

# Selecting The Right Turkey Choke

by L.P. Brezny



A .669-inch choke will shoot a baseball-sized pattern at 25 or 30 yards. That's very tight, and missing the whole bird is a real possibility. But at 40 to 50 yards, that ultra-tight pattern will become a deadly killing machine about the size of a basketball. Photo by Ron Sinfelt.

Turkey chokes are unique compared to other types of payload-control systems. A good turkey choke needs to put the greatest amount of pellets directly into a target area about 20 inches in circumference. Most other choke tube systems — like those designed for waterfowl or upland birds — are made to put uniform shot patterns on a 30-inch or larger area. The turkey gun and its choke-tube system don't get that luxury.

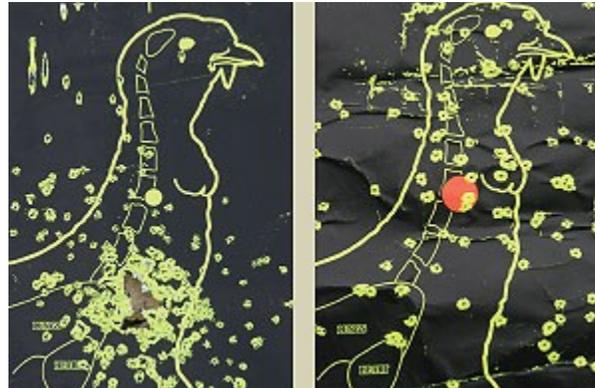
The bottom line here is you need to pattern your gun and choke system together. If you do, you will know much more about the performance of that combination. Your confidence will increase and so will your success rate.

What you want to see in a pattern down range is at least 18 or more pellets on the neck and head of the bird at 40 yards. Good shooting systems will best this with ease and return up to 30 or more centered hits across that kill zone. When shooting on targets, or real-time birds, don't aim for the head but rather put the sight about half way down the bird's neck. This will produce both head and neck hits with a uniform pellet distribution. Remember, you want to close down the turkeys nervous system, and all that equipment is located in the spine and brain.

If your patterns tend to be clustered with open areas on the kill zone, you need to make things right by different loads or a new choke system.

Try a load change first because it is by far the easiest on the wallet. Things that can cause a missed bird are numerous and include poor loads, poor range estimation, poor pattern distribution, bad aim from the start, the bird ducking the shot, or just bad luck.

If you have never missed a turkey, I can say for sure you have not hunted many of them. We all have missed the grand birds, and it's not fun. But it's not always the choke or loads fault. Some basic pattern work should clear that question up quickly for you.



At left, you see what looks like a nice ultra-tight pattern at 35 yards. But look again and you will see how you could miss with this type performance profile. Note the cluster that almost cuts the head off at the lowneck. If this bird had moved just a little -- and they often do -- you would have missed it. At right, the same gun, shot and choke is right at 40 yards. Notice the solid hits on thread and neck. Even if the bird moved, the pattern could cover vital areas.

You may find that your gun just won't shoot a good pattern with your turkey choke or standard choke-tube system. The next step? Research a specialized pattern-control system designed just for turkey hunting.

For starters, pay close attention to the amount of constriction the custom turkey choke has built into its design. The more constriction, or tighter tube dimensions in the choke, the longer the range will be in general. Chokes that measure .600 tighter are long-range systems. When the choke is more open, say .500 or less, the range become shorter in terms of an effective pattern.

But make no mistake, a shorter range can mean better payload control. What you need to decide is how far do you want to shoot at a bird? And what is the best distance with that choke.

For example, a .669 choke will shoot a baseball pattern at 25 or 30 yards. Missing the whole bird is a real possibility here.

At 40 to 50 yards, that ultra tight pattern will open more and become a deadly killing machine about the size of a basketball.

I shoot a very old and restored Winchester Model 1897 with a 30-inch barrel and a super tight, fixed waterfowl full choke on turkeys. I like the old gun and the open-hammer system more then many other modern shotguns. Inside 35 yards, this gun is a deadly

combination when I shoot simple bismuth 1 1/8-ounce upland No. 4s at a very modest velocity.

What is required, however, is to talk that bird into the closer gunning range. As to that challenge, it's your call all the way.

I have hunted with many professional guides and friends across the country during some 40 years of taking on the grand birds, and in many cases these pros tend to hold their shots to a point inside 35 yards or less. At that range you don't need a massively tight choke tube system, and in most cases, a \$25 basic turkey choke will work out just fine. In other words, don't be too quick to part with your money, but rather pay close attention to your wants and needs, with an emphasis on the performance of what you're now shooting.

Currently, choke tube outfits like Hunter's Specialties, TruGlo, and Carlson can offer tubes that work and don't break the bank either. In some of my setups, I still use standard Remington factory X-Full extended turkey tubes with great results. I have in fact a very old Remington turkey tube that is hard to beat, even by systems costing many times more. You never know when or where that sweet-hitting special tube is going to surface. When you do find it, don't let it go!

Develop a choke-and-gun combination that you feel confident with. Then bring the elements of good calling, concealment and marksmanship together. When that trophy gobbler shows up, the rest of the deal will take care of itself.

Trust me on that score.

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