



WITH JOHN HEAGREN // SHOOTING MANAGER AT BISLEY

# Perfecting your swing

John Heagren, award-winning coach, talks us through the oldest and probably most widely used method of shooting – swing through – and also considers maintained lead

Ask most people what method they were taught to shoot and the chances are they will say swing through. This is because it is the simplest and most reliable way to get someone to hit a target. But that doesn't mean that it's a technique that experienced shooters should ignore – far from it as it's a great way to tackle live quarry when out in the field. Unlike clay shooting, we don't always know where our bird will be coming from or where it's heading, so this method has several advantages. It may well be that the

bird has caught us by surprise so by the time we see it chances are it's already in front of the gun, therefore it's a natural reaction to swing the gun after it. By doing so, we will naturally get the line of its flight path and once we have that, the shot is already half complete.

## The basics

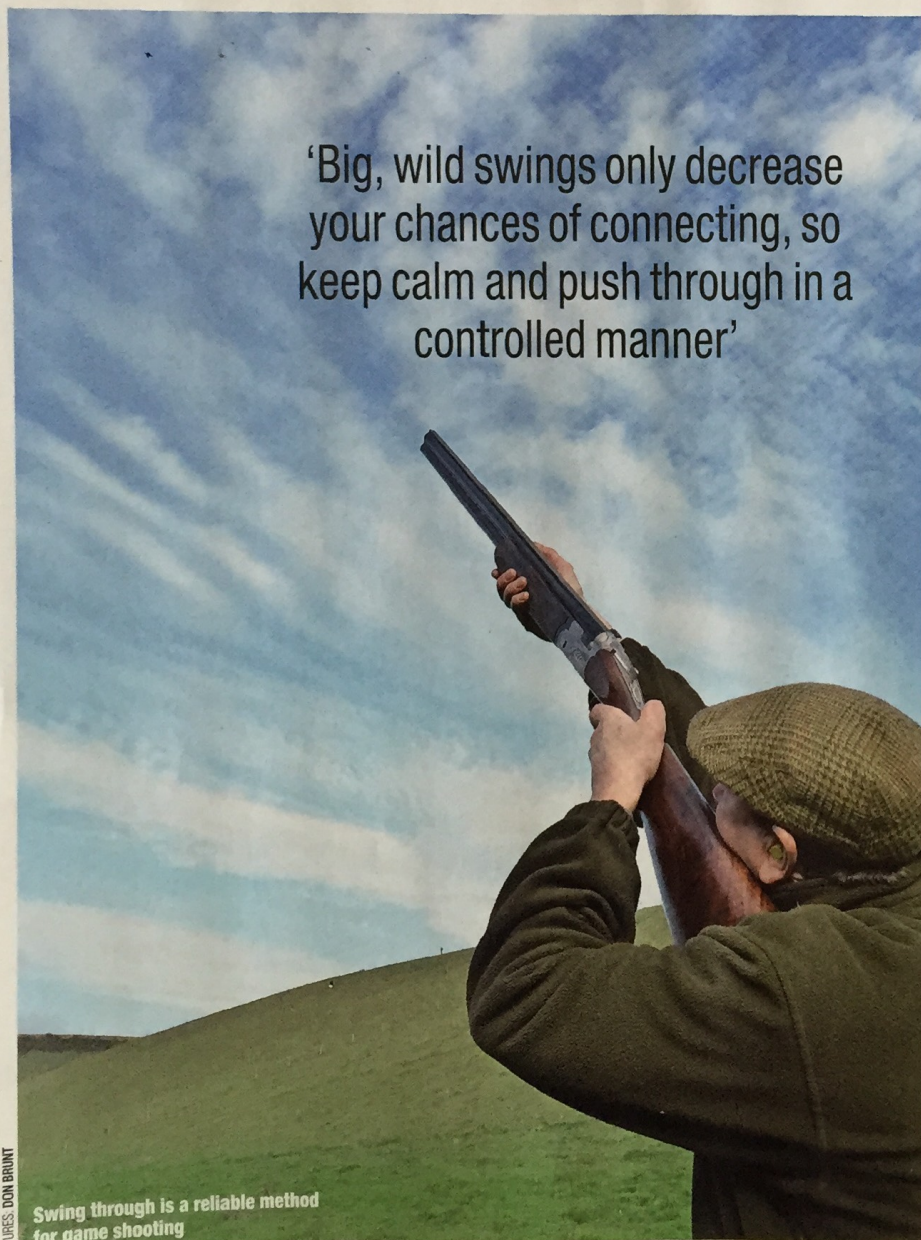
To get the best out of any method you need to make sure that your fundamentals are right a long time before you come to squeezing the trigger.

Once you see your quarry, it should almost be instinctive that, if needed, your feet are already moving so that you won't be running out of swing as you finish the shot off and your gun will already be starting to swing after the bird as you mount it. If you have seen the bird from some distance away then you should have plenty of time to put everything in place, but don't be tempted to mount on the bird too early. If you track a bird for more than a couple of seconds, you are likely to start overthinking the shot rather than letting your instincts take over and make a natural shot. This happens quite often on driven birds where a novice may make the mistake of putting the gun on the bird when it's still more than 100 yards away or more. Instead, wait until the bird is approaching what you feel is the optimum spot in which to shoot it, then put those fundamentals together in one flowing movement.

