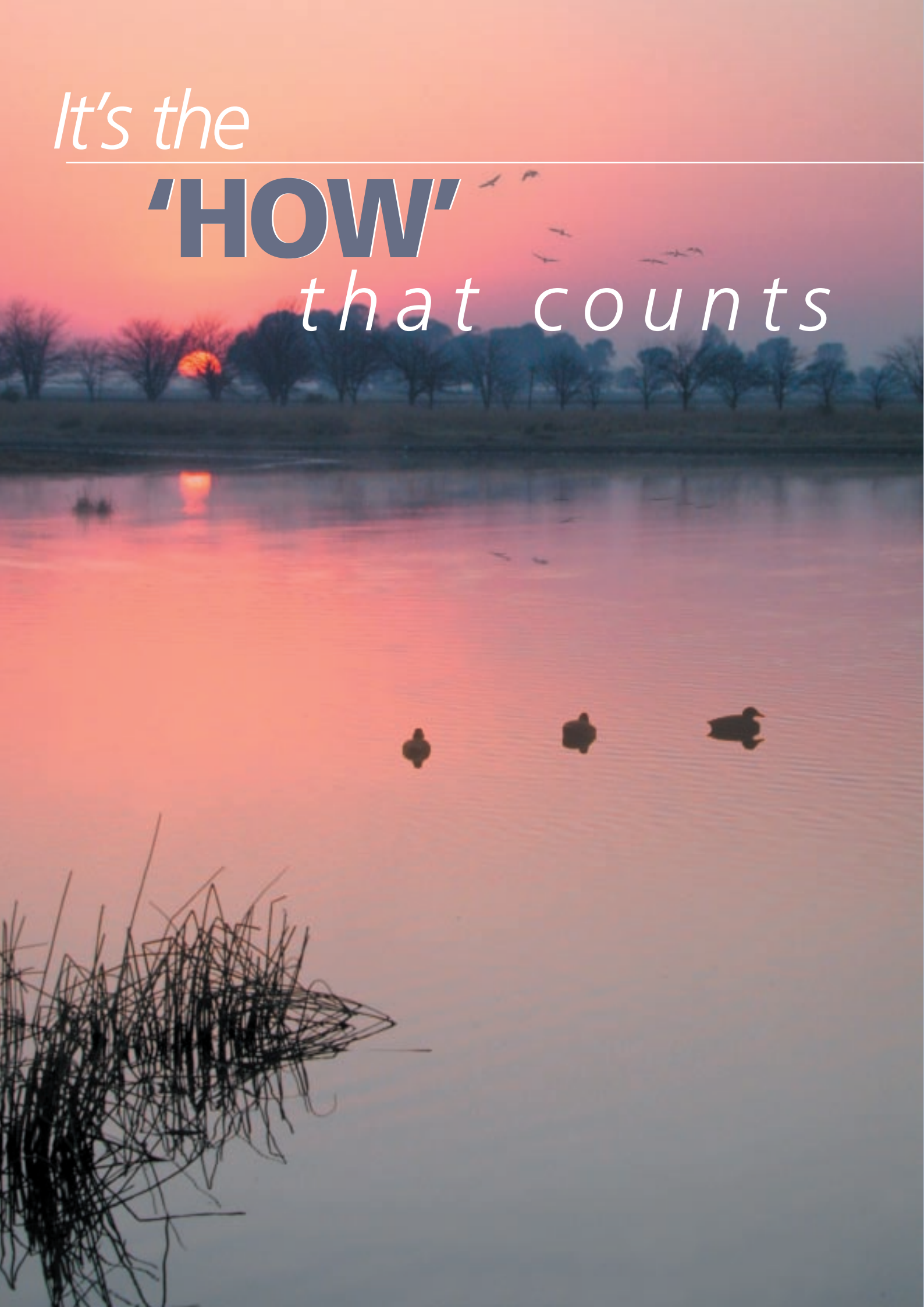


It's the

'HOW'

that counts



True sportsmen of the hunting fraternity generally have as companions those with whom they share their activities, people whose company they enjoy, and people who invariably mirror their own sentiment in respect of the ethics of the sport...

They occasionally get saddled with some thoughtless or careless person who either does not know or ignores the basic rule of good manners, good sportmanship and general veld behaviour. This sort of person, although in the minority, is not welcome if he cannot be educated to the finer points of the sport.

The hallmarks of a good companion afield and a responsible hunter go far beyond the obeying of the statutory laws. They involve a basic respect of property, companionship and the game being hunted. Examples are the shooting of gamebirds on the ground, or out of trees, when roosting. Although there may not be a law prohibiting this, no true sportsman would do it.

Correct species identification is especially important to ensure that only those legally permitted for the area in question are shot. Added to this point is the fact that many property owners, with or without justification, may protect certain species. This in particular should be clarified with the owner in good time and religiously respected if one wishes to shoot on his property again. On the other hand there are farmers who insist that certain species do incalculable damage to crops, and encourage their wholesale destruction in or out of season. Beware of such farmers, for they are generally misinformed as to the actual facts.

Educating the land-owner or the farmer in gamebird management and getting him to take an interest in improving habitat by planting cover and food goes a long way to ensuring a future for the sport.

A hunter who wishes to be invited to hunt with others more than once, should follow a few of the unwritten rules on the ethics of wingshooting. With experience, these will come naturally, but novices should make an effort to follow them.

Give your companion whenever possible as many opportunities as you yourself would like, the accepted practice being to take alternative shots. A good way to become unpopular is to continually try and out-gun your companions. Claiming birds you didn't actually hit is another aggravating point, so if in the slightest doubt, concede the bird. Bag sharing with an unsuccessful companion at the end of the day goes a long way to cementing good relationships.

A cardinal rule is never to infringe on farms where you have been previously invited by friends without their consent, or even make personal approaches to the land-owner which exclude the friend who originally took you to the farm in question. Violation of this courtesy could lead to a rapid end of what could have been a fine relationship.

Remember the adage, 'If you want to find out about a man, take him hunting', so if you want a return invitation, watch your manners and conduct yourself like a true sportsman, and do not forget that it is only courtesy to reciprocate the invitation if you are in a position to do so.

Emphasise the basics of hunting ethics and gun-safety to all your associates, but especially to youngsters, as they can only learn by good example.

Do not forget when gun dogs are involved, never to criticise your companion's dog's shortcomings, praise its good work, and ignore the bad. And above all, try not to handle his dog unless invited to do so by the owner.

Field trial rules and regulations had more in view, when first compiled, than just testing the skills of individual handlers and their dogs. They went far beyond that. They were created with specific objectives in mind and if you consider that they evolved in Victorian times and even earlier, you will understand that manners from both the hunter and his dog were of cardinal importance. Hence wingshooting was referred to as the 'Sport of Gentlemen'.

What a pity more hunters are not educated to the finer points of disciplined hunting over good dogs, as it gives an added dimension to the sport which ordinary pot-hunters can never achieve.

It is no wonder that even amongst experienced hunters and some field trialists there is the misconception that field trial dogs are not entirely suitable for use in hunting. However, if hunters were to discipline themselves and their dogs and apply the original objectives of field trialists, they would find well-trained field trial dogs to be far more than suitable. In fact they could be classed as the connoisseurs amongst hunters.

Much is heard about the hunter who fills his bag, but more emphasis should be placed on how he fills his bag!

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