

# Waterfowling WITH Fine Doubles

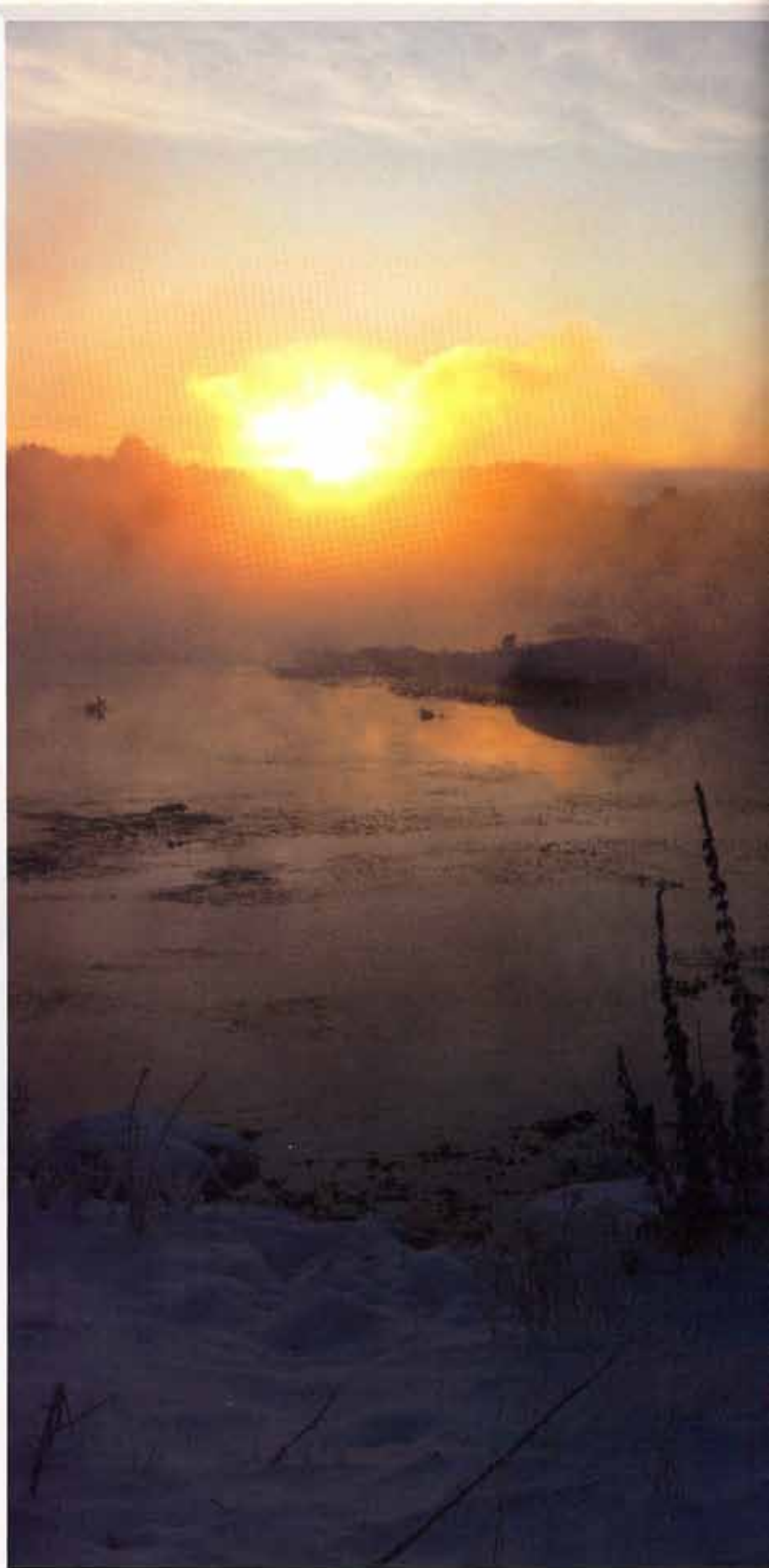
by  
*Ross Seyfried*

The big northern greenhead appeared through the falling snow; he was cruising just past reasonable range for the little gun. But when it popped he folded like stone and splashed in the crystal clear warm water. It would not be at all surprising to flatten a big mallard drake at 45 yards with a 12 bore firing 1-1/4 ounce of #5 lead. That I had just done it with a wee 28 bore and 3/4 ounce of legal, non-toxic shot made it quite remarkable. It seemed I had just taken a step backward to the good old days.

