

HUNTING SAFETY

A Safety Handbook for
Maltese Hunters



FKNK

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HUNTING SAFETY

by

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Appreciation

The Federation for Hunting and Conservation - Malta (FKNK) wants to thank the Minister of Interior, the Hon. Michael Farrugia and the Commissioner of Police, Lawrence Cutajar who have offered the facility for this booklet to be distributed free of charge to hunters when these pay their hunting licence.

Thank you,
Lino Farrugia
CEO



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Introduction

Federico Cusimano, the author of this Hunting Safety guide, was born in Palermo on August 7, 1969, is married with two daughters and now lives and works for over twenty years in Rome. In his role of journalist and television author, he has conducted several TV documentaries about sustainable hunting activities all over the world, including four TV episodes in collaboration with the Federation for Hunting and Conservation - Malta (FKNK) about the Maltese socio-cultural traditions of hunting and trapping. These episodes, which were commissioned by the FKNK, were all aired on the *Caccia e Pesca* Italian TV Channel and on the Maltese TV Channels of PBS and SMASH.

A born hunter, Federico, loves all forms of hunting, his main passions being big game hunting and that of hunting over hunting dogs, which he undertakes in Italy and in several other countries. He has led the way for the magazine *Caccia Passione* and collaborates with the major Italian hunting publications, including: *Diana*, *Ball Hunting*, *Hunting and Nature*, etc. Federico was vice president of the Safari Club International Central Italy Chapter, and is currently a regional representative of its Italian Chapter, besides being also a member of the Italian CIC delegation. He chairs a group of hunters who formed an association for the hunting and conservation of the wild boar.

After so many years of field experience all over the continents, Federico is firmly convinced that modern sustainable hunting, land management, exploitation of wild species, and agriculture can all be important economic and environmental resources, and essential for the hunting tourist's contact with nature, in many areas of Italy and many other countries in the Mediterranean basin.

The FKNK regards safety in hunting as the prime concern whenever and wherever hunting occurs. The FKNK has thus produced this English version (the Maltese version is in the pipeline) of this safety hunting guide, which the FKNK will launch at its forthcoming Country & Game Expo that will take place at the end of August 2017, the eve of the autumn hunting open season. Furthermore, the FKNK foresees the distribution of this guide to all Maltese

and Gozitan on their 2018 hunting licence renewal, besides to any new hunting licence applicants.

This safety guide should be an easy handbook for any hunter, also because it is written in layman's words, and even though the unique hunting situation on the Maltese islands only entails the use of the smooth-bore shotgun for hunting purposes, the safety references with regards the use of other firearms, in particular rifles, are still included, especially since nowadays a substantial number of Maltese hunters travel abroad on hunting expeditions where they make use of hunting rifles. This guide should not be considered exhaustive in the hunting safety aspect.

The FKNK also aspires that this hunting safety handbook, together with the established FKNK Code of Conduct and Practice ethics (relevant extracts from which are being included at the end of this booklet), will form part of the syllabus, of the Sustainable Wildlife Use Malta Academy, which the FKNK launched in late 2015. The Academy's main goal is the development of a Course that new hunting licences applicants have to undertake before they can sit for the Test to obtain their licence, since a fundamental part of the Course's programme will include the knowledge of firearms handling and safety proficiency.

FKNK
July 2017



Safety, general principles when handling, taking care of and maintaining firearms.

When out hunting, safety is one of the most relevant and fundamental elements to be considered. It may happen that a few rules, good hunting practices, or simply being careful, are disregarded due to excessive self-confidence or the habits one may have developed after many years of hunting. There lies the risk. As we are dealing with potentially dangerous tools, the risk is always there.

In these pages, we will try to face the matter of safety in the clearest and simplest way possible. In most cases, small tips and good habits can make the difference. A simple but still very important *vade mecum* to turn to when handling firearms or carrying out activities in the open air which may be dangerous for oneself and others is:

“The firearm that causes accidents is always the one that is unloaded”. By mentioning this old saying, we can state that, when handling a firearm, it is extremely important to check whether it is loaded or unloaded. It is therefore necessary that, wherever and in whichever situation, we must check whether the firearm is loaded. This good practice should always be followed, without any exceptions.

Prior to using a firearm, we must always make sure that its mechanism works properly. Thorough inspection of the barrels, of the trigger guard or of the bolt and of the safety mechanism is always needed. It is also important to clean the firearm after it has been used for hunting or at firing ranges. At least once a year, firearms should be disassembled, cleaned and inspected. This procedure, which is essential to guarantee that the firearm is safe and lasts long, should be performed by an expert, who can verify how worn each single piece is and replace it in case of need.



Always check that your firearm is unloaded

The storage of firearms

The safe storage of firearms at home and elsewhere is particularly important. Ammunition should be safely stored separately.

Firearms must be stored completely unloaded in secure locations out of the reach of children and of unauthorized adults.

In most European Countries it is compulsory to store firearms in armoured cabinets. In Malta, there is no such obligation; however, owners of firearms must ensure that unauthorized people cannot have access to them. Therefore, in order to avoid any issues, as the question is extremely delicate and those who fail to store their firearms properly are severely punished by law, it is better to have an armoured cabinet available for firearm storage.

It goes without saying that a firearm must be stored safely not only at home but also anywhere else. It should never be left unattended, anytime and anywhere, except when in safe storage as explained above. A common example is when, after going hunting, one stops at a bar or restaurant leaving the firearm in the car. In this case, both the firearm/s and any ammunition should be stored out of sight from any visible sight from outside the vehicle which should be locked. Ideally, the firearm must be taken with you, completely unloaded and in its case so as to ensure its correct storage. Hereunder are the salient sections concerning licensing and safekeeping of firearms from the Maltese relative legislation:

"Cap 480 Arms Act

Part 3 - Licences

(3) (a) An application for a licence under this Part to keep in any premises firearms or ammunition shall specify the premises where the said firearms and ammunition are to be kept and the licence shall only be granted on condition that the approved firearms and ammunition are kept locked safely and separately within such premises and that such fire arms be kept unloaded.

