



What's The Deal With TEAL?

Master these tough targets with the help of NSCA Chief Instructor Don Currie.

BY MARK CHESNUT

Most of us have probably been there: We're cruising along, enjoying a round of sporting clays, and suddenly we're faced with a target that sends our spirits on a downward spiral. We know that we're likely to miss, and then start thinking about that instead of concentrating on the things that deserve our focus.

For many new and intermediate shooters, the springing teal is one of the targets most likely to cause such consternation. But the teal doesn't have to be your big nemesis if you take the time to learn what the bird does and how to break it consistently.

Don Currie, NSCA chief instructor, knows a thing or two about teaching people to break teal. A recent conversation with Currie on teal strategies was an eye-opener, indeed.

TWO TYPES OF TEAL

"There are two categories of teal," Currie said. "And I think there are two different ways to take a teal, depending on which of those categories they fall into. First, there's the teal that basically is going straight up or nearly straight up, and then coming straight down. In that same category is one that is coming slightly in toward you. The other category of teal is the one that is rising and going away from you."

Currie said shooters must change the way they are thinking, depending upon which of those types of teal they are getting ready to shoot. That's because the two should be shot at different points in

their flight.

"If you have a teal that's basically just going up and coming down, which is the most common, or you have one that is coming slightly in — in other words, as the flight of the bird progresses, it's not moving any farther away from you — the most predictable spot to break that target is just after it stalls," he said.

Sounds simple, right? But, as Currie explained, it's actually more complicated than that since most birds aren't going straight up or coming straight down.

"What a lot of shooters will miss on that particular target is the behavior, or the character, of the target as it comes off the peak," he said. "You can have a springing teal that's going up, and when it comes down, it's coming down at about a 5

o'clock direction. And you can have another one, and when it starts to come down it's coming down at about a 7 o'clock direction. A lot of folks are just trying to shoot right at it, not understanding that once it hits the peak, it's not coming straight down, it's going a little left or a little right."

Currie said he sees misses on those types of teal because the shooter isn't really understanding what the target is doing after it peaks. Consequently, they'll tend to miss at 6 o'clock, when they need to be at 7 o'clock or 5 o'clock.

"The other thing I see happening there, particularly on teal that are farther than 35 yards, is shooters underestimating the amount of lead the target needs underneath," he said. "They're shooting right at it and they're missing over the top,

instead of feeling like they're a little bit underneath."

Currie said the solution to those problems comes long before the shooter ever moves into position and calls for the bird.

"During your pre-shot planning, make sure you understand what the target is doing after it peaks," he said. "Watch that target go all the way to its peak, then watch it go all the

the easiest way to miss any target — teal or otherwise — is to not understand what it's doing.

"I harp on this when I teach," he said. "Make sure you understand what the target is doing at the break point. Is it relevant what it's doing elsewhere? Sure. But what's most relevant is what the target is doing at your chosen break point."



▲ Once a teal hits its peak, it will start to go slightly left or right — not straight down. This causes many shooters to miss to one side if they attempt to shoot right at the target as it peaks.

way to the ground. And notice the location of the trap. If the target ends up 20 feet to the right of the trap from your perspective, you know that target's going left to right — it's not from 12 to 6. It's going up at about 1 o'clock, and it's coming down at about 5 o'clock."

In fact, according to Currie,

THAT OTHER TEAL

Currie said the second type of teal is the one that is moving away from the shooter as it rises and falls. Consequently, waiting to shoot it at the apex could result in a very long shot.

"By the time it gets to the top, it's either out of range or is a little farther than you'd like to be when you try to break a target," he said. "So, let's say the trap is at about 20 yards, but the bird is peaking about 60 yards away from you. That type of target really needs to be shot as a swing-through."

Currie said one way to understand how to shoot this target is to visualize the rising teal moving away from you as a quartering bird that is at 90 degrees. That gives some perspective on how the bird is moving and how to break it.

"Think about a quartering bird where the trap is 30 yards to your right and is quartering at a 45-degree angle in front of you," he said. "Let's say you're going to break it right in front of you. You would normally hold back about a third, let the target come to the gun a little, then just give it a little push through the target and break the target. If you took that same quartering bird and moved it 90 degrees where it's now the teal we talked about — going straight up but going away from you at about a 45-degree angle — we want to attack it in the same way."

