

Tips for small game hunting – Part II

Welcome back to our discussion about improving your small game hunting strategy. In the first part of this article, we covered why it's important to know the regulations of your hunting area, discussed what the hunter needs to bring for a successful hunt, and provided some tips for scouting the hunting area.

Now, let's move forward with our recommendations and see how we can further improve our hunting tactics.

Pay attention to your surroundings

Staying aware of your surroundings at all times is critical for a safe and successful hunting experience. Unfortunately, situational awareness is a skill that many people lack, which makes them susceptible to accidents.



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- Always be alert and attentive to your environment. Avoid distractions such as using your phone or engaging in conversations that might divert your focus. Your primary task is to stay observant of any changes in your surroundings.
- Periodically scan the area around you. Use a systematic

approach to ensure you don't miss anything important. Check both the ground and the horizon for any signs of movement or changes in the environment.

- Familiarize yourself with the behavior and signs of the game you're hunting. Recognizing patterns and activities can help you anticipate animal movements and avoid surprising or encountering them unexpectedly.
- Be aware of other hunters in the area. Ensure you maintain a safe distance and avoid crossing paths. Use bright-colored clothing or gear to increase your visibility to others, reducing the risk of accidents.
- Pay attention to changes in weather conditions, such as shifts in wind direction, temperature changes, or approaching storms. These factors can affect both your comfort and your hunting effectiveness.
- Use your sense of hearing to detect any sounds in the environment, such as animal movements or other hunters. Quietly listen for rustling leaves, breaking twigs, or any unusual noises that might indicate the presence of game or people.
- Be conscious of your scent and its potential to alert animals. Avoid strong-smelling substances like perfumes or food odors. Understand how wind direction can carry your scent and adjust your position accordingly.
- Continuously assess the terrain around you. Watch for potential hazards such as unstable ground, deep water,

or dense underbrush that could affect your mobility or safety. Navigate carefully to avoid accidents.

- Keep track of your position relative to landmarks and your planned route. Use a map or GPS device to ensure you're on course and to help you navigate if you need to move.
- Pay attention to how you're feeling physically. Fatigue, dehydration, or discomfort can impair your judgment and reaction times. Take breaks as needed to stay sharp and focused.
- If hunting with others, maintain communication to coordinate movements and avoid surprises. Use hand signals, radios, or other communication tools to stay connected and share information about your surroundings.
- Be prepared for unexpected situations by having a plan in place. Know the nearest exits, safe zones, and emergency procedures. Carry a whistle, a first aid kit, and a map of the area for quick access if needed.
- Move quietly and avoid making unnecessary noise that could alert game or disturb the environment. Practice stealth techniques such as slow, deliberate movements and careful placement of gear.

It's not easy to make the perfect

shot

Being patient and waiting for the perfect shot is essential for a successful hunting experience. Here's what you can do to develop and maintain patience while ensuring you take the best possible shot:

- Recognize that patience is a critical skill in hunting. Rushing a shot can lead to poor accuracy and potentially wound the game, making it difficult to recover. Taking your time helps ensure a clean, ethical shot.
- Ensure you have a clear, unobstructed view of your target before taking a shot. Avoid shooting through dense vegetation or from awkward angles that might affect your accuracy or the outcome of the shot.
- Observe the animal's body language and position. Wait until the animal is in a favorable position where you can target vital areas, such as the chest or head, which will provide a more humane and effective shot.
- Practice controlled breathing to steady your aim. Take slow, deep breaths to calm your nerves and stabilize your body, which helps improve accuracy and reduces the chances of a shaky or errant shot.
- Make sure you're using the correct shooting technique for your weapon. Align your sights, hold the weapon steady, and apply smooth, consistent pressure on the trigger. Proper technique enhances precision and effectiveness.

- Consider wind direction and speed, as these can affect the trajectory of your shot. Take the wind into account when aiming, and adjust your position or technique to compensate for its impact.
- Determine the distance between you and the target. Use a rangefinder if necessary to measure the distance accurately. Adjust your aim and shooting technique based on the distance to ensure accuracy.
- Maintain focus on the target and keep your composure. Avoid distractions and stay calm to prevent sudden movements or hasty decisions that could affect your shot.
- Be patient and wait for the animal to present the optimal shot opportunity. This might mean waiting until it turns or moves into a better position. Avoid taking a shot just because it's available; wait for the ideal moment.
- Pay attention to the animal's behavior and movements. Wait for it to settle or stop moving to minimize the risk of a missed shot or an injury. Observe for signs of agitation or alertness that might indicate it's about to flee.
- Eliminate any potential distractions that could affect your concentration. This includes noise, movement, or other hunters. Focus solely on the task at hand and the target in your sights.

- Mentally prepare yourself for the shot by visualizing a successful outcome. Positive mental imagery and confidence can improve your performance and patience.
- Work on developing your patience through practice sessions. Spend time at the range or in mock hunting scenarios to practice waiting for the right moment and improving your shooting skills.
- Understand that sometimes the best decision is to wait on taking a shot. If you're unsure about the accuracy or the ethical considerations of a shot, it's better to wait or pass on it rather than risk a poor outcome.

Small game abounds

If you're new to hunting you might wonder what is the most common small game, hunters go after in our country. The following information should answer your questions and we also provided some hunting tips for each species.

The most common small game hunted in the United States include:

Rabbits and Hares:

Species like the Eastern cottontail rabbit and snowshoe hare are popular targets due to their abundance and wide distribution across the country. You should focus your search on areas with dense cover, such as brush piles, thickets, and field edges, where rabbits and hares like to hide.