(b) A change in the approved premises shall be notified to the Commissioner within fifteen days prior to the date of such change.

The storage of firearms

(4) (a) Saving the provisions of article 11(1), a licence to a person to have in his possession, under his effective control or to carry outside any premises or appurtenances any firearm, or ammunition under article 5(1) shall only be granted in order that the said firearm or ammunition be used for sporting activities.

*(6) Any firearm licensed under this article for target shooting -
(a) may only be carried during a sporting activity in a licensed shooting range or facility, and to and from such range or facility within such period of time, as may be prescribed, before and after such sporting activity;
(b) shall be kept unloaded and secure when being carried to and from a shooting range or facility as aforesaid."*



Store your firearm with the greatest possible care

The transportation of firearms

We should first of all clarify the difference between transporting firearms and, as in our specific case, transporting firearms during hunting.

Transporting means taking the firearm off one's own private property, without it being ready for use (ex. the firearm is locked in the boot of the car). In Malta one can carry a maximum of two firearms during hunting.

During transportation, firearms must be unloaded, meaning unloaded and safely stored in their cases. This is also true when travelling from one hunting area to another by vehicles. In this case, prior to putting the firearm into its case, one must make sure that it is indeed unloaded. In that respect, it is worth remembering that it is not enough for the cartridge in the barrel to be removed for the firearm to be considered safe, those in the magazine or clip must also be removed. In order to guarantee safety, the firearm must be completely deprived of ammunition.

When walking from one hunting area to another, it is still necessary to unload the firearm completely. This is also true when, during hunting, one should cross an obstacle.

Once hunting is over, prior to putting the shotgun into its case, it is necessary to verify that it has been unloaded completely. In the case of rifles, it is necessary to remove the bolt completely and store it separately from the rifle.



Check, once more, that your firearm is unloaded

General safety rules



Handling a firearm always entails a potential risk for oneself and for others. Therefore, apart from abiding by all the laws established for correct firearm handling and storage, it is also necessary to follow common sense rules aimed at safeguarding everybody's safety.

Any assembled firearm must be considered to be a loaded gun; hence, it must be handled with extreme care.

No firearm, even if it is considered to be unloaded, must ever be pointed in the direction of another person, a house, a car, a dog, or any other animal which is not to be hunted.

Firearms must be loaded carefully: in the case of break-action rifles or shotguns, before loading, one must first check that the barrel/s are clear of obstructions, when the barrel/s must be pointed to the ground. Such guns must be closed with their barrels pointed downward.

When loading a rifle or any semi-automatic shotgun, after opening the bolt, one must always check that the barrels are clear of obstructions; then,

General safety rules

barrel/s must be pointed upwards and loaded.

When walking from one place to another or crossing obstacles such as ditches, fences or small walls, firearms must always be unloaded, or kept open as in the case of break-action guns. It is good practice never to rely on the safety catch only, which works on the trigger, because in case of accidental falls, the catch may break and cause accidental discharge.

One must always check where other hunters are located and monitor the surrounding environment so as to know exactly where to shoot and where not to shoot. This activity must be carried out before hunting, so as to know exactly where to shoot even in the most chaotic moments of hunting.

During hunting, hunters must keep their finger away from the trigger until they are ready to shoot. They must identify the target precisely prior to shooting. They must never shoot if they are not sure of where the shot will end up in case it does not reach the target.



Any assembled firearm should be considered to be a loaded gun

Shooting distances with different types of hunting firearms

Shooting distances and hunting areas are strictly regulated by law. Beyond what is established by law, it is worth remembering that common sense should always prevail. Thus, we recommend and encourage hunters to pay greater attention to shooting distances beyond what is established by law.

Apart from what is established by law, it is necessary to carefully check the area where hunting is taking place. Hunters must always know where their shot will end up. When hunting in a flat field with a rifled barrel firearm, hunters must never shoot at eye-level. Instead, an angle which will make the shot, regardless of whether it hits the target or not, end up on the ground must be taken.

The type of ground and vegetation should be evaluated. Shooting in the direction of particularly hard grounds, rocks or water may cause bullets/lead shot to ricochet uncontrollably.

Further relative important extracts from the Maltese legislation follow:

" LN 409/76 (updated)
CONSERVATION OF WILD BIRDS
[S.L.504.71 15

18 (1) Without prejudice to regulation 9, no person shall:

(f) during the open season for the hunting of birds at sea:

(i) hunt or attempt to hunt, at sea, any bird which is not included in Part B of Schedule II;

(ii) hunt or attempt to hunt at sea:

(aa) within, or less than, three kilometers from the coastline, from a boat or any sea-craft, or

(bb) beyond three kilometers from the coast from a boat or sea-craft which is being driven at more than 5 kilometers per hour: Provided that on the open sea, for safety reasons, the use of a boat or sea-craft with a maximum speed of

Shooting distances with different types of hunting firearms

18 kilometers per hour may be authorized for hunting;

(iii) carry at sea, within a distance of three kilometers from the coastline, a fire-arm licensed for hunting game which is loaded;

(g) no person shall, while in or on any motor vehicle or aircraft, be in possession of any fire-arm which is loaded or outside its case, or go in pursuit of any bird, or hunt or attempt to hunt, take or attempt to take any bird.

(2)

(a) No person shall carry a fire-arm, whether loaded or not, that is not in its case, or discharge any fire-arm, while within 200 meters from any town or village, or other inhabited area, or any of the beaches listed in Schedule VII, or within a distance of 50 meters from main or arterial roads: Provided that this distance of 50 meters shall not apply in the case of secondary roads and country lanes: Provided further that the fire-arm is not aimed in the direction of the road, whether main, arterial, secondary or a country lane."



Different forms of hunting

The hunting and trapping methods traditionally used on the Maltese islands are better described as follows:

"covert shooting" – shooting at game birds from within a stone hide or near a thicket (covert);

"walked up" - walking with a dog or dogs over hunting terrain to flush out game such as quail and woodcock, and occasionally wild rabbit;

"shooting at sea" - waiting on a boat out at sea for hours on end hoping to shoot at any migratory wild duck that might fly within range;

"ferreting" - putting ferrets into burrows to flush out rabbits either for the gun or into nets set at the bolt-holes of the burrows.