Yes, backward is often a good thing and with the gunning season of 2008 we saw a new pellet material and the reintroduction of an old one. Both are wonderful and useful in every sort of gun from small bore to Damascus barrels. Also, between the two companies, Pinnacle/Bis-Maxx and RST, virtually every sort of load one could desire is available.

But before we get specific about the new bullets, lets spend a few moments understanding why and how shotguns take game and how they do not. Perhaps the bane to my ballistic existence is the word energy. It is bandied about in all sorts of ways, from sticking solids in elephants to flattening your white-tail buck and perhaps worst of all in the context of shotguns. Basically critters of all shapes and sizes do not care about "energy." When we began to refer to pellet or pattern energy as a measure of how well or not those shells will take birds and fowl, we are really, well fouled! While I cannot enter in to a treatise of how firearms work on critters, we need a little baseline to understand. Guns and rifles of all sorts shut off critters based on two criteria: bullet placement and that bullet's penetration though vital organs. With a rifle we hit the correct place with a bullet of sufficient construction to penetrate through those things that keep the critter alive. This action will wreck the central nervous system or interrupt the oxygen supply to the brain. When this is done, one way or the other, the critter cannot survive.

*It was so cold that morning that it threatened to extinguish the nuclear engine of the sun. But the ducks came to the warm water.*





A bird or waterfowl is little different than a deer, except that he has wings that can bring him out of the sky, but may or may not bring him to bag... depending on how good your retriever is! But once again, just like the deer or elephant, we need good bullet placement and sufficient penetration to get a dove or a duck. Ah, but how do we "hit the right spot," with the random shotgun pattern? It is, at the end of the day, quite simple. We hit the bird many times and some of them

are large enough to completely, or nearly through the bird. It is this principle that caused several forms of non-toxic shells to fail (notwithstanding none of them were useful in "our" guns). Before the world figured out that steel loading cripples was the norm (and before gunners learned that regardless it was not as efficient as lead, and therefore needed shorter ranges) gunners, makers, and writers, the worst of all, accused steel pellets of "just penetrating through," the



*The long-barreled RBL 28 gauge performed far beyond its size in the Snake River*

will be in the correct places. It takes three pellets to reliably break a clay target and in my opinion three to five to kill a bird cleanly. Eight to ten pellets give you those really solid "stone-dead" hits every time. But there is a catch. It does not help to hit a duck with five #9 pellets (ruling out the very random hope of hitting the brain.). This is very simply because the little bullets do not have enough penetration to get through the feathers, muscles and bones and then through the vitals. If we flip the coin over and shoot at the same duck with #2 or BB, where one or two hits are about the best we can hope for, he is most apt to be only wounded, because even though the bullet is large and goes through, it has only a random chance of getting anything vital. So a shotgun needs to be in balance with the game at hand, enough bullets to hit him often and with bullets that

same exquisitely lame argument they give deep-penetrating rifle bullets. Early and incorrect steel loadings have just the opposite problem. Steel is light (relatively not dense) and flies through the air like a ping-pong ball. It dies very quickly. Over time, makers have learned to use somewhat larger pellets, better wads and higher initial velocity to get the bullets to go through the birds, instead of stopping in the muscles or even skin, and now steel kills rather well.

Enter the new age non-toxic pellets, mostly tungsten based. The material is very dense, very hard, and very expensive. It can throw magnificent patterns. But using this theoretical advantage, along with fictitious energy numbers, shell makers have put several loads on the market with a very marginal weight of metal in the shell, this, of course to try to hold a price and profit level. They claim the dense,



*Timmy at work. The new non-toxic shot has been approved by Labradors everywhere. Nice Shot in 20 gauge worked as well as any combination could in duck-rich Argentina.*

pattern and high retained energy make up for the lack of bullets. Keep in mind if you have a material that is denser than lead, and you put a lighter load in the shell than a normal lead load, you have fewer "bullets," and as we now know we need sufficient bullets to kill well. Some of these were so bad that there really were not enough pellets put in the shell to work properly if they all stayed in a 30-inch circle. That is, it takes about 60 pellets in a 30-inch circle to hit a goose well and if you begin with only 50 pellets.

in the shell, well the math is rather simple. Getting blood out of a turnip has always been difficult. Of course if the pattern were extremely tight it could theoretically work once in a while if you could put the bird in the center of that necessarily tiny pattern. But then the same can be said for a .22 Hornet, but I know few men good enough to prove it!



