

# Gear FAQs

New to waterfowl hunting and have questions about equipment? This Fish & Game resource answers the most commonly asked questions about hunting gear. From selecting your first shotgun to choosing the right decoys, these practical answers will help you make informed decisions about your equipment investments. This guide is part of our complete resource collection for waterfowl hunters - visit [fishandgame.org.nz](http://fishandgame.org.nz) for more information.

## Guns

Several types of shotguns are suitable for waterfowl hunting, including single-shot, double-barrel (over/under or side-by-side), pump-action, and semi-automatic models. Most hunters use a 12-gauge, but hunters with a smaller frame, or those who prefer a lower recoiling gun, will sometimes use a sub-gauge (largely any shotgun other than 12 gauge) for ease of handling. Beginner waterfowl hunters will often start with a double-barrel 12-gauge shotgun, but most New Zealand hunters use semi-automatic 12-gauges. When purchasing your shotgun, you don't need to spend a fortune as well-maintained second-hand options can be reliable and affordable. The key factor is to have a gun that fits you well. Don't hesitate to ask staff in the shop to help you, a spacer should be provided with your shotgun.

### Q. What choke should I use?

When waterfowl hunting, the choice of choke depends on the range at which you expect to shoot and the ammunition you use. Most hunters now use steel as lead is prohibited within 200m of open water and the below choke details refer to using steel (note steel patterns tighter than lead and alternative non-toxic choices).

- **Skeet** Ideal for close-range shots (15-25 metres), such as when ducks are decoying into a spread. It offers a wider pattern, making it more forgiving.
- **Improved cylinder (1/4)** A good all-around choice for medium-range shots (25-35 metres). It balances shot spread and density, making it versatile for most waterfowl hunting situations.
- **Modified (1/2)** Best for longer-range shots (35-45 metres) that might be needed on larger water bodies. Half choke produces a tight pattern, so is only suited to use by more proficient waterfowl hunters.
- **Full and improved modified (3/4) chokes** should NOT be used for steel at any time.

If you're new to waterfowl hunting, starting with a skeet choke and targeting close birds is recommended. Always pattern your shotgun with your chosen choke and ammunition to ensure it performs well at the ranges you intend to shoot at. Grab some Fish & Game pattern sheets from our offices and pattern your gun - more details are written on the pattern sheets.

### Q. Do I need a retrieving dog?

A trained retrieving dog can greatly enhance your hunting experience. Dogs are invaluable for retrieving waterfowl from large bodies of water, medium-to-large rivers, ponds with deep water or waterbodies with dense surrounding vegetation. While a dog not essential for hunting shallow ponds, paddocks, puddles, or small streams, a dog is highly recommended if you plan to get serious about waterfowl hunting as it will open up many more hunting opportunities.

### Q. Do I need a set of waders?

Waders are a practical and often necessary piece of equipment. They are useful for setting up or retrieving decoys and for staying warm in colder conditions. If your hunting companion has a pair, you might manage without them in the short-term. However, if you plan to hunt regularly throughout the season it is well worth investing in a pair.

### Q. How many decoys will I need?

The number of decoys you'll need varies based on the time of year and the hunting situation. Early in the season, larger spreads of decoys can be useful but later in the season, when mallards are settled into their routines, fewer decoys are often sufficient. A good starting point is 12 high-quality floating decoys, which will cover most situations. If a large decoy spread is required, there is always the option of pooling decoys with your hunting companions or buying second hand and cleaning or re-painting them.

**Q. Do I Need a Motion Duck Decoy?**

Not necessarily, but motion in your decoy spread can make a big difference, especially on calm days. Here are some options to add movement to your spread

- **Spinning wing decoys** These work well early in the season when young, inexperienced ducks are more likely to respond. They're also effective when hunting over puddles, paddocks, or stubble.
- **Bubbling/splashing decoys** These add realistic motion on calm days, helping to make your spread more convincing.
- **Jerk cords** A budget-friendly DIY option, jerk cords are simple, effective, and just as good as pricier electronic decoys for creating movement.

**Q. Is camo critical?**

No, camouflage clothing isn't critical for waterfowl hunting, but it can certainly help. Waterfowl have excellent eyesight, so blending into your surroundings is important. Wearing drab, natural-coloured clothing like dark greens, browns, and tans will reduce your visibility.

To stay concealed

- Cover exposed skin, especially white areas like your face and hands, using gloves, face paint, or a mask.
- Let your well-covered maimai conceal you (be it nets or brush)
- Use the natural environment to your advantage by positioning yourself where the scrub, trees or contour of a riverbank can break up your outline.
- Avoid unnecessary movement, as waterfowl will be quick to notice it.

Camouflage clothing is more about convenience than necessity—if you dress in drab coloured clothing and use natural cover effectively, it's not always required.

**Q. How do I call in a duck?**

You don't need to be an expert to call in mallards successfully. Start simple, focus on practicing a basic greeting call, and use it at the right moments.

A basic greeting call of five or so consecutive quacks ("quack-quack-quack-quack-quack") is easy to learn and effective. It mimics a mallard hen trying to get the attention of passing ducks. The air going through the call should come from your diaphragm not your cheeks. To achieve this, try blowing a 'whit' or a 'woot' sound into your caller.

Call when ducks are flying away or side on (tips and tails), not directly heading toward you. The goal is to grab their attention and turn them toward your spread.

When they ducks look like they are committed, avoid calling when ducks are already coming in - they might spot something wrong if you overdo it.

With a little practice and good timing, even a basic call can help bring ducks into range. Remember, it's more about sounding natural than being fancy!

**Q. What call should I buy?**

When choosing a duck call, focus on finding one that suits your skill level. A key decision is between single-reed and double-reed calls

**Single-reed calls**

- Offer more range and versatility, making them great for producing a variety of duck sounds.
- Slightly harder to master, so they might require more practice for beginners.

**Double-reed calls**

- Easier to use and more forgiving, making them a good choice for beginners.
- Excellent for producing raspy, realistic quacks but less range than single-reed calls.

There are many brands available. Opt for a mid-range priced call—these tend to offer a good balance of quality and affordability. Avoid the cheapest calls, as they may not sound as realistic or hold up well over time.

Remember, the most important factor is practice. A mid-priced call, whether single or double reed, will perform well in the field when you've spent time learning to use it.