In the next few pages, we will treat different forms of hunting, also those that are not possible on Malta, trying to highlight the critical points for each.

Overall, we can say that there are some forms of hunting which are particularly risky due to their very nature. Collective hunting expeditions, such as boar hunting, given the presence of several different subjects in the field such as hunters, beaters, dogs, require particular attention and procedures aimed at guaranteeing safety. Other forms of hunting such as mountain hunting or hunting that requires great physical effort demand physical training and attention to detail and the loads being transported. Hunters must always guarantee their own safety and the safety of their hunting partners but also the safety of the wild animals which are not to be hunted.



Whichever is your hunting activity, be safe

Hunting apparel and the use of high-visibility garments



Hunting apparel has always, in one way or another, characterized hunters. Traditionally, we have always preferred sober clothes to camouflage apparel, which are typical of American and Northern European hunters.

However, over the years, the use of camouflage clothes locally has probably become more 'fashionable'. This does not necessarily increase safety, as for instance it has become evident how high-visibility apparel may guarantee greater safety, in other forms of hunting which is not available locally. In fact, all over Europe and in most other countries over the world the use of high-visibility apparel has become common practice.

For some forms of hunting, it is compulsory to wear high-visibility orange waistcoats, jackets or caps. It would be a good idea to wear high-visibility apparel in all forms of hunting, not only in boar hunting, where it is compulsory. There are several reasons for that: first of all, it makes it possible to clearly spot other hunters over the same territory, which makes hunting and shooting safe. Most of the wild animals that are hunted cannot distinguish colours, hence, hunting would not be impaired. All apparel manufacturers have brought out high-quality technical clothes with orange inserts. Many jackets are double-sided which makes it possible to have two jackets in one:

Hunting apparel and the use of high-visibility garments

one to use while hunting, and the other, by turning it inside out, after hunting.

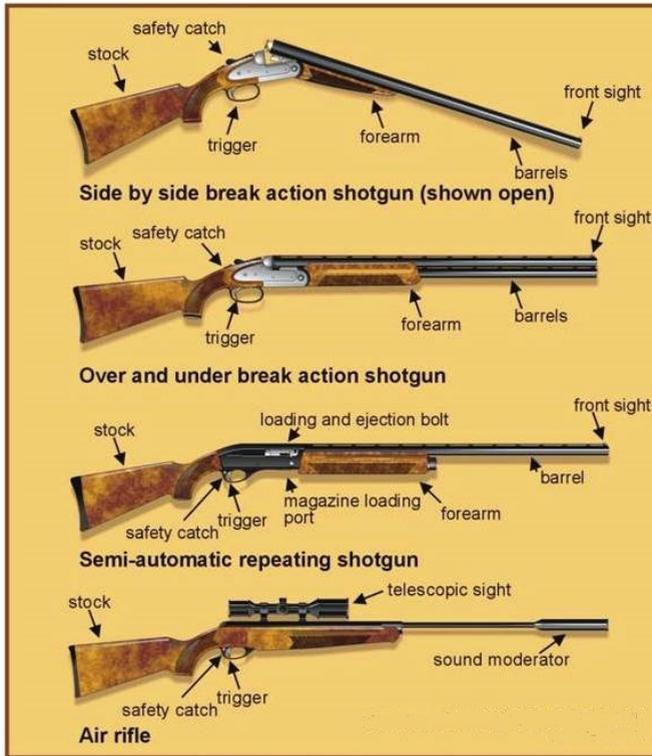
The use of brightly-coloured garments, even hats, is extremely important when hunting with pointing dogs. When hunting woodcock, for example, it is extremely important to know exactly where the dog is standing in the most chaotic moments so as to be able to shoot safely. Today, it is increasingly more common to see waistcoats both for pointing dogs, which make them visible in a thick wood, and for hounds, boar hunting dogs in particular, which, apart from providing dogs with greater visibility, protect them from attacks by boars as they are made of particularly resistant fabrics.

The use of high-visibility garments is also extremely relevant for mountain hunting. In this case, the reasons are different but nonetheless important. In the case of an accident for example, the possibility of being easily spotted by binoculars or a helicopter may save one's life.

In conclusion, when hunting, it is always advisable to wear a garment which helps identification even in a thick wood; this is crucial for our safety and the safety of others,.



Hunting with smooth bore shotguns



Different types of shotguns and an Air-Rifle

Smooth bore shotguns are the firearms most Maltese hunters own and are permitted to use locally for hunting, the air-rifle being the only exception, which use is also permitted for wild rabbit hunting.

These guns can be divided into double-barrel shotguns, with side-by-side (S/S) or over-under (O/U) barrels, and single-shot single-barrel shotguns or semi-automatic shotguns allowing up to 3 shots to be fired.

It is also worth mentioning combination shotguns which have one or two smooth barrels and one rifled barrel. Their use is mainly for mountain hunting, and we will describe them later. Wildfowling (not in Malta) foresees the use of over-under shotguns with two barrels of different calibres, 16, 20 and 28 for example.

Hunting with smooth bore shotguns

As far as double-barrel and single-barrel break-action shotguns are concerned, it is extremely important to check that their safety catch is functional. If the frame and the barrel do not close perfectly, it is advisable to have a gunsmith check the firearm. Prior to loading, hunters must check that the barrels are clear of obstructions. During hunting, it is advisable to walk with the firearm open and carried over the arm. This guarantees that the firearm is inoffensive. Only when ready to shoot, hunters must close their firearms and shoot.

Even when carrying the firearm open, if one falls accidentally, or should cross ditches or very thick woods or put the firearm on the ground, it is always necessary to remove any cartridge from the barrels and check that these are clear of twigs, leaves or mud.