It's recommended to walk slowly through these areas, kicking brush piles or stomping on thick grass to flush them out. Early mornings or late afternoons are often the best times to

hunt, as rabbits are most active during these periods.

Use a shotgun with light loads, such as #6 or #7.5 shot, for close-range shooting. Alternatively, a .22 rifle can be used for more precise shots.

Squirrels:

Both gray squirrels and fox squirrels are commonly hunted, particularly in wooded areas. Squirrel hunting is often seen as an entry point for new hunters. Look for mature hardwood forests, especially those with plenty of oak, hickory, or beech trees, as squirrels are attracted to the nuts from these trees.

Hunting squirrels requires a lot of patience since there a lot of sitting and waiting. Sit quietly and wait for squirrels to move, or slowly stalk through the woods while watching the treetops. Listen for rustling leaves or the sound of nuts being cut open.

For squirrels, a .22 rifle is ideal for precise shots, or a shotgun with light loads can be used for close encounters in thick cover.

Doves:

The mourning dove is one of the most hunted game birds in the U.S. Dove hunting is especially popular in the southern and midwestern states. Doves are found in agricultural fields, especially those with sunflowers, wheat, or corn, as these are favored feeding areas for doves.

To hunt for doves, you need to set up along field edges, fence lines, or near water sources where doves frequently travel. Pass shooting is common, where you wait for doves to fly by and take your shots.

Bring a 12 or 20-gauge shotgun with #7.5 or #8 shot for dove

hunting. It's also recommended to use decoys to attract more doves to your area.

Quail:

Bobwhite quail are a favored small game bird in many parts of the country, particularly in the Southeast. Other quail species, like the California quail, are also hunted in their respective regions.

For quail hunting, you should focus on areas with a mix of grasslands, brushy cover, and agricultural fields, as quail thrive in this type of environment.

Most hunters use a dog to flush and retrieve quail, as they tend to hold tight in cover. Walk slowly through likely areas, and be ready for quick, close-range shots when quail flush.

A 20-gauge shotgun with #7.5 or #8 shot is ideal for quail hunting. Also, as said previously, a good bird dog is often essential for successfully hunting quail.

Pheasants:

Although technically a larger game bird, ring-necked pheasants are often included in small game hunting. They are especially popular in the Midwest. When you go hunting, you should target areas such as fields of tall grass, corn, or sorghum, as well as along fence rows and ditches.

It's recommended to use a dog to flush pheasants from cover, or walk in a line with other hunters to cover large areas. Be ready for fast, high-flying birds.

A 12 or 20-gauge shotgun with #5 or #6 shot is preferred for pheasants due to their size and strength. A retriever dog is also recommended.

Grouse:

Ruffed grouse and other species like the spruce grouse are commonly hunted in northern and mountainous regions. Ruffed grouse are found in dense, young forests, often near aspen, birch, or alder trees. Look for areas with thick undergrowth.

You will need to slowly walk through the woods, pausing frequently to listen for the sounds of grouse flushing. Grouse often hold tight and then flush suddenly, requiring quick reflexes. It's quite a challenging hunt.

Bring a light, quick-pointing shotgun, such as a 20-gauge with #7.5 or #8 shot, since it is effective for these fast, unpredictable birds.

Woodcock:

The American woodcock is another sought-after game bird, especially during their fall migration. Woodcock prefer moist, young forests, particularly those with alder, birch, or willow near water sources.

It's advisable to hunt during their migration periods in the fall, focusing on early mornings or late afternoons. Slowly walk through suitable cover, and be ready for woodcock to flush close by.

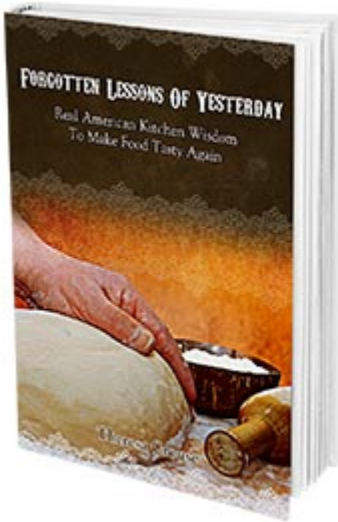
A 20-gauge shotgun with #7.5 or #8 shot is commonly used. A pointing dog can be very helpful in locating and flushing woodcock.

Waterfowl (for smaller species): While not always classified as "small game," some hunters target smaller waterfowl like teal and coots. Look for waterfowl in marshes, ponds, rivers, and flooded fields, especially during migration periods.

Use decoys to attract ducks to your location, and set up in a well-camouflaged blind. Early mornings are typically the most

productive times for waterfowl hunting.

A 12 or 20-gauge shotgun with non-toxic shot, such as steel #4 or #6, is required by law for waterfowl hunting. Consider using a dog to retrieve downed birds from the water.



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These species listed above are widely pursued due to their accessibility, the challenge they present, and the traditions associated with small game hunting in various regions of the U.S. If you want to bag some of these critters, here are some hunting strategies that should help:

Concluding

Hunting small game is a challenging and rewarding experience, and hopefully, the suggestions provided in this article will improve your hunting skills. Successful hunting hinges on a combination of preparation, awareness, and patience. I guarantee that with these practices in mind, you'll enhance both your enjoyment and effectiveness in the field.