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For Birdshooters and Waterfowlers

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Dateline: Louisiana

How To Plan A Self-Guided Woodcock Hunt

Editor's Note: Here's a fun opportunity for the self-guided wingshooter. Drive down to Louisiana next winter for some woodcock hunting. Correspondent John Felsher tells you everything you need to know to put this hunt together.

Louisiana winters more woodcock than any other state in the union, allowing hunters here to annually kill more of these birds than all the Southern states combined. During cold winters, approximately 70 percent of the population winters in the Bayou State. And the Atchafalaya Basin, the largest river bottom swamp in North America, historically attracts the most woodcock in this state. Situated in portions of Pointe Coupee, St. Martin and Iberville parishes near Krotz Springs in the northern part of this vast floodway, Sherburne Wildlife

Management Area, Atchafalaya National Wildlife Refuge and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers lands offer 43,617 acres of prime



public woodcock habitat. The Louisiana Dept. of Wildlife and Fisheries manages the entire tract of state and federal lands as one section for public hunting.

Primarily bottomlands, the area contains lush cottonwoods, sycamores, oaks, gums, hackberries, ash, willows, cypress and bitter pecan trees. In addition to the towering hardwoods there are also maples, mulberries, greenbriars, dewberries