Currie said to start by holding the gun about one-third of the way back from where you plan to break the target as it rises. "Not one-third back from where the peak is, but from where we're going to break it to the trap," he emphasized. "Our eyes should be focused about two inches over the front muzzle bead and out to distance. We let the target rise through our gun barrel, past our eyes, and as soon as we see the flash of the target above our barrel, we're going to cover it up and pull the trigger."

Currie said this is one of the few targets in sporting clays that shooters have to cover up to kill it. "Whether it's a rising trap target or a rising teal target," he said, "we have to cover up that target to kill it if we're going to take it while it's still rising."

As with the first type of teal target, shooters must pay attention to exactly what this bird is doing in flight. Again, it's very likely not going straight up and falling straight down.

"On the long bird, let's say instead of going up and out at a 45-degree angle, let's move that trap about 15 yards to the right and orient it slightly to the left," he said. "Now the target is going up from about 5 o'clock to 11 o'clock. You actually attack the target the same way. You're still picking out your break point and coming straight down one-third. Only you're not going one-third back on the target line, you're coming one-third straight down."

Currie explained that you bring your gun straight down instead of back down the target line because the body moves more efficiently and easily up and down, and right to left.

"So what's going to happen is, if you were to come one-third back on the line of that bird, you would actually cover up the target and do what we call spoiling the line," he said. "That shooter is going to miss that target high and to the right. Come straight down from the break point, and as soon as the target is even with the front muzzle bead, go straight up and kill it. It's a quick move, not a sustained lead. In that case, it's more of a cutoff, but you still have to be above and to the left of that target to kill it."

THE EYES HAVE IT

Setup and where the shooter is looking are both important to breaking both types of teal



▲ Target reading is critical with teal. Is the target really going straight up and back down, or is it moving away from you as it rises and falls?

targets, but even more critical for the longer one, Currie said. For the first type of teal, shooters have plenty of time, so their eyes should be focused about halfway between where the trap is and where the target is going to peak.

"You just make a slow mount and then pull the trigger," he said. "But your eyes should be at the spot on the target that is in the direction the target is going. In other words, if the target is going straight up and straight down, your eyes should be at the 6 o'clock, because when you pull the trigger, that target is on its way down."

On the longer teal going away from the shooter, Currie keeps his gun in a position that yields a quicker mount.

"For the teal that's going away from you, I tend to be somewhere between half draw

and pre-mount," he said. "I'd be a little bit out of the gun, but I might be, say, three or four inches off my cheek, because it's a quick bird."

Currie said shooters having problems breaking longer teal

probably one they need to put some practice into," he said. "If there's a weakness in a part of your game, then you need to spend some time practicing that target so when you see that target again, you'll go, 'OK, I've got that.'"

"If you're having trouble with 40- or 45-yard teal, what you want to do is move up to it so it's a 30-yard teal, then start moving back at five-yard increments. Here's the logic behind that. If I'm missing a 45-yard teal, I don't know where I'm

▼ If you're having trouble hitting far-out teal, put in some practice at closer distances, moving back as you master each distance.



targets aren't likely to get any better by continuing to shoot at them and continuing to miss. That'll just cause frustration, which can lead to anxiety.

"Typically, if they get anxiety on a certain target, that's

missing it, so I need to move up on it and shoot it until I'm breaking it."

Currie said shooters rarely learn anything by missing a target, unless they know exactly why they missed. Shooting the

shorter teal, then moving back helps shooters learn why they are hitting or missing.

"If you get up there and you're breaking the target, now you move back to 35," he said. "You've got to think to yourself, 'If I was shooting right at the target just as it peaks and I move back five yards, I probably need to be a little more underneath it. And if I move back another 5 yards, I need to be even more underneath it.' That shouldn't be where we're measuring it, but it should be a feel. We should feel ourselves under the target."

Don Currie shares tips like these through a free monthly newsletter. You can sign up at his website, doncurrie.com. **CTN**