During hunting, when holding the firearm closed, it is necessary that the barrels are pointed either upwards or downwards. The typical position is that of holding the firearm's butt under the armpit with the frame at the level of the wrist.

Smooth bore semi-automatic shotguns, as established by law, may be used for hunting with one shot in the barrel and two cartridges in the magazine, with three shots maximum.

More relative legislation extracts below:

"18 (1) Without prejudice to regulation 9, no person shall:

(2)

(b) No person shall be in possession of any fire-arm, licenced for hunting game, which has a magazine capable of holding more than two shots at any time."

Semi-automatic shotguns are extensively used by hunters, also in Malta. This is because they allow for one additional shot to be fired and because they are very handy for some forms of hunting.

Hunting with smooth bore shotguns

In the case of stalking or still hunting, it is important always to load the semi-automatic shotgun while keeping the barrel pointed upward. Although it is more awkward than with break-action firearms, it is always necessary to check that the barrel is clear of obstructions prior to loading semi-automatic shotguns. Thus, the shotgun should be opened and the barrel checked from the anterior part. When crossing an obstacle or a ditch, the firearm must be unloaded. With semi-automatic shotguns, it is extremely important that, when opening the bolt and unloading the barrel, a cartridge is not loaded simultaneously into the chamber. In this case, all three cartridges must be unloaded.

As for boar hunting, and more in general for ungulate hunting, the use of expanding ammunition is strictly forbidden.

Although it is not forbidden, it is nonetheless advisable not to use shotgun slug ammunition for boar hunting. Slugs that are fired with shotguns tend to ricochet more than slugs that are fired with rifles.



Unload your firearm prior to crossing an obstacle

Hunting with rifled barrel firearms

In the last 30 years, given the rise in the number of ungulates in Europe, boars and roe deer in particular, an increasing number of hunters have turned to hunting this type of game. Thus, apart from the areas where traditionally large ungulates have always been hunted, there have been an increasing number of enthusiasts taking up new forms of hunting.

Undoubtedly, the best way to hunt large-size animals is by using specific firearms and ammunition. This is the reason, apart from target shooting, why more hunters own and use rifled barrel firearms than in the past.

Rifled barrel firearms can be divided into: double-barrel rifles, with side-by-side or over-under barrels (express-like rifles), single-barrel break-action rifles (Kipplauf-like), bolt-action rifles and semi-automatic carbines.

The purchase of these type of rifles is possible in Malta, however, also because of the total lack of big-game on the Maltese islands, the use of these firearms for hunting locally is prohibited and the local enthusiasts look forward to the promised setting-up of an adequate firing range in 2018, where at least, one would be able to use their rifles for target shooting.

Normally, the use of firearms similar to those available for military use is forbidden for hunting by legislation. Some European countries even forbid the use of semi-automatic rifles for hunting. It is worth remembering that hunters should always behave like hunters, never turning into a sort of warriors. This is also particularly true when it comes to considering safety. Hunters should never fire when the situation is particularly difficult or when shooting is not a hundred percent safe.

In terms of the rules to be followed when loading a rifled barrel firearm, these are exactly the same as those listed for smooth bore shotguns.

For break-action carbines in particular, whether rotating bolt or straight-pull carbines, it is advisable never to load them immediately. In this form of hunting, more than in others, one should fire only after having evaluated the target carefully; thus, there is enough time to operate the bolt and load the

Hunting with rifled barrel firearms

chamber prior to shooting.

It is however important to reflect upon the range of rifled barrel firearms. As it is well known, rifling makes the bullet spin on its own axis, which allows for greater velocity and, consequently, a longer range to be reached than with smooth bore shotguns. In that respect, the law does not, normally, provide clear indications as to what distances should be respected.

It is evident how difficult it is to calculate the distance correctly. In this case, it is therefore necessary to use common sense and the greatest possible care. In that respect, one must be sure of where the shot will end up, regardless of whether it reaches the target. In the next few chapters, we will deal with the different forms of hunting with their peculiar aspects of safety. It must however be reiterated that given the potential danger linked to the very long range of rifled barrel firearms, hunters must shoot only when they are sure that there are no potential dangers or that the shot will hit the target.



Only shoot when you are sure and safe

Wild Boar Hunting

Wild Boar hunting has become the most widespread form of hunting in Europe. It is a form of collective hunting carried out by a large number of hunters simultaneously. Given that it poses great risks, it must be carried out according to specific rules, in particular in terms of safety, which must be adhered to scrupulously.

First of all it is necessary to outline and mark the territory where hunting is taking place so as to avoid that other hunters or people who may be walking in the woods find themselves in the hunting area without realizing it and therefore in danger. The territory should be marked with red flags or signs stating that boar hunting is under way, which must be placed all along the borders and access routes of the hunting area.

Hunters are grouped into teams which, on the basis of regional regulations, are assigned a given territory for their hunting. Each hunting party is organized internally according to a sort of hierarchy. The leader of each hunting party assigns the hides to the hunters in his party, and also shows the direction in which to shoot. In that respect it is worth remembering that, unless there are further limitations linked to a specific hunting area, the standard angle to respect for shooting is a 30-degree angle. It is therefore advisable, once the hide has been reached, to check the exact position of close-by hunters and then mark, by using trees as a reference, the maximum distance within which to shoot both in front and, if possible, behind one's position. Shooting sideways is never allowed. This recommendation is particularly important as it helps hunters decide whether to shoot in the chaotic moment of the hunt itself. Having taken references correctly, hunters immediately know if the boar is within their shooting distance.

It is also important to check references for shooting distance immediately. One should never shoot too far if one does not have a clear vision of what is beyond the target. In any case, hunters must remain extremely calm before taking each shot.

In this form of hunting more than in any other, it is necessary for hunters to wear high-visibility garments. Moreover, all regional regulations have made

Wild Boar Hunting

the use of this sort of clothing compulsory for boar hunting. Therefore, both hunters and batters must wear at least an orange waistcoat that can be immediately spotted. It is also advisable to have the dogs wear special waistcoats which, apart from making them immediately visible in a thick wood, give them some protection if they are attacked by boars.

