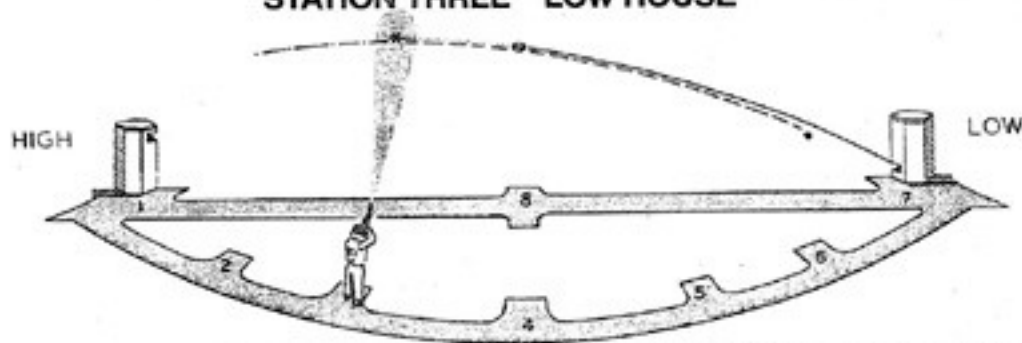
STATION THREE HIGH HOUSE

An easier angle than station two high house, this requires another foot of lead, but gives the shooter more time to get onto the bird.



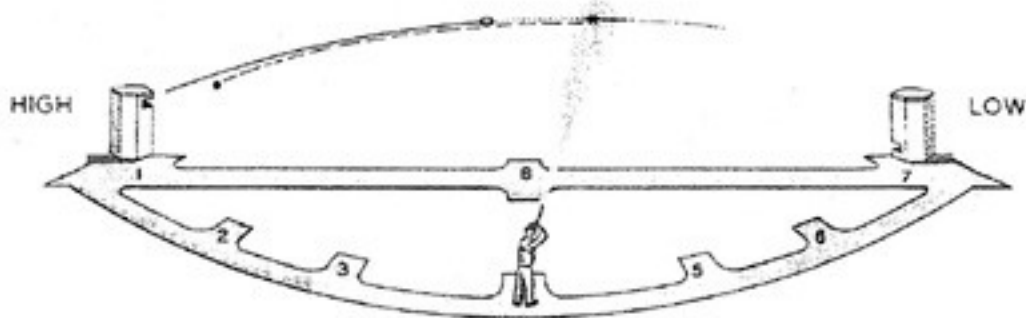
STATION THREE LOW HOUSE

This is one of the easier targets on the field when taken as a single. The shooter has plenty of time to find it and establish the correct lead.



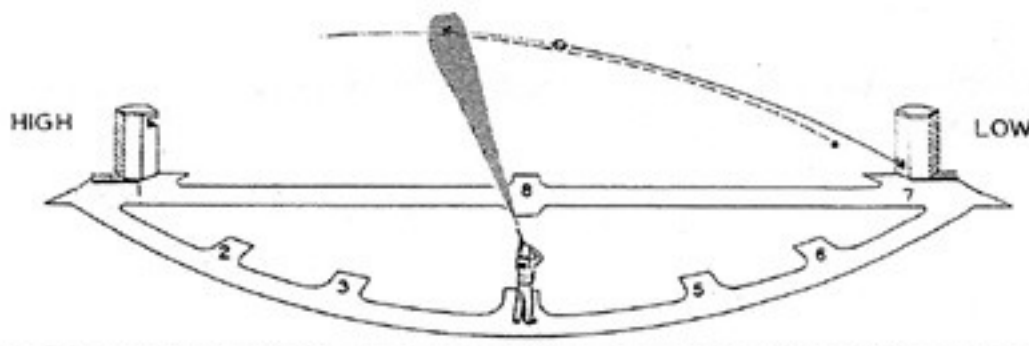
STATION FOUR HIGH HOUSE

This is one of the longest shots you'll see on a Skeet field and tricks many sustained lead shooters who do not believe they need a 4-foot lead on a 21-yard target. Fast-swing shooters can cut that lead in half.



STATION FOUR LOW HOUSE

Virtually the same shot as from the high house, but in a different direction. If you break both station four targets near the Eight Post, you don't even have to change foot position.