With these thoughts we see the fallacies and errors thrust upon us, and of course steel and most alternative pellet materials are hard and not suited to guns we like. So, we are off in search of a better mousetrap, in search of pellets that act like lead in almost every way.

The "original" Bismuth alloy is an old friend. I go back a long way with this one, back to when John Brown from Canada patented the material and Mr. Robert Petersen became a partner and put the show on

the road. Suddenly those of us who shot grand old guns had legal ammunition again. I have used Bismuth shot in virtually every kind of shotgun; a wee 2-inch .410, flint guns, large bores, and even a Benelli once in a while. It served perfectly in all applications. Sadly due to a wide variety of circumstances (not related to its performance on

feathers, but due to “people-related failings,” Bismuth came and went.) The good news is, under the name Bis-Maxx, Bismuth is back!

The new kid on the block is called Nice Shot. It is a tungsten-based material, but one that is soft and pliable, with density very similar to lead. RST loads the material, along with a significant line of specialty lead loads; loads that is, in sensible, useful and wonderful shells intended for classic guns.

I first learned about Nice Shot from my favorite Tom Sawyer victim, Sherm Bell. In the beginning, RST had the wisdom to speak to some knowledgeable gunners and ballistics men to lay the ground work. Sherm said it was soft, killed well and behaved well ballistically. So while he did all of the work, I stole the idea and took some 20-gauge #5 ammunition to Argentina. I was shooting a 20-gauge RBL from Connecticut Shotgun, one of the Wayne LaPierre



*A picture is worth a thousand words; this is why I am glad there are legal 28-gauge shells that work!*

It may seem strange, even inappropriate, to talk about two companies and materials that are clearly competitors in the same article. There are two pretty good reasons for this. First, in my opinion and experience these are the only two companies making ammunition that is truly suited to our purposes. That is, legal waterfowling with classic double barrels... in all gauges. (A third turns out loads with soft dense pellets that are the most ridiculous overloads I have ever encountered, so we disregard them as the unknowing.) How could I speak of one, without the other and remain honest? Too, while there are overlaps, the kinds of loads, gauges and styles of ammunition of the two companies are at times significantly different. And hey, who said you would not buy a few boxes of each and test drive them just as I have. Oh, yes, now to the fun and realistic part. Let's go shoot some ducks and geese.

guns. Of course Argentina is at least 50 years ago and lead is still correctly legal, but I wanted to try the new shells in this duck-hunter's heaven. Regulations limited my ammunition to two boxes, so I saved the #5 Nice Shot for a good morning. As the sky turned red I could begin to make out the lines of ducks flying over the perhaps 1000-acre bullrush marsh. The crystal-clear water was about knee-deep and flowing through the myriads of channels. While there were quite a few teal pochards, pintails seemed to be the most common duck in this area. I was shooting quarter and three-quarter choke. A pair of cinnamon teal roared past the decoys in typical fashion and tumbled nicely. Moments later a vee of big black pochards flew straight overhead. The load swatted the back bird in the string and the larger-than-a-mallard made a fine splash. The pins came

with the sun, and even though they are a different species, they still fly like pins, fast, in close formation. I watched the second overtake the leader and nudged the trigger. Both of them fell like bullets, while the left barrel clipped a drake further back in the bunch. Later, full of confidence and a bit of greed, I let number three in the flight eclipse the front pair and dumped all three birds with a single round... stone dead, 35 yards, on purpose, with 20 bore

day of the winter and yes, the ducks had come! At first I only heard wings and raspy quaks as the birds escaped in the jungle, then the pair jumped left through a 30-foot hole. I always have been and probably always will be amazed when I experience the little 28 bore and a green-head. To kill well, guns should roar and recoil. But as usual, in contrast to real waterfowl guns, when I point it well, the little gun pops and does not move in the hands, while the



*Another view of the Connecticut Shotgun RBL Model in 28 gauge.*

and 7/8-ounce of shot! Dorothy, we are not shooting steel shot in Kansas any more!