Hunters must reach hides while carrying their firearms unloaded and in their case. Once they have reached the hide, they can load their firearm only after the signal that hunting has started is given. During hunting, firearms must be pointed downward. Once the signal is given that the hunting is over, firearms must be unloaded immediately and placed into their cases again. Shooting before hunting has started or after it is over is strictly forbidden.

It is extremely important to shoot only and exclusively after the target has been clearly spotted. It is forbidden to shoot into vegetation or when one does not have a clear vision of the boar. In this form of hunting, there are several people in the woods, the beaters, and many dogs driving the boars. It is forbidden for hunters to move from their hides during the hunt. In case a boar is injured, they must never reach it to kill it. There are usually one or more beaters who are allowed to do that. And these should be called to carry out this action. Also, when a dog is standing still barking at a boar, it is strictly forbidden for hunters to reach the boar to kill it. There

are specific people who have this role. These people should, among other things, carry out this activity in all safety by asking close-by hunters to unload their firearms during these operations.

As for the firearms to be used for boar hunting, apart from reiterating that it is strictly forbidden to use expansion ammunition, so-called buckshot, the law does not pose any limitations in terms of use of smooth bore vs. rifled barrel firearms.

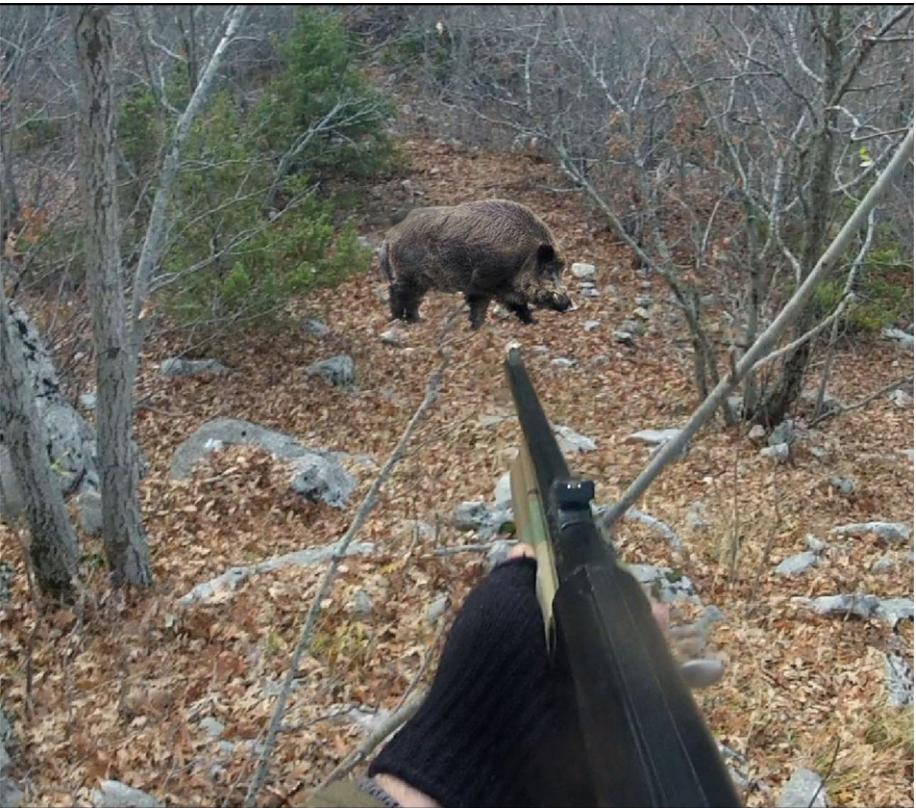
It is however advisable to use rifled barrel carbines, both single-barrel semi-automatic carbines and express-like double-barrel carbines. Slugs that are fired with smooth bore shotguns, both 12 and 20 calibre (which is the most commonly used) shotguns, tend to ricochet more than slugs fired with a rifled

Wild Boar Hunting

barrel firearm.

In terms of calibres, the most commonly used are the following: .30.06 Spr. .308 Win. .300 Win. for semi-automatic firearms; 444 Marlin, 8x57 JSR and 9,3x72 R for express-like firearms.

Once hunting game is over and the firearm has been unloaded, each hunter must verify where their shots ended up and promptly report any blood trail they may find, which suggests that an animal has been injured. It is a priority to search for any injured animal.



Never shoot unless sure and safe

Walked-up Wild Boar hunting

Walked-up wild boar hunting, using a single dog and undertaken by a small number of hunters, is a form of hunting which, although it is still not very widespread, is steadily gaining ground given the good results which can be achieved with this technique, mainly in places where hunting is particularly invasive and difficult to carry out.

This form of hunting foresees a limited number of hides and one bloodhound's handler. It includes four different phases: mapping, arranging the hides, finding and killing the boar. Mapping is carried out by leading the dog on a 3-6 metre leash all along the perimeter of a boar access area. If the dog signals that boars have entered the area recently, the handler places the hides close to the paths which boars take more frequently, and at a given distance from the border of the wood. Once the hides have been set up, the third and fourth phases start. The handler enters the wood with the dog on a long leash or, if the territory is favourable as is the case with very thick woods, off-leash in search of the animals. The use of one single dog, which does not drive the animals too much, allows for boars to reach the hides by walking or trotting, which also allows hunters to select the animal to kill, should this be required by hunting regulations.

As for safety rules, apart from strictly abiding by the general safety rules which have been extensively described earlier, hunters must follow some additional specific rules for this form of hunting.

It is fundamental to establish reliable communication channels between hunters. As there are few hides, which sometimes are moved from one place to another, it is necessary that all hunters know each other's movements. In that respect, it is strongly advised that transmitters-receivers are used. High-visibility garments are compulsory. Hunters must shoot only when they are a hundred percent sure of the target and of the territory behind it (the back-stop). They should always keep calm and observe the surrounding environment before shooting. At times, other hunters may not be visible, thus, it is extremely important to know their position so as to avoid shooting in their direction.