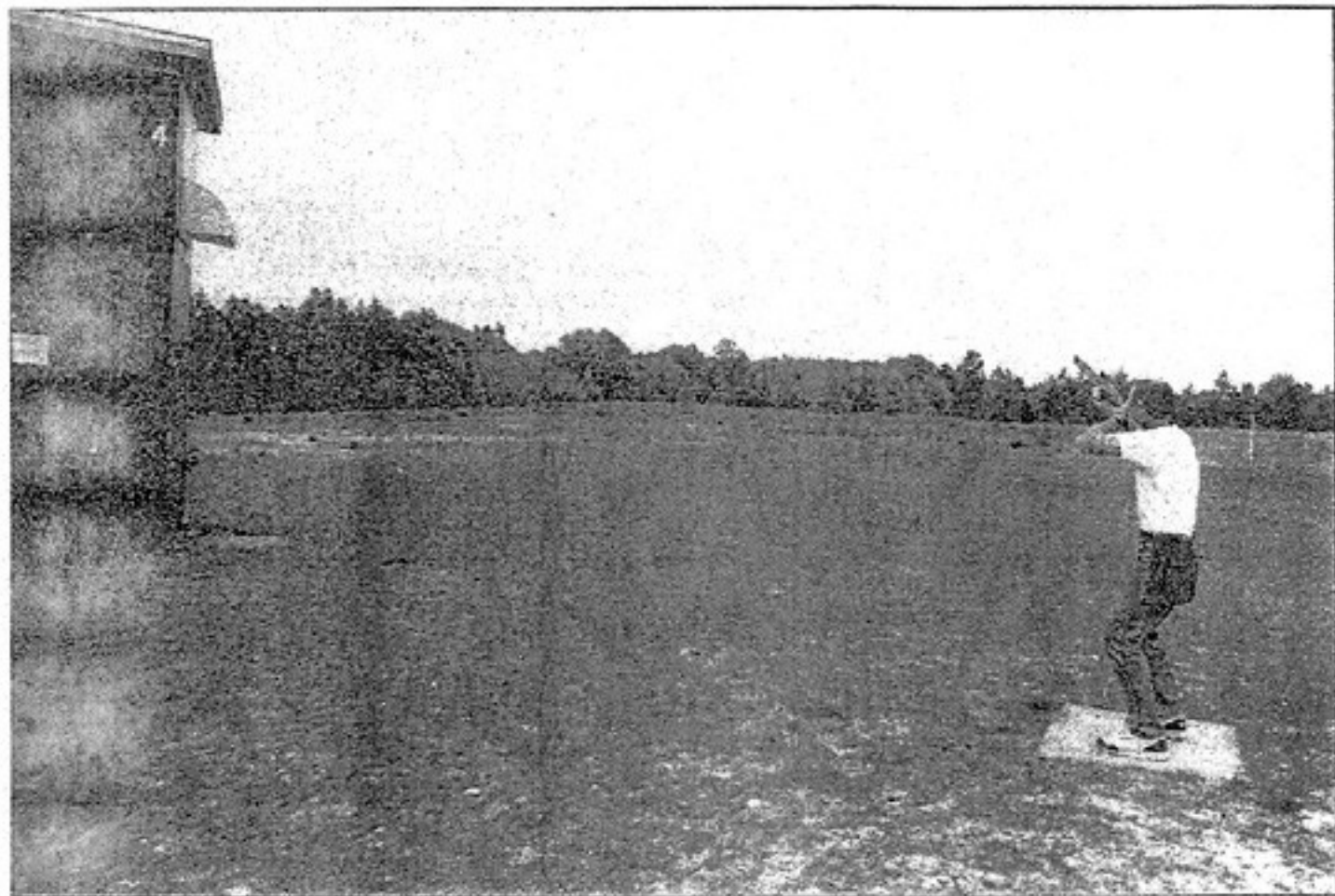
bird as it emerges and will interfere with your ability to quickly pick it up.

Once the bird is released, swing smoothly with it, yet don't be in a hurry to break it. Veteran Skeet shooters want to break this target (along with low house two and high houses six and seven) in the same place they will break it during doubles. Let the target reach a point about 45 degrees off your left shoulder and take it there. The lead for this target is one foot.

If you get into the habit of shooting station one singles in this manner, doubles are a snap: take the high house quickly and when you come back for the low house you will find it right where you normally break it as a single.

of the body to bring the gun about two-thirds the way back to the house. If you come too far back toward the house, you may not catch this target. Put the gun at the same elevation at which the bird will appear. Once the bird comes out, get onto it quickly with about 2½ feet of lead. You must follow through on this shot. Any slowing or stopping of the swing will result in a miss. That's true of any Skeet target, but especially so on high house two!

Low house two is much easier. Treat it just like low house one, and extend the lead to 18 to 24 inches. Let the bird get to a point almost equal with your position—that's where it will be during doubles.



This is a good starting position for the high house two target. Initial gun position should not be too close to the house. If so, the shooter may have trouble smoothly catching the bird.

Station Two

Four targets are again presented: high and low house singles and one set of doubles. This station, however, is not as easy as one.

The high house shot is, at least for me, one of the toughest targets on the field. It is a vicious quartering angle that must be taken quickly, and with a lot of lateral body movement. Right-handed shooters have trouble with this station because the body does not swing as well to the right as it does to the left.

