

Africa has always been a big-game hunting destination, with bird shooting little more than a sidelight. But during the past decade, wingshooting in Africa has come of age – with the best opportunities in South Africa and Zimbabwe. Both countries have professional hunters who offer bird shooting as stand-alone packages or in combination with big-game hunting. In recent years, many of them have leased large tracts of land, obtained trained pointing dogs and retrievers, hired adequate staff – and most of all, they are bird-shooting aficionados themselves.



African BIRD-SHOOTING SAFARI

by Gary Kramer

SOUTH AFRICA

Since 1994, South Africa has welcomed the restoration of political calm and has emerged as one of the most popular tourist destinations in Africa. From the wine lands of the Cape to the semi-tropics of coastal KwaZulu-Natal Province and the *bushveld* of the Northern Province, South Africa has a climate and outdoor adventure to suit every desire.

One of my most memorable hunts in South Africa was for francolin in the company of professional hunter Mark Haldane near the KwaZulu-Natal hamlet of Dundee. We left the lodge as the sun was beginning to peek above the horizon, and we headed for one of Mark's

leases about 20 kilometers away. Other than being dry, which is customary during South Africa's winter months of June through September, the conditions were good for the dogs. Mark has an excellent kennel of pointers and runs two at a time with two more in reserve.

The hunting area was dominated by tall grass with a few trees and shrubs. About 10 minutes into the hunt, one of the pointers abruptly stopped and assumed the classic pose – head forward, back straight, tail high – and the second dog properly honored. Mark motioned my hunting partner, Vince Bruccolieri, to move in. The moment Vince reached the dogs, a pair of brown bombshells exploded from the long grass. He

Hard-charging pointers handle the bulk of the upland chores in Africa. Driven guinea fowl.

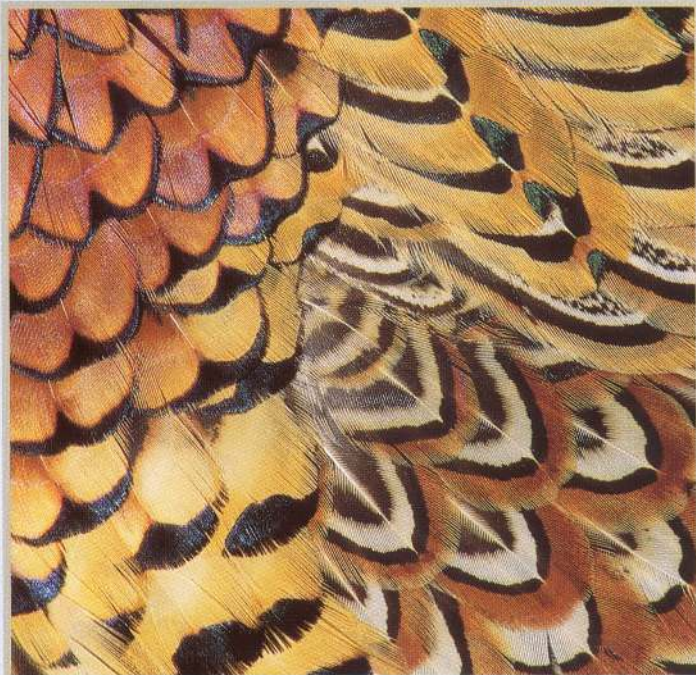




The miles are harder because the weather is cruel. But you and the dogs are tougher from the long season, and you're up to it; and there's something primal about hunting with the wind and snow stinging your face, and your fingers growing numb. When you finally compute the factors and solve for X, you'll find: Late Season > Early Season. ■

For information:

Contact Cody Warne, Warne Ranches, 29774, 192nd Street, Onida, SD 57564
(605) 264-5325. All wild birds.



SKIP MOODY PHOTO, DEBINSKY PHOTO ASSOCIATES

responded exactly right, and the first two francolin of the trip hit the ground.

Examining the birds with great interest, we decided they were the size of a ruffed grouse and flushed like Hungarian partridge. They were Swainson's francolin, belonging to the partridge family; other species found in the area, although less common, are Shelly's and Natal francolin.

After the first francolin were in the bag, we knew better what to expect and headed off across the grass-covered landscape, continuing to work the long grass and finding birds on a regular basis. Most all held nicely for the pointers in pairs and small groups of up to eight. It was like hunting Huns or sharptails in tall cover with virtually every bird flushed in front of a seasoned and steady pointer.