A change of hemispheres, guns and certainly scenery gives us another look at both kinds of bullets. This is a bizarre place to hunt mallards, the bottom of a giant, bolder-strewn canyon in the more or less desert. There should be no ducks, but there is a secret ingredient, a virtual river of warm crystal-clear spring water pours out of the canyon wall. Below, it flows and braids through the rocks and brush, growing the finest crop of watercress I have ever seen. It does all of this on its mile-long journey into the Snake River. We began by jump shooting in a literal jungle of olive, rose, juniper and other brush, which is really thick. It is a little like a good grouse covert with mallards and rocks! By luck this was the first really mean stormy

big mallard is simply slapped from the sky somewhere beyond 30 yards... with 7/8-ounce of Bismuth #6. We spent the rest of the morning shooting a combination of jumped and pass-shot ducks with the little 28. I alternated #6 Bismuth and Nice Shot and neither I, nor the ducks could tell the difference. The last shot of the morning came at the hands of my host, who reluctantly tried the svelte RBL 28 with its extravagant, but wonderful 30-inch barrels. The widgeon was high, flying straight down the warm water course. It was a real shot for a real waterfowl gun and yet the little 28 brought him down with authority. He handed me the gun, rather quickly, saying, "That is enough, I don't want to have to buy one of these."

I moved on to California with the 28 and as has become tradition, to the awaiting bevy of grand old 10 bores. This

year however there was a new kind of shell for the tens. While Bis-Maxx has not yet begun to load 10s again, RST is making 2-7/8" cartridges with both lead and Nice Shot. They are classic loads, perfect loads, of 1-1/4 ounce, #2, #4 or #5 Nice Shot, and a super-classic 1-1/8 ounce of lead. (I bet most of you did not know that the 10 used to be loaded with 1-1/8 ounce.)

I began with the 28, just because it is a new and wonderful

best. Singles and pairs flew by, but as reasonable ranges and often enough to keep us busy. This day I shot an old friend, an early W. & C. Scott hammerless 10 with full-choked Damascus barrels. I confess I had not been shooting well until that afternoon, and as the curtain was closing again found the fundamentals of lead and trigger. There was that wonderful sensation that we all know; dead-center, some dead and a good feather shower from time to time. No not



*Bismuth has served well for many years. This time I used both the Bis-Maxx and the tugsten-based Nice Shot in my W & C Scott 10-bore Damascus old friend.*

toy and I cannot resist the wand in my hands. The evening brought ducks that did not decoy, but passed by the blind. Once again I had the feeling of a real gun. The crossing widgeon went down well at 30 yards, while I only edged the 40-yard mallard with the right barrel, the left brought him down against the clump of rushes... that were, well too far for a 28. Timmy had employment and a challenge. Life was good.

The last afternoon was the



at 20 yards, but at 30 to 50 yards with 1-1/4 ounce of #5. I primarily used Nice Shot, but did fire some of the old Bismuth loads that had served us so well for many years past. They are incredible killers, and the new loads from RST performed the same. Take an old 10, put a duck in the pattern and he comes down, with authority! We cannot shoot lead shot any more, but I can say we do have shells that make it very difficult to know it is not 1979 again.

As I said earlier there are parallels between the two companies' ammunition, with, at times, significant differences in loads. The Bismuth ammunition is loaded in England and comes in a wide variety of "conventional" loadings, that is 2-3/4" and/or 3" and 3-1/2" lengths in 410, 28, 20, 16 and 12 gauge. RST, Nich Shot is loaded here in the States and comes in all gauges from 28 through 10 gauge inclusive. RST specializes in shells for classic, Continental, and British guns, with emphasis on 2-3/4 inch shells where applicable and classic lighter shot charges such as the 1-1/4 ounce 10 gauge, or 1-ounce 12 gauge.

As for the pellets themselves, Bismuth is primarily bismuth and tin, melted together and formed into shot with a variety of processes. Nice Shot is tungsten based. Bismuth pellets are the hardest of the two and less malleable. This has always been the case with this material. The earliest alloys (many years ago) required buffer in the shells, while the later and current alloy with more tin does not. Nice Shot is almost as malleable as lead, but after hammering and flattening to a significant degree some cracks do appear. This is good time to remember that shot pellets do not significantly deform or

*My favorite old Greener 10 bore and a Continental 16; both can be fed well with the new non-toxic ammunition.*

mushroom like a bullet when they strike a bird. In fact a great quest in lead shot was and is to keep the pellets nice and round in the barrel so they fly well through the air... thus "chilled" shot and shot plated with copper or nickel... all to make them harder so they would pattern better. We get this with the new non-toxics as a by-product. But!!! They are very soft relative to steel and most other tungsten pellets and they are easy on barrels and chokes.

At the end of the day we have made great strides backward to a time before the lead-shot ban in waterfowling. While steel shot will be the mainstay for gunners using modern repeaters, those of us who like doubles and single shots can delight in having once again, great ammunition for ducks and geese. Yes, we will never see those glory days again, but at least we can now hunt waterfowl with the guns that knew them.