Start by positioning on the Eight Post, or maybe just a bit to the right of it to give yourself a little more room to uncoil. Piv-

Doubles are the same as at the last station. Get on the outgoing target (high house) quickly, and come back to find the incoming low house right where you normally break it as a single.

If you are having a problem with high house two, the answer is to swing faster and shoot quicker. You have to be aggressive on this target.

Station Three

During a standard round of Skeet, only two targets are taken at this station, both singles, one each from the high house (first) and the low house. The high house is an outgoing quar-

tering shot similar to high house two, but you have more time and it is an easier shot. Position on the Eight Post or a bit to the right of it, and give the bird 3 feet of lead.

The low house is an incomer, similar to low house two, but becomes more of a crossing shot due to the distance. Position as with low house two and give this target $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet of lead.

One problem with station three (along with four and five) is wind. If there is a breeze, these targets can do some serious dancing! It pays to develop the habit of getting onto these birds quickly. That will also help you when you play the Doubles game and find yourself taking doubles at these stations.

Station Four

Like station three, the shooter is presented with two singles. Both are direct crossing shots and are the longest one will see on a Skeet field. These birds are 21 yards away from the shooter when they cross the Eight Post. The lead for both houses is 4 feet.

I prefer to position on the Eight Post for both houses and try to break them as they cross the post. Some shooters use a different foot position for the high and low houses at this station (as well as three and five), but I do not concur because it causes problems when you shoot these stations in the Doubles game. As long as you are positioned on the Eight Post, you have all the range of movement you require for both singles and doubles.

Up to this point, shooters have been seeing new angles and shots at each station. As we move to station five, however, things begin to become familiar.

Station Five

This is nothing more than station three in reverse, with the high house becoming the incomer (and still shot first) and the low house becoming the outgoing target.

The high house is taken using the same $3\frac{1}{2}$ -foot lead that was used on low house three. The low house is taken with the same 3-foot lead as high house three. Positioning on the Eight Post is the same.

The biggest difference is that the low house takes a more abrupt upward angle because of your proximity to it, and you must rise with it. Other than that, every bit of practice you take at station three helps you with station five, and vice versa.

Station Six

This is a reversed image of station two. The high house is shot first and is a gentle incomer, just like low house two. Body position is the same, as is the 18- to 24-inch lead used on low house two.

Low house six becomes the outgoing target and is a sharp and rapidly rising target. For right-handers, however, it is easier than the "Demon High House Two" because the body uncoils better to the left. Shoot it the same way, using the same body position and $2\frac{1}{2}$ -foot lead.

For doubles, the outgoing low house is shot first, with the incoming high house taken as it draws in to a 45-degree angle to the shooter's right.

Shoot station six the same way you shot station two.

Station Seven

This is the easiest station on the field. The high house is shot first, but let it get close, and use a 1-foot lead.

The low house looks like a dead straightaway and, if you have a little upward angle in your initial gun position, it is. This target can be broken with no gun movement—position the gun and body on the Eight Post, elevate the gun barrel to a point about 8 feet above it, and if the trap is regulated properly the target will "appear" right over your front bead.

Pull the trigger—dead bird.

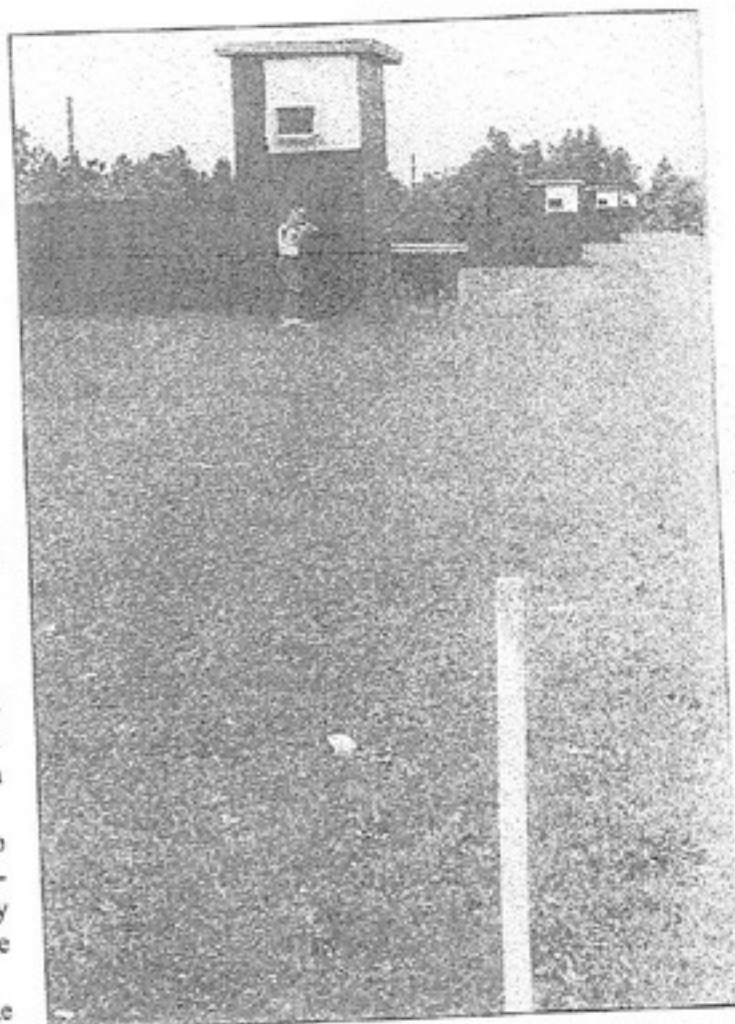
Doubles at this station are so easy one wonders why they even bother. Take the outgoing house with no gun movement and let the recoil ride the gun up to perfectly pick up the incoming bird. Piece of cake.