Finally, it is always better not to shoot if there is any doubt that shooting may not be safe.

Hunting with smooth bore shotguns from hides

In order to guarantee safety, regardless of whether hunting is taking place from a fixed hide or a temporary hide, firearms, which are basically kept inside the hides, must be handled with extreme care. Hunters must make sure their firearms are placed in a way so that they cannot fall accidentally. If there are two hunters in the hide, they must pay great attention to each other's shooting direction, and never shoot sideways as the hunting partner may stand in the shooting line. Thus, hunters must always shoot in front of or behind their stand. The barrel must always be pointed upwards. When leaving the hide, to collect the game, firearms must always be safe.

Any dogs in the hide should be kept away from the shotguns to avoid any accidental contact or dropping.

For this form of hunting, it is advisable to use single-barrel semi-automatic firearms given their loading mechanism. Hides are usually small, thus, with a semi-automatic firearm it is possible to load ammunition easily by aiming the barrel upward without the need to move.



Pay great attention to the direction you are shooting

Selective hunting with rifled barrel firearms

Selective hunting is the most effective approach when it comes to managing big-game species and the environment.

Selective hunters hunt alone or with a partner; stalking or from a hide/high seat. In the next few pages we will treat selective hunting from a hide/high seat, leaving other forms of selective hunting for later discussion.

When managing a given species, such as for example wild boar or deer, a hunting plan is drawn-up based on the study of the population and the number of each single species; the hunting plan is divided according to sex, ages and different hunting seasons. Selective hunters are usually assigned one or more animals to kill and one single position.

This type of hunting may be carried out from temporary or fixed hides, or from high-seats, which undoubtedly guarantee a better view of the area.

In terms of safety, it is advisable to respect the following rules. Hunters must reach and leave the hides while carrying their firearms completely unloaded and in their cases. In this form of hunting, shooting is always evaluated carefully and only happens after the animal to kill has been observed attentively. Thus, the hunter must load the gun only when ready to shoot. In this form of hunting, more than in any other, it is completely useless to have the firearm loaded before shooting. Hunters usually shoot while seated and rested. Thus, it is important to find the most stable position possible. Hunters must never shoot at animals that are on ridges or when they do not have a clear vision of what stands behind the animal to be killed. Shooting in the direction of houses or roads is forbidden. For this form of hunting, only rifled barrel bolt-action firearms, usually manually operated bolt-action carbines, with long ranges, are allowed. Thus, great attention should be paid to the shooting direction.

Shooting from high-seats, apart from offering the advantage of great visibility, offers the best angle to shoot, which is always downwards. This way, regardless of whether the shot reaches the target, one can be sure that it always ends up on the ground.

Finally, it is always advisable to carry a large backpack and a strong rope. When retrieving the killed animal, hunters must use the greatest care so as to guarantee their own safety.

[Watch out for what is behind the target \(the safe back-stop\)](#)

Hunting over gun-dogs

For a large number of hunters, gun-dogs represent the essence of hunting itself. It is the companion with which to share emotions and labours.

Whether they are pointing dogs, flushing dogs, hounds or bloodhounds, it is always essential to guarantee the safety and the wellbeing of our dogs.

Starting with transportation, the best possible conditions must be guaranteed.

It is necessary: to let dogs have enough air to breathe; to make regular stops during long journeys so as to allow dogs to move and relieve themselves. At each stop, they should be given enough water to drink. Dogs must never be left in the car in the sun.

The attitude to work of the breed chosen must be taken into account without expecting that a dog does a work it is not intended for. In other words, a greyhound cannot be asked to behave like a dachshund.

Technology has made great steps forward in terms of hunting dogs' safety. Dog collars with chips that provide real-time GPS localization are available on the market. These devices offer functions that obviously concern hunting. However, here, it is important to focus on safety. Hence, apart from showing hunters where their dogs are located, these collars are also essential in case of an accident, allowing hunters to find and retrieve their dogs promptly.

For hunting-hounds, there are particular special high-visibility jackets available for the dogs, which have the advantage of making dogs immediately visible vs. prey, and also the advantage of protecting dogs if they are attacked by the hunted animals.

Overall, it is always essential to identify the prey exactly before actually firing. Hence, hunters must pay great attention: dogs chasing a wild animal may be right behind it and not be seen. It is therefore essential for hunters to use their hearing as well as their sight and only shoot when they are sure of the target.

Hunting over gun-dogs

As far as pointing dogs or hounds are concerned, it is essential to consider that, once birds have taken flight or hares/rabbits have started running, dogs always tend to chase. Therefore, the prey should be allowed to distance itself from the dogs, enough for the latter not to be in the shooting direction. A good example for everybody is quail hunting since quails tend to fly very close to the ground. Hunters must never shoot if dogs are running after the flushed quails thereby being in the line of fire.

Once hunting is over, prior to placing dogs in the car again, they should be given enough water and food. Dogs, when hot and tired after hunting, must never be put in the car immediately after hunting. Hunters should check the overall condition of their dogs, that their paws are not bleeding and that their breathing is regular.

Sharing hunting with dogs is one of the best experiences hunters can have. This is why we must ensure that our four-legged companions are safe and well protected.



Protect your companions just like they protect you

Stalking with rifled barrel firearms

Selective hunting may also be in the form of stalking.

In terms of safety, apart from abiding by all the general safety rules highlighted earlier, it is important to remember that the firearm must be carried with the barrels pointing upward and with no cartridge loaded in the barrel. In this form of hunting, shooting only takes place after the target has been evaluated carefully; hence, there is enough time to operate the bolt and load the barrel if needed. If, after loading, the hunter decides not to shoot, the firearm must be unloaded prior to moving away.

When stalking, it is extremely important to evaluate the animal's position and the territory carefully. Before taking a shot, hunters must make sure there are no houses, roads, railways, etc. behind the target. Once the animal is spotted, it is easy to focus only on the animal and on preparing the shot, paying little attention to the surrounding environment. On the contrary, hunters must be sure of where the shot will end up regardless of whether it reaches the target. It is extremely important to consider the shooting angle: hunters should always prefer top-to-bottom trajectories, never shooting at animals that are on ridges.