## The technique

Mount behind the bird, or on the end of its tail, and accelerate the gun through the target. Be careful here to make the acceleration a smooth increase in speed rather than a frantic push; big, wild swings only decrease your chances of connecting, so keep calm and push through in a controlled manner. As far as forward allowance is concerned, this method probably requires the least lead of any technique as the gun is already moving faster than the quarry so you should, in most cases, pull the trigger as the gun comes

'Big, wild swings only decrease your chances of connecting, so keep calm and push through in a controlled manner'



Swing through is a reliable method for game shooting

## THE VENUE

Bisley has been the nation's 'Home of Shooting' since the 1800s and Bisley Shooting Ground has long been an integral

part of the shotgun shooting community. Set amidst 3,000 acres of stunning heathland and woodland, its two shooting locations, Long Siberia and Cottesloe Heath, offer a perfect environment in which to shoot. With targets that both educate, entertain and challenge shooters of all abilities, BSG offers tuition, guided practise, automated 'Pay and Play' and hosts popular competitions throughout the year.

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off the beak of your quarry, the lead being 'built in' by your swing. It is very important to finish the shot off properly – don't stop the gun as you come through the bird or you will miss behind; keep the gun moving. On longer range targets at speed, you will need to consider the lead picture needed to see the bird fold and the best way to understand this is to take time to practise on clays. Although the lead required decreases as the gun speed increases, don't be tempted to speed things up too much or the main added benefit to this technique, i.e. staying on the line of the bird, might be lost.

This method works very well on most live quarry targets, whether they be crossing or driven, though, as with any technique, you need both eyes open at all times to get the best out of it. If you close one eye then that's a habit you really must get out of if you want to shoot to the best of your ability.

Swing through is a very effective method on live quarry, but requires practise to build up lead pictures.



The gun starts behind the bird...



... then catches it up...



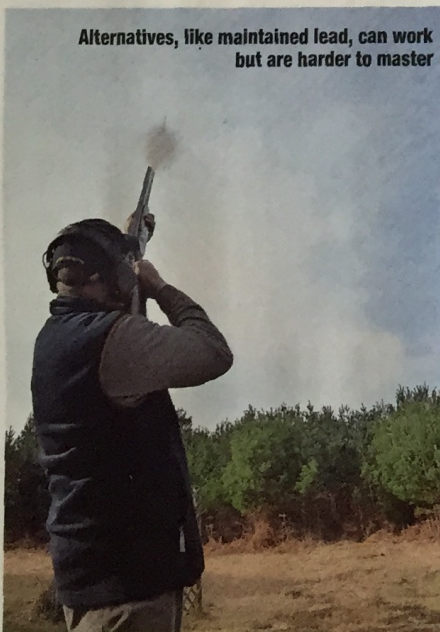
... the trigger is pulled as the muzzles go past the target...



... and the target breaks – simple as that

### Maintained lead

Maintained lead is another method that can be effective, especially on clays, but is not as reliable as swing through when tackling live quarry. As the name suggests, it requires that the gun stays in front of the bird at all times. When you see your target, start the gun moving with the muzzles below the line of the bird and slightly out in front of it. As you mount, you should still be in front of it, staring hard at the quarry. You will see your barrels in your peripheral vision, but don't be tempted to flick your eyes from muzzles to bird and back again or a miss is practically guaranteed. Keeping your focus out on the target, move the barrels ahead until you reach what you perceive to be the right gap, matching the speed of the bird then pulling the trigger. Once again,



Alternatives, like maintained lead, can work but are harder to master

### THE COACH

John Heagren is well known in both the clay and game shooting community as a coach who gets results, with more than 25 years of experience as a full-time coach and a shooting career going back to his eighth birthday. Having returned to competitive shooting, in the last four years he has topped the FITASC rankings, represented England in international competition and last year won the prestigious Stratstone Super 7 Challenge. He is also a respected shot in the game field and spends much of the winter coaching on the peg.

you *must* keep the gun moving all the way through the shot, after all the bird may require a follow-up shot to dispatch it, if wounded. Once you reach that right gap, make sure you pull the trigger; try not to 'ride' the target for too long, make your decision and stick to it – stay on it too long and you might come off the line or just overthink things. It can be difficult to be consistent using this method, unless you have built up a memory bank of lead pictures and that will only come through experience and practise, so if you are going to use this don't expect to be hitting everything from the start. For instance, a high pheasant at speed might need 10 or 15 feet, or even more, while a partridge going over the line at 25 yards might only need a foot or two and it will take time to work out what works for you. As with swing through (and, in fact, any method) you need

to ensure that you have built the foundations of a successful shot with your feet before you engage your quarry. Of the many shooting techniques out there, all of them depend on you thinking ahead. Yes, you may on occasion pull off a great shot when everything was 'wrong', but that will be the exception to the rule, so just because you manage it a few times don't assume that you can forget the basics.

### Pull away

Another option is pull away. Simply mount onto the bird, track it momentarily – which helps lock onto its line – and then simply pull away off the beak, pulling the trigger. It can be very effective, though it's another one that can require rather more practise than swing through to get to a proficient level.

**'It's very important to finish the shot off properly – don't stop the gun as you come through the bird or you will miss behind, keep the gun moving'**

There are plenty of other methods to choose from: chopping, ambushing or even spot shooting, but although they all have their uses on the clay ground, when it comes to game shooting they are not as reliable as those we have discussed here. By all means experiment with some of them but identify the one that works best for you and practise it – remember that when the season comes, those who have put rounds through the gun during the off season will have an advantage over those whose guns haven't ventured out of the cabinet since the last day of the season. ■