If you are looking to introduce a new shooter to Skeet and you want to build their confidence quickly, take them to station seven first.

Station Eight

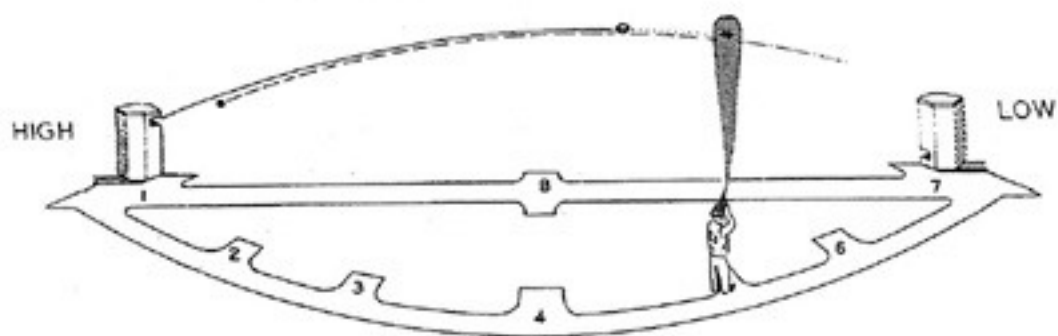
Having completed our trip around the outside of the field, it is now time to step inside and face two of what seem to be the most intimidating targets on the field.

The high and low house eight targets are not "gimmees."



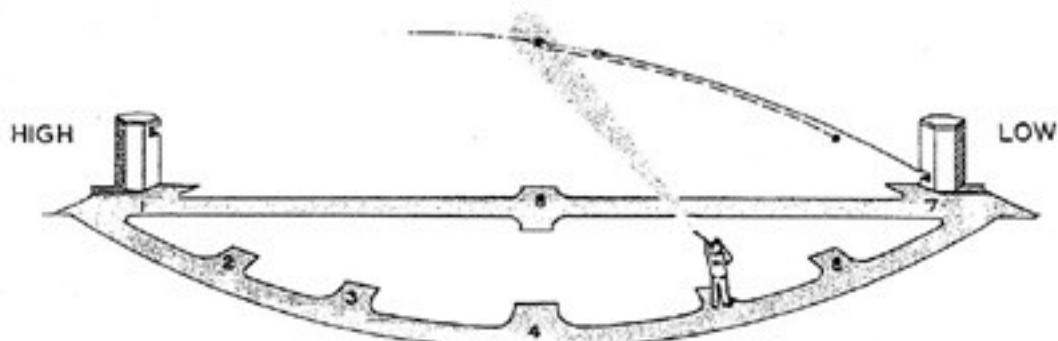
All Skeet targets are directed to fly over the center stake, or "Eight Post." This is normally where a shooter will want to take his natural point of aim on all stations except eight.

STATION FIVE HIGH HOUSE



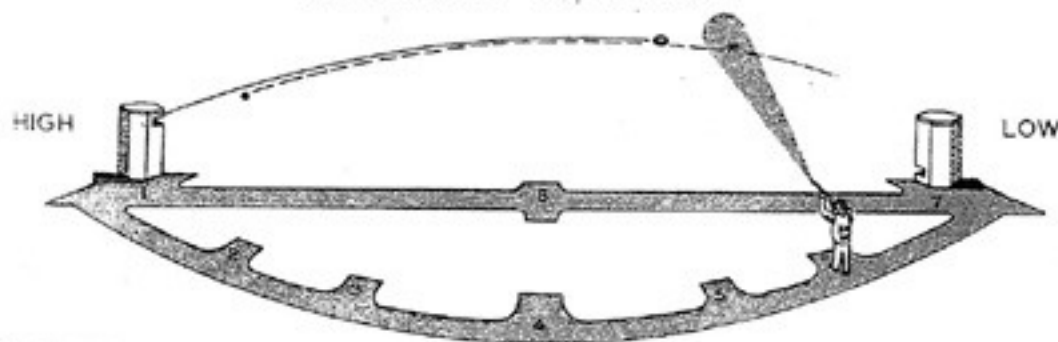
This is almost the mirror image of the station three low house. The lead is the same.