Mountain hunting

A very exciting form of hunting is undoubtedly mountain hunting. This results as a consequence of the environment where the hunting takes place and because of the difficulties it poses. In terms of safety, this form of hunting poses some peculiar difficulties hunters must take into account.

First of all, it is important to remember that mountain hunting takes place in a difficult, uneven, tough territory. Hence, from garments to the equipment one should take, everything must be carefully checked, also in view of sudden changes in the weather and temperature. Hunters must use warm but light clothes, wearing several different layers. A large backpack is needed together with a high visibility garment, which might even be an orange cover for the backpack. In case of an accident or need for help, one can thus more easily be spotted by a helicopter. In case of areas completely or partially covered by snow, it may be necessary to wear spiked shoes and to carry along an appropriate stick which may be useful when crossing green or snowy slopes, to support the rifle in case of a shot (not beyond 100/200 metres), and also when using binoculars.

Mountain hunting may be carried out with both smooth bore shotguns and rifled barrel firearms.

As for small game hunting or wildfowling, a dog is usually used. Hunters must be particularly careful when walking on slippery or steep ground. Hunters must always pay great attention. The firearm must always be carried open or unloaded, over the shoulder, with barrels pointing upward. It is not enough to rely on the firearm's safety catch, which only controls the snaplock and, in case of an accidental fall, may get broken and allow a shot to be fired. Hunters must always have a good vision of the territory before firing a shot. Wild animals often seek refuge behind a small bump or in a gully. Hunters must always avoid taking any dangerous shots that, although they hit the target, would make retrieving dangerous.

For mountain hunting, combined firearms with two or three barrels are sometimes used. These firearms usually come with one or two smooth barrels and one rifled barrel. Safety rules remain the same: hunters must proceed with their firearm unloaded and one that has been chosen on the basis of the

Mountain hunting

type of game being hunted. Suitable ammunition must only be loaded immediately before shooting.

As for mountain hunting involving large mammals, for safety purposes, it is necessary to pay great attention to the shooting direction. Hunters must never shoot at animals that are on ridges. The type of ground where the animal to be killed is standing must be carefully evaluated: rocky ground may cause bullets to ricochet uncontrollably.

Hunters must also pay great attention when shooting from peaks into valleys: the shooting direction must be considered and hunters must be sure that the shot will end up on the ground should it not hit the animal. The risk of stray bullets is very high in these territories.

As for the selection of firearms, for this form of hunting, single-shot carbines or manually-operated bolt-action carbines are used. Firearms must always be carried unloaded, by their shoulder straps, and with the barrel pointing upward.

It is important to remember that mountain hunting is extremely demanding from a physical point of view; hence, one should never face a potentially hostile territory without suitable training. It is always advisable to go mountain hunting with a hunting partner.

Hunting on ponds or lakes (none are available on the Maltese islands)

Quite a high number of hunters love hunting aquatic birds in wetlands or on ponds or lakes.

From the point of view of safety, it is worth remembering that this form of hunting is mainly still hunting, although other forms such as stalking are permitted.

When walking in wetlands, which may be partially or completely submerged, hunters must be particularly careful as there may be the risk of falling into the water with the equipment and heavy clothing. If, in order to reach the hide, a boat is needed, a life jacket must always be worn. Firearms must be carried unloaded and in their cases.

The firearms which are usually used for this form of hunting are smooth bore semi-automatic shotguns. These firearms' loading mechanism is practical and safe given the hunting area. Firearms must always be loaded while the barrel is pointing upward.

The use of lead pellets/bullets is forbidden in wetlands in EU Member States.

When shooting on ponds or lakes, the likelihood that bullets will ricochet is extremely high, hence, great attention must be paid to the shooting direction. Hunters must make sure there is enough space so as to allow the shot to end without hitting anything else.

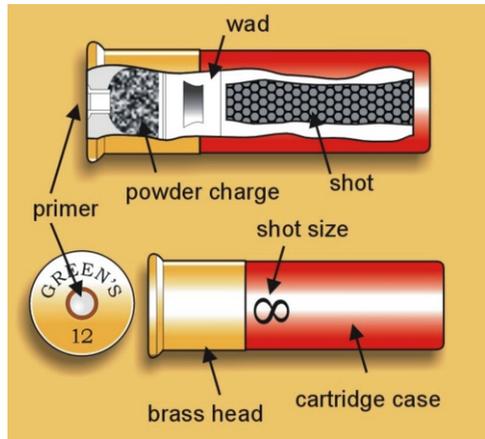


Be careful when moving in swamps

Ammunition

As for the storing of ammunition, there apply the same rules as those set for the storage of firearms. So, in summary, ammunition must be stored safely, in a secure location out of the reach of children and of unauthorized people. In addition, ammunition must be stored in a cool dry place.

As for handling ammunition during hunting, hunters must make sure that the bullet/cartridge they are loading is whole and that the shell does not have any bumps or cracks. As for metallic bullets/cartridges, hunters must also make sure that the cap does not present any cracks or anomalies.



Always check the bullet/cartridge before loading it

Hunting accessories



Every hunter is usually equipped with a number of accessories which may be useful for hunting and for their own safety as well.

The firearm shoulder strap is one of the most classic accessories. It is very useful for stalking with both smooth bore and rifled barrel firearms. It is essential for mountain hunting. By using the shoulder strap, it is possible to carry the firearm with the barrels pointing upward. When crossing an obstacle or uneven ground, the hands are free. It is however worth remembering that, in this specific case, it is not enough to carry the firearm with its barrels pointing upward and the safety catch in place, the firearm must always be unloaded. There are cases when the shoulder strap must be removed. This is when for example one is hunting in a thick wood, or in situations where it would be dangerous to have something hanging from the firearm. For this purpose, modern firearms are equipped with shoulder straps that can easily be removed when they are not needed or may be dangerous.