That afternoon, we hunted doves over a cut cornfield, and the next morning tried our luck at ducks. It was still dark when we stowed our gear in a shoreline blind fashioned from reeds. Our bird boy placed the decoys

strategically in front of the blind, and we settled in to scan the horizon for birds. I was pouring my second cup of coffee when Mark tapped me on the shoulder and pointed toward the horizon. We crouched low in the blind while the bird boy steadied the trembling Lab that sensed the impending action.

Six yellow-billed ducks pulled their wings back and dove toward the decoys, then flared at the last minute and made a wide pass. A steep bank brought them back into the wind and their final approach to the blocks. At the command, I looked up to see ducks committed to the decoys – wings cupped and feet down. I picked a pair to the right and swung past a bird that was putting on the brakes. A single report from my over-under, and a bird plummeted from the sky. My second shot was intended for a yellowbill that was going vertical, but when I pulled the trigger the bird kept on climbing. Mark managed a nice double, and we



From left, a Natal, Swainson's, and Shelly's francolin.

were both satisfied with round one!

The black Lab found the first two ducks in the open water almost immediately; the third bird was more problematic, and the dog worked the shoreline vegetation for at least 10 minutes. Finally, he came up with the last duck – a drake – and delivered it to the bird boy. That morning was one of the best waterfowl hunts I have experienced, and in two hours, we had 30 birds between us – a mixture of yellow-billed ducks, red-billed teal, white-faced whistling ducks, and a pair of Egyptian geese.

Bird boy mouth-calls to some ducks while the Lab anxiously waits.

This could be a pothole in North Dakota – except for the fact that you might turn around and see a herd of zebras.





HILL ROD & GUN CO.

ENGLISH SHOTGUNS
COST PROHIBITIVE??

Balderdash!

AT LAST, the average American can own the world's finest lightweight, handcrafted game guns at **REALISTIC PRICES!!**

Select from a carefully maintained inventory of 50 **AFFORDABLE** English side-by-sides, each meticulously inspected by best British gunsmiths, ready for the field!

WWW.HILLRODANDGUN.COM

Or... Write, Phone, Fax, or Email for a current list of **REASONABLE** English double guns.

Hill Rod and Gun Co.
208 East Main Street, Suite 208
Bozeman, Montana 59715
(406) 585-2228
(406) 585-2212 (Fax)
hillrodandgun@mcn.net

Exclusive Five-Day Shooting Inspection
**RETURN DEMANDED
IF NOT DELIGHTED**

MEXICO

Baja California
"Upland Bonanza"



Program #1 - Ensenada Area
California Quail • Liberal Limit
Oct. 12-Dec. 9

Program #2 - Mexicali Area
Pheasants - Gambel Quail • Mountain Quail
Nov. 2-Dec. 9

Fin & Feather Safaris

by Charles Arnold

800-320-7117 • Fax 205-824-1411
finandfeather@mindspring.com

In addition to fine waterfowling, we experienced outstanding shooting for three species of dove and rock pigeons in harvested corn and milo fields, top notch francolin hunting over pointers, and driven guinea fowl.

ZIMBABWE

In neighboring Zimbabwe, it's no secret that there has been a great deal of internal strife - farm invasions, violence, food and fuel shortages, and government corruption is a reality. The result has been a significant decrease in tourism. I was in Zimbabwe in September 2000 and saw the problems firsthand. I never feared for my safety, but there was turmoil, particularly in the cities. Once away from the cities, we enjoyed a trouble-free and enjoyable vacation.

While Zimbabwe delivers quality francolin, dove, and sandgrouse shooting, nowhere have I seen as many guinea fowl and experienced as consistent shooting. My most recent hunt was with Brooklands Hunting Safaris, owned and operated by Barry Deacon. The shooting takes place in the Save Valley Conservation Area, which is one of Africa's most successful conservation stories.

In 1992, during a severe drought, landowners in the 850,000-acre Save Valley decided to remove the cattle and interior fences and restock the region with game. Species long absent from the region were reintroduced; today, free-ranging populations of lion, elephant, black rhino, cape buffalo, and sable are found throughout the Conservancy, along with impressive populations of guinea fowl, francolin, and doves.

The first shooting venue was for driven guinea fowl. Throughout Africa, guineas are both admired and cursed by those who hunt them. They prefer to run rather than fly, seldom hold for a dog, and generally flush out of range. As a result, drives are the most productive and popular method of hunting them.

It's classic European-style shooting - six to 10 or more beaters begin the drive up to half a mile from a line of waiting guns. The beaters move through



Delivering a Swainson's francolin.

the brush and push the birds over the shooters. Some birds escape along the sides, and others fly back over the beaters; however, most birds fly high, hard, and fast over the guns. It is not unlike pushing pheasants to the end of a cornfield. However, drives in Africa are unique among all driven shoots in the world: Where can else can the beaters drive kudu, impala, zebra, or the occasional jackal past the shooters?

