

# Clay Target Games Are a Good Way To Sharpen Bird Hunting Skills

## Outdoor Matters

A column from the  
Michigan Department of Natural Resources

Across the U.S., the shotgun shooting sports, including skeet, trap, sporting clays, and five stand, are being enjoyed by more men, women, and youth than ever before.

According to the National Shooting Sports Foundation, there are nearly 20 million active target shooters in the U.S., and national participation in target shooting has increased by 48 percent over the past five years.

Most target shooters agree these clay bird games are a good way to sharpen bird hunting skills. Skeet, they say, provides great angles for all bird shooters;

trap improves shooting accuracy, especially for those hunting ground-flushing birds and sporting clays, and five stand are considered to be the closest things to actual field shooting.

But according to Jerry Hall, a member of the Natural Resources Commission whose lifelong passion and favorite game is hunting pheasant, shattering clay targets also is a great way to exercise the body, mind, and soul when hunting season is over.

"Target shooting is fun," Mr. Hall said. "It's challenging and it's a year-around activity the family can enjoy together."

Mr. Hall believes trapshooting is the best way to introduce beginners to the shooting sports.

A round of trap consists of 25 shots, five each from five stations located 16 yards behind the trap house. The gun, usually a 12-gauge, is shouldered, and the target is released following the gunner's familiar command, "pull." In order to simulate the unpredictable flight patterns of birds taking wing, the targets are sprung from the trap at various angles and in various directions. The targets rise to a minimum height of about 10 feet and, unless hit, travel about 150 feet from the trap.

"The challenge is to get them on the incline before they start to drop," Mr. Hall said. "With a sharp eye and learning the proper swing, many beginners will find it's easier to hit the angles than the straight-aways."

Although trapshooting has its roots in England and dates back to the late 1700s, at a time when live birds were released from a box, the game of skeet began in Massachusetts in 1920, 40 years after the invention of the clay target.

The word "skeet" is derived from the Scandinavian word "shoot."

On a skeet range, the targets emerge from a high house (10 feet above ground) on the left and from a low house (three feet above ground) on the right. The two houses face each other and are about 40 yards apart.

There are eight stations, and a round of skeet consists of 25 shots, beginning with a high-house clay target at station one. The targets always follow the same sequence and shotguns used in skeet must be capable of firing two shots, because four sets of doubles are included in the round.

In contrast to trap, skeet is a short-range game, with most targets broken within 25 yards or less.

"I prefer skeet to trap because it's more challenging," Mr. Hall said. "There's a much shorter shooting distance, so everything's much quicker. You break low 8, for instance, at only four yards."

The fastest-growing shooting sport in the nation is sporting clays, a game designed to simulate actual hunting conditions. Courses are laid out in natural surroundings and typically include 12 to 15 shooting stations, with shooters moving from one station to the next to complete the course.

Each station presents shooters with a different type of shot. Targets may be thrown as singles, simultaneous pairs, following pairs (one target following another), or report pairs (the second target is launched at the sound of

the gun being fired at the first target).

To further challenge shooters, the size of the target varies from the standard trap/skeet clay target to the smaller "midi" and "mini" targets, or the flat, disc-shaped "battue" target, which imitates the flight of the wood duck. There even are special "rabbit" targets that zip across the ground at high speeds.

"It takes about an hour and a half to complete a sporting clays course that typically includes 50 targets," Mr. Hall said. "All courses are designed differently, and all the stations, targets, and combinations can be changed daily."

A variation to sporting clays is the game of five stand, which, like trap, allows each shooter to take five shots from each of five

stations, but instead of using just one trap in front of the shooter, there usually are eight traps placed around the field that throw a wide variety of targets. No two five stand fields are exactly alike. Shooters may have the choice of two or more levels of challenge and there usually is a menu card that advises the shooter of the sequence of the targets.

"Five stand is a great way to get the same kind of shooting experience that you will find on a sporting clays course, but the stations are close together," Mr. Hall said.

Michigan has more than 140 shooting ranges across the state; more than 80 are open to the public. A list of shooting ranges is available on the Department of Natural Resources Web site at [www.michigan.gov/dnr](http://www.michigan.gov/dnr).

## DeTour Schools Nov. Students of the Month



Zach Kelly



Kaalin Goetz



Ashlyn Bosley



Phillip Hartman

Zach Kelly, Kaalin Goetz, Ashlyn Bosley, and Phillip Hartman have been named November students of the month at DeTour Area Schools.

Zach Kelly is in the second grade at the Drummond Elementary School and the son of Stephanie and Tom Kelly. He enjoys reading and mathematics, especially on the classroom computers. He is willing to help anyone and is eager to please, teachers said.

Kaalin Goetz is in the first grade at the DeTour Elementary and is the daughter of Sheila Goetz and Jonathon Crawford. Her teachers said Miss Goetz is a wonderful role model for the kindergarten students. She listens, follows directions, and is ready to work. She is often found helping students when they need help.

Ashlyn Bosley is in the seventh grade at the DeTour Middle

School, and the daughter of Dale and Roxanne Bosley, and Teresa and Royce Lapinski. Miss Bosley is on the Raider basketball team, volleyball team, and track. She also enjoys biking, babysitting, and dodge ball. She was chosen because of her improved academic performance, positive attitude, and because she is always friendly and helpful.

Phillip Hartman is in the ninth grade and the son of Tracy Hartman and Randy Hartman. He enjoys reading, spending time with friends, and working on model cars. He is a member of the YAC committee, band, and golf. Teachers said he has been an outstanding student all year, leading by example and helping others who fall behind. His teachers appreciate the effects he has on the classroom.

The students for the month of November will receive donated gifts and coupons.

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*Menu 2005*

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Grilled Flaked Norwegian Salmon & Gulf Shrimp Pasta with Garden Vegetables & Roasted Garlic Basil Cream Sauce  
Cornmeal Crusted Great Lakes Whitefish

~ Side Courses ~

Twice Baked Potatoes  
Caramelized Shallot Mashed Potatoes  
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