

# Chokes and Shot Sizes for Hunting Game Birds

By Chuck Hawks

The following recommendations are based on various sources, including ammunition catalogs and the author's personal experience hunting birds in the Pacific coast states of the US. They assume the use of 20, 16, or 12 gauge guns for hunting upland birds and most waterfowl and 12 or 10 gauge guns for hunting geese and the largest ducks (mallard, pintail, black). 28 gauge and .410 bore guns are not capable of throwing enough shot for general purpose use; they are tools for expert wing shooters, who already know what chokes and shot they need and thus are beyond the purview of this article.

Shot size recommendations assume the use of lead shot or shot of approximately equivalent density (bismuth, Hevi-Shot, etc.). This does NOT include steel or iron shot. Chokes are categorized by the percentage of shot pellets that strike within a 30" diameter circle at a distance of 40 yards. The recommended chokes are based on the following definitions: Extra Full = 80% plus, Full = 70-80%, Improved Modified (IM) = 65-70%, Modified (Mod) = 55-65%, 1/4 Choke = 50-55%, Improved Cylinder (IC) = 45-50%, Skeet or Cylinder = 35-40%.

Shooting waterfowl over decoys is quite different than pass shooting. Choose the smaller recommended shot size and more open chokes for use over decoys and the larger shot size and tighter chokes for pass shooting. Early season pheasants generally allow the use of smaller shot sizes and more open chokes than late season birds. No set of recommendations can anticipate every circumstance and need, so consider these to be reasonable guidelines, not hard and fast rules.

<b>Game bird</b>	<b>Choke</b>	<b>Shot size</b>
Large geese	Full, IM, Mod	2
Small geese	Full, IM, Mod	2, 4
Ducks over decoys	Mod, 1/4, IC	5, 6
All other duck shooting	IM, Mod	4
Turkey	Extra Full, Full	4, 5, 6
Pheasant, prairie chicken	IM, Mod, 1/4	5, 6, 7-1/2
Chukar, partridge	Mod, 1/4, IC	6, 7-1/2
Grouse	Mod, 1/4, IC	6, 7-1/2
Pigeon	IM, Mod, 1/4	7-1/2, 8
Quail	1/4, IC, Skeet	7-1/2, 8
Dove	IM, Mod	7-1/2, 8
Woodcock, snipe, rail	1/4, IC, Skeet	8, 9