STATION FIVE LOW HOUSE



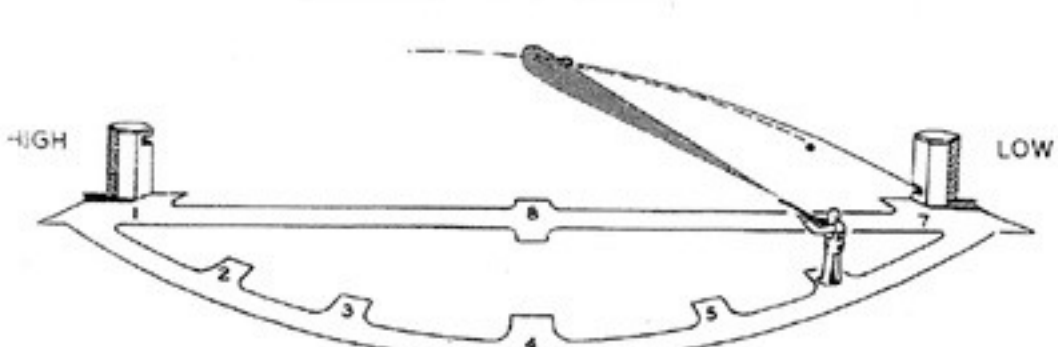
Very similar to the station three high house except the target is usually climbing a little more. The leads are the same and the shooter must concentrate on swinging up and through the target.

STATION SIX HIGH HOUSE



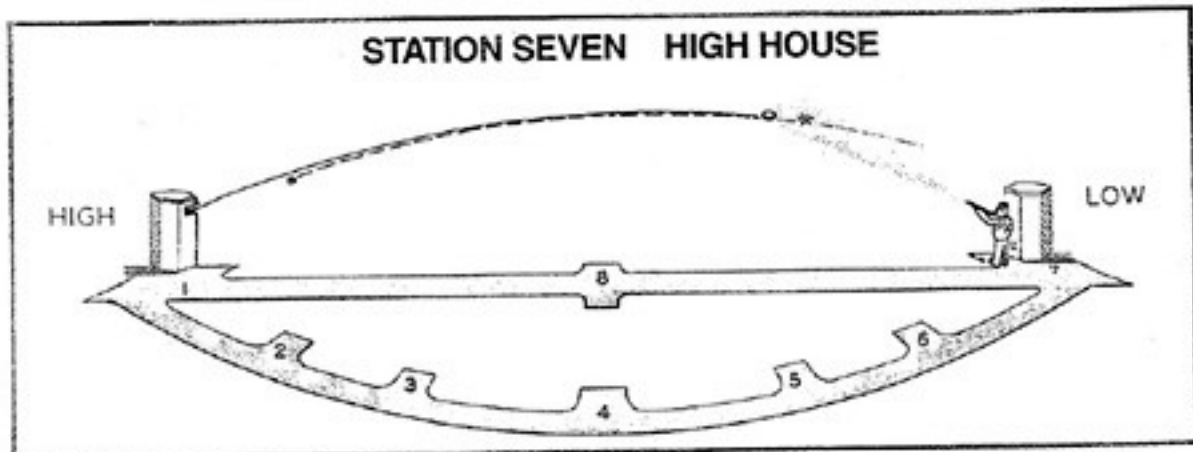
This is as easy as the station two low house, although the target is often falling slightly, depending upon the wind direction.