The use of transmitter-receivers, mainly at big-game driven hunts, has now become common practice. However, although they are extremely useful in

Hunting accessories

order to communicate the position of other hunters, they must only be used when needed. These should not be used to tell each other hunting stories or to say what is going on, but only to communicate a few useful information and instructions.

Other accessories which may be defined as 'modern' are those that protect ears: ear-muffs, ear plugs or earpieces. There are several such devices available on the market, including electronic tools which can be very useful indeed: apart from amplifying noises (hence, for safety purposes, they allow hunters to hear all that which can be heard in their surroundings), when shooting, they protect the hunters' ears from the damage caused by loud noises.

Knives are a real classic. All hunters carry a knife. From the point of view of safety, it is worth highlighting that, in a few situations, it is strongly advised and useful to have a knife with a sharp blade.

Lastly, it is advisable to get equipped with all those tools that are useful for the form of hunting one wants to engage and to get used to preparing one's pack by filling it with useful things and leaving unneeded weight behind.



Protect your ears

Reloading ammunition



A few enthusiastic hunters reload their own bullets/cartridges, while others are starting to do so for several different reasons. In particular, hunters who reload their own ammunition are always looking for the perfect bullet/cartridge for their firearm. Regardless of whether reloading concerns shell ammunition or ammunition for rifled barrel firearms, a few safety principles must be taken into account.

First of all, it is worth remembering that the same rules as those set out for gunpowder safe storage must be applied here.

For reloading, primers, apart from gunpowder, are needed; these must be handled with extreme care as they are high-potential propellants.

One of the most important aspects when reloading is to follow the gunpowder dosage instructions listed in the relevant manuals. In other words, depending on the type of ammunition, calibre, the type and weight of the shell and relevant gunpowder, ammunition reloading manuals establish a minimum

Reloading ammunition

and a maximum dosage for gunpowder, which is expressed in grains and not in grams. For information purposes, a grain is a very old unit of measurement which is still used in some fields including ammunition. One gram corresponds to 15.4324 grains.

For safety purposes, it is compulsory never to exceed these limits or use a lower number of gunpowder grains to reload.

Ammunition reloading is actually quite an easy operation, which however requires precision and care. One must always verify that the shell to be reloaded is whole, presenting with no bumps or cracks. For brass cartridges, the top must be carefully checked. The primer must be cleaned carefully. The total length of the ammunition must correspond to that mentioned in manuals.

Finally, great care in the storage of all the components needed for reloading must be taken by storing them in a cool, secure location out of the reach of children and of unauthorized people.



Reload your ammunition with extreme care

Hunting safety relevant extracts lifted from FKNK's Codes of Conduct and Practice

EXTRACT FROM FKNK'S CODE OF CONDUCT WITH REGARDS TO SAFETY

5. You are responsible for your actions. Meticulously observe the law.

(a) When you're not hunting;

- i. Always ensure that your shotgun does not pose a risk to yourself and others. The shotgun should only be loaded at the hunting site. At home your shotgun and cartridges ought to be stored safely and separately and always out of reach of others particularly children.
- ii. During transit, your shotgun should always be unloaded and kept within its pouch.
- iii. Upkeep and conduct regular maintenance and cleaning of your weapon.

(b) When you're hunting;

- i. Always follow the manufacturer's recommended cartridge charges for your shotgun.
- ii. Be cautious of any obstruction of the shotgun barrel.
- iii. A loaded shotgun should always be pointed upwards or downwards.
- iv. Do not carry your shotgun in a horizontal position.
- v. Unload your shotgun before tackling obstacles.
- vi. When transiting from a hunting site to another, it is recommended to unload the shotgun unless stalking.
- vii. Always note the whereabouts of other hunters and other people in your vicinity and ensure that they know yours.
- viii. Never discharge your weapon in the direction of a tree or a person notwithstanding the distance is perceived as being out of range.
- ix. Be aware that shotgun pellets have a tendency to rebound upon impact with certain surfaces such as rocks and the water surface.

Hunting safety relevant extracts lifted from FKNK's Codes of Conduct and Practice

EXTRACT FROM FKNK'S CODE OF PRACTICE WITH REGARDS TO SAFETY

Hunting on land

5. Always be wary of taking low aimed shots.
6. No unnecessary shots should be taken.
7. Keep your hunting dog under control particularly when in the vicinity of farmed land or when in the vicinity of a trapping site. Take good care of your dog.

Hunting at Sea

9. Always have safety equipment on board your vessel.
10. Always be accompanied when hunting at sea. Nonetheless, it is not considered prudent to have more than two shooters on any one vessel.
11. Always stay out of shooting range of other vessels at sea.
12. Bear in mind that unnecessary shifts in your position creates unwarranted disturbance and is annoying to others hunting in your vicinity and that it tends to ward off inbound wildfowl.
13. Wildfowl should not be intercepted if approaching another hunting vessel.
14. Other than to take shots, shotguns should have the safety catch on safe at all times.
15. Always shoot from a sitting or kneeling position. Never take shots from a standing position.
16. Be respectful of fellow hunters on the shores as well as fishermen.

Conclusions

With this booklet, we have tried to highlight a few regulations and rules which might be useful for safety purposes. We have mentioned a few aspects covered by current laws on hunting. Our intent when writing this *vade mecum* was to provide a few hints for reflection. Safety must be a value that each hunting enthusiast should look for and pursue each and every day and whenever hunting.

Hunting has always distinguished, no matter for what reason, those who have undertaken it. Hunters have always been special men/women. This heritage, for us modern hunters, comes from the dawn of time. This is the reason why we should preserve this legacy and do whatever we can to guarantee the safety of our hunting partners, of our dogs, of the environment, of those who do not hunt and even of those who are against hunting. Apart from our own safety! Statistics are mere numbers, even one single hunting accident is one too many. Conscious of this great responsibility, we must be careful and wary. Only by doing so, can we transmit to our children and the future generations the positive values of hunting.

Good luck to all and safe hunting!

Federico Cusimano



FKNK

Members



VO Malta



ELO 



O.M.P.O.



Klabbs fi hdan il-FKNK



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