Our first drive was in a stand of trees and brush where Barry knew a flock of guineas fed and watered in the early morning. The beaters took off in one direction while Barry led the five shooters on a short hike through the bush to get into position. Soon the beaters could be heard shouting and chanting as they moved toward the shooters. It wasn't long until I spotted birds running toward me. They were more intent on what was behind them than in front of them. When the guineas were 40 yards out, they sensed something wasn't right and flushed. Seconds later, 30 guineas were heading my way. I picked a bird coming over the top, pulled the trigger, then

THE TRAVELING WINGSHOOTER

switched to a bird to my right – both birds hit the ground with a loud thud. I heard the beaters yell, “Birds coming!” and loaded two more rounds. A late-flushing bird passed about 40 yards out, and with a long shot, I managed to connect. There were five shooters, and we shot 10 birds – not bad for the first 30 minutes of hunting. That morning, we completed four drives and ended up with 27 birds.

In addition to excellent guinea fowl populations, the Save Valley supports good numbers of Natal francolin. The shooting is over pointers or occasionally flushing breeds such as Labs and springer spaniels. After breakfast on the second morning of my recent trip, we loaded the pointers and piled into the Land Rover for the far side of the property, stopping along the way only long enough to let a herd of zebra cross the road.

Once we reached our destination, the bird boys wasted no time putting the dogs on the ground. The pointers moved with the grace of well-trained athletes, and not five minutes from the vehicle, one of them froze. The second dog moved in and backed the first, and Barry motioned us to move up. As we reached the dogs, birds exploded from the heavy cover. A couple of minutes later, the first Natal francolin of the day was retrieved and delivered to our bird boy.

After admiring the bird, we headed off across the grass and brush-covered hills. The pointers ranged wide and quartered beautifully, finding francolin about every 10 to 15 minutes. Most of the birds held and presented 25- to 35-yard shots, which suited our doubles, choked improved and modified. By 10 a.m., the temperature climbed into the high 70s, and the scenting conditions deteriorated. All present agreed to call it quits and head to camp for a cold drink.

In terms of notoriety, wingshooting in Africa takes a backseat to the big-game hunting tradition there. However, for the ardent wingshooter with a sense of adventure, Africa offers a unique experience in an exotic setting that can be matched in no other location in the world.



For Information & Reservations:

SOUTH AFRICA: Bird Hunters Africa, owned and operated by Mark Holdane, houses their clients in Zulu Wings Lodge near Dundee between May and August. The trip is 14 days and includes seven days of shooting, two days of game viewing, and two days touring Cape Town. The price is \$5,595 for shooters and \$4,995 for nonshooters, and includes international airfare from Atlanta or New York. Mark also offers bird shooting in Botswana's Okavango Delta and Kalahari Desert. Bird Hunters Africa is booked by Trek International Safaris, P.O. Box 1305, Ponte Vedra Beach, FL 32004; 800-654-9915 or (904) 273-7800; website www.treksafaris.com.

ZIMBABWE: Brooklands Hunting Safaris, Travel Plaza, 2nd Fl., 29 Mazowe St., Harare, Zimbabwe; phone 011-263-4706-368; e-mail barry@bhs.co.zw. Barry has an 11-day safari that incorporates six days of game viewing and five days of bird shooting for \$3,450/shooter and \$2,950/non-shooter, from Harare. Hunts are operated from July 1 to September 30.

At Greystone Castle...

At Greystone Castle, each morning brings a renewal of one of the finest and most unique sporting experiences found anywhere in North America. High above the battlements, the morning sun reveals vibrant colors and a breathtaking view of the legendary Texas landscape. The elegant, 24-room English castle sits atop a 1,200-foot mesa overlooking the magnificent 4,000-acre property below. Coupled with this scenic beauty is an abundance of native and exotic wildlife. Upland birds, doves, and ducks thrive, as well as white-tailed deer, Rio Grande turkeys, and numerous species of exotic plains game. Fully automated 5-stand along with 2 challenging sporting clays courses offer shotgunners exceptional shooting opportunities.

The castle staff caters to the individual needs of each guest and strives for impeccable service. Guests will savor professionally prepared meals, cocktails, fine wines, and complimentary cigars. Full conference facilities are available for corporate retreats and meetings.

A few days of being treated like royalty and you'll forget about the work you left at the office. You may even forget you have one!

Greystone Castle
Sporting Club

Greystone Castle Sporting Club
P.O. Box 158 • Mingus, Texas 76463
Ph. 254-672-5927 • Fax 254-672-5971
www.greystonecastle.com