STATION SIX LOW HOUSE

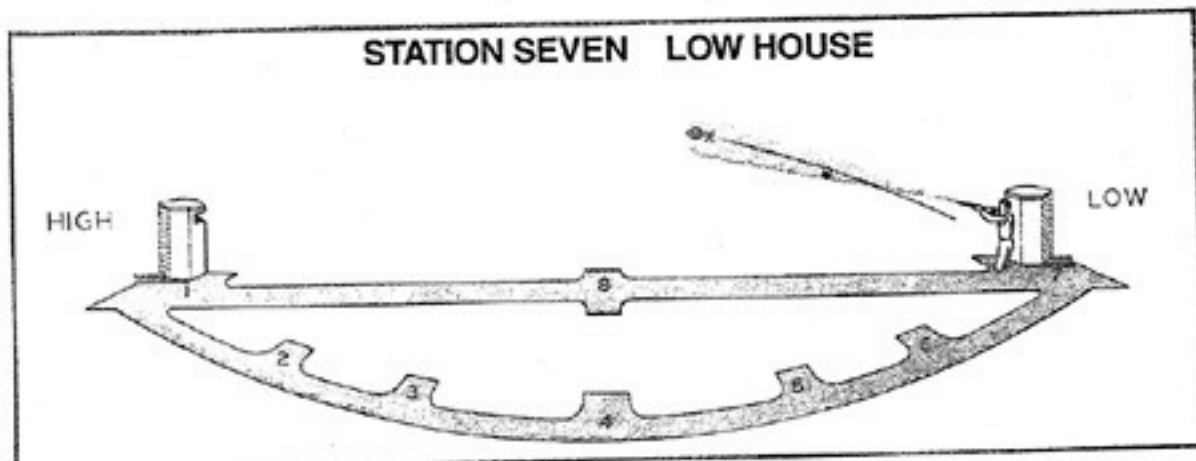


Left-handed shooters have the same problem with this target that right-handers do on the station two high house. You must swing quickly through this target and trigger the shot as soon as you have your lead. If you hesitate, you'll lose this bird.

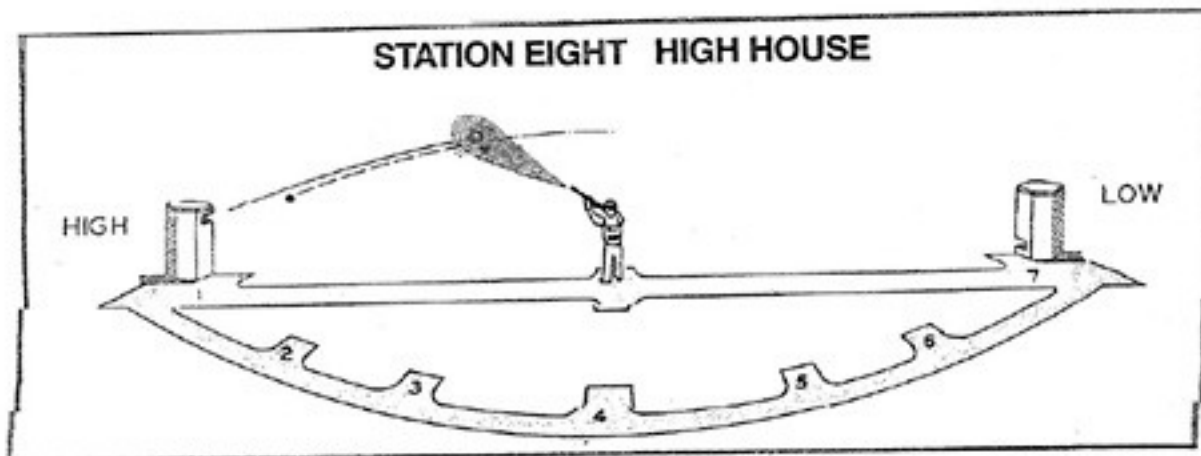
One of the easiest shots on the field, this target should be broken in the same place you will see it as a double.



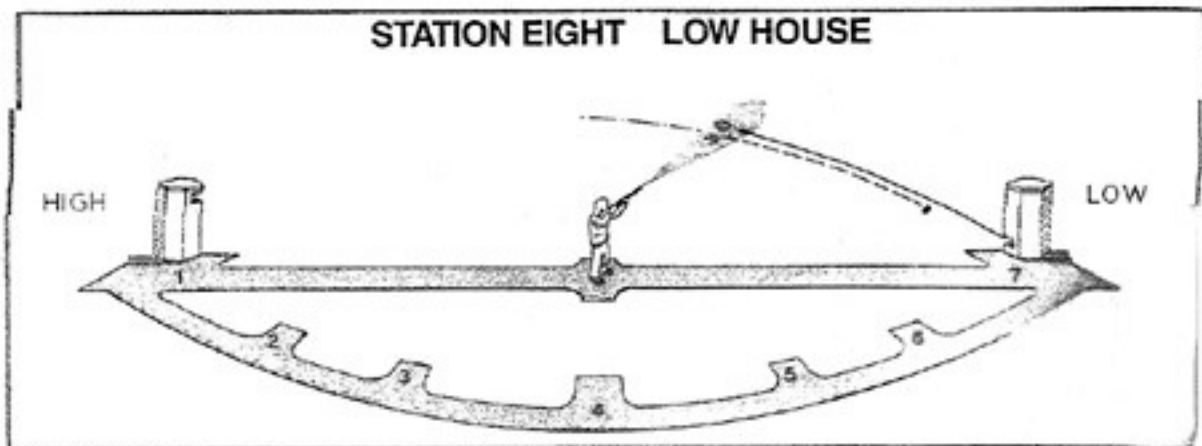
This is the only target on a Skeet field that can consistently be broken with no gun movement. It's a true "gimmee!"



More intimidating than it looks, shooters should swing fast through this target and trigger the shot as soon as the muzzle reaches the leading edge of the bird.

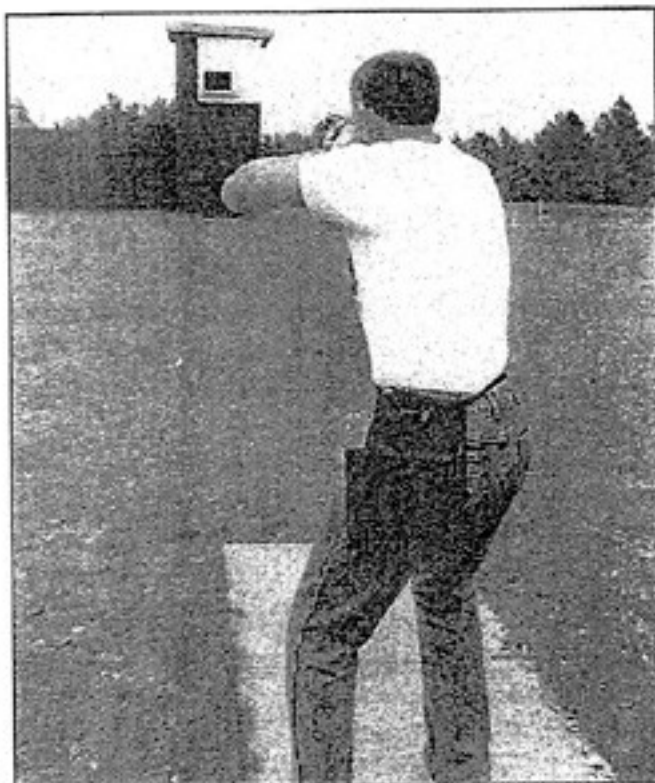


The closest shot on a Skeet field, with many birds broken 4 yards off the muzzle. Fast-swing through the target and trigger the shot as soon as the muzzle blots out the bird.





Low house seven is the only station on the field where the target can be consistently broken without gun movement. This shooter shows the proper gun hold angle to allow the bird to magically appear over the bead. Pull the trigger and it's dead!



Beginning shooters often place the gun muzzle right in the house window on station eight, but this will block out the initial visual acquisition of the bird. As Bob Lee demonstrates, the gun hold should be to the outside of the window, and at the same elevation. This lets him quickly see the bird and swing through it.

but they are not nearly as tough as they look and you have more time to shoot them than you might think.

The reason these two targets are so intimidating is because they are so close. In years past, some shooters even used special "spreader" loads to handle them. Once shooters found out how easy these targets were to break, however, the station eight birds lost their intimidation factor.

High house eight is taken by positioning gun and body right on the trap house opening, then moving the gun 4 feet to the right of the trap house. As the bird comes out, swing quickly up and through it, triggering the shot just as the gun muzzle passes the bird and shows just a hint of daylight between bird and muzzle.

The low house is shot by positioning on the opening and then moving the barrel 3 feet to the left of the house. When the bird comes at you, swing up and through and break the shot the moment the muzzle blots out the bird.

These targets are that simple.

If you have been counting shells, you will know that we have only fired twenty-four of our twenty-five rounds. The last round is called the "option round" and is fired at the first target missed during the round. If you get to low house eight without a miss, the last round is fired as a second shot on that station.

If you have never run 25 straight before, it is the toughest shot on the field. If you make it, it is also the most satisfying.

Getting to that point, however, takes proper equipment and intelligent practice.

All-Important Practice

The foregoing angles, leads and body positions provide all the information required to consistently break every target on the field. In order to make use of that information, though, a shooter must see enough of those targets, and break them, in order to build the positive subconscious images needed for success. There are good and bad ways to do that.

The worst, in my opinion, is for a new shooter to simply fall in with a squad and start shooting. This is because the new shooter will see new angles and shots at each station. Before he can begin to understand and master them, he is whisked off to the next station where the "new" starts all over again. Along the way he, or she, will get a lot of well-intentioned advice from the other shooters on the squad, yet much of it will be confusing and sometimes contradictory. That makes for a very poor learning environment in any situation.

The most effective way to teach (or learn) Skeet, and the most efficient in terms of time and ammunition spent, is to start on one particular shot and keep on working with it until it is burned into the subconscious. Then move to the next.

My preferred system is to begin working on the easy incoming shots and ignore everything else for a while. This builds a shooter's confidence and begins to demonstrate the symmetrical nature of the game.

I start teaching at station one and work on the low house until the shooter has that down pat. It sometimes takes as few as four or five shells! Once the shooter has a solid feel for that

target, I move to low house two. It is virtually identical, except for the lead, and the positive experience with low house one is a plus at low house two. Then we go to low house three and do it again.

Shifting to stations five, six and seven, we now work on the incoming high houses until the shooter has a firm grasp of all these shots.

When this point is reached, I move to station four to work on both high and low houses. The leads are identical, and these shots are similar to those the student has already learned at stations three and five. This also gets the student used to swinging quickly on fast-moving targets, because until now all shots have been lazy incomers. Station four is, in my mind, the perfect spot to make the shift from deliberately taking incomers to aggressively pursuing outgoing birds.

After that it is back around to stations three, two and one, and then over to five, six and seven for work on the outgoing targets. Station eight comes next, and the final lesson is putting it all together with doubles.

Using this approach, the time required to give a new shooter a solid, working knowledge of the game can be reduced from months to weeks. I have seen some students expend as little as ten boxes of shells in practice, and then go out and pop twenty-one to twenty-three birds the first time they shoot a complete round!

Instruction like this, assuming a competent instructor, can also prevent the shooter from acquiring bad habits at the start, which can do some serious damage to a shooter's scores.

Common Errors

Even with this, however, a shooter must still execute the fundamentals properly in order to score. Sometimes this does not happen. There are three very common ways to miss even the easiest Skeet target and they will, on occasion, plague shooters at almost any level of skill.

The most common, in all likelihood, is lifting the head from the stock. Not surprisingly, this seems to be the bane of new shooters and those who have taken a lot of time off from the game. Under these conditions the targets will seem to be the size of aspirin tablets moving at about the speed of a Patriot missile! New shooters often pop their heads off the stock to get "a better look" or to just find the target. When the head comes off the stock, the shot charge goes high every time.

There is no quick and easy cure for this, other than to constantly remind yourself to "Love Thy Wood." Take plenty of care when mounting the gun to assure a proper cheek weld with the stock. That cheek weld is critical to success in any wingshooting endeavor, and a shooting basic that must be constantly worked on and reinforced.

Stopping the swing is another quick way to blow a target and, surprisingly, this often seems to affect mid-level shooters the most. It can be especially prevalent among shooters who rely completely on the sustained lead technique, since this can, at times, encourage indecision and hesitation.

New shooters see targets moving so swiftly that they must swing very quickly to catch them, and this forces them to swing through the target. Once a shooter gains some experi-

ence, however, two things seem to happen at the same time: the targets suddenly grow much larger and they seem to slow down a lot.

The shooter now knows he has plenty of time and becomes more concerned with getting "just the right lead." The gun swings through the target, the correct lead is obtained, analyzed, trimmed up a bit, and then the subconscious says "We've got it!"

Then, just as the trigger gets slapped the gun gets stopped, and the shot charge sails harmlessly behind the target.

The best way to avoid that is to think of wingshooting in the same light as many other sports: *one must follow through.*

Think of it this way: If a golfer stops his swing the moment his club makes contact with the ball; or a bowler stops his arm movement when he lays the ball down on the alley; or a tennis player quits when the racket strikes the ball; what would the results be? Nothing. Zip. Nada. No follow through equals no results.

Shotgun shooting isn't any different. In order to hit an aerial target, the gun must be moving at the moment the shot is triggered, and it must continue to follow right on through the target. If you are troubled by stopping your swing, try following the broken pieces and mentally take a second shot. If you develop the habit of staying with the broken pieces after the shot, even if for just a fraction of a second, you won't have to worry about stopping your swing.

The last of the common problems is simply not being ready when you call for the bird. Believe it or not, this can often sneak up on experienced shooters without warning.

What happens is this: you've broken that target hundreds, maybe even thousands of times; you could do it in your sleep, and with one hand. You never miss that bird. Then you step to the shooting pad, let your mind drift, and when the bird comes out you are totally unprepared. Your timing is completely off and the bird sails away unscathed.

I watched a world class shooter do this at a national championship one time, and he cheerfully admitted his gaffe afterward. He stepped to the shooting pad, took a moment to admire an airplane flying overhead, called for the bird, and found his mind was still on the airplane. He missed.

Everyone will develop his own little routine when he steps onto the pad. Some squiggle around. Some adjust their shooting vest or glasses. I sweep all the little bits of broken targets off the pad with my foot. The point is, we all do it. While it may look a little quirky to others, it is actually a very important part of our shooting game—it is the subconscious mind's way of preparing us to execute the shot. Let the subconscious do its job. If you have a comfortable "pad routine," don't deviate from it or you'll short-circuit your own success.

When you are about to conduct an evolution that requires a number of complicated body movements and mental decisions that must happen in about 1.2 seconds, your subconscious mind is the best friend you've got. Don't get in its way.

Combine that with an understanding of the proper leads and angles, and an effective practice regime that lets your subconscious absorb them, and you'll find that Skeet can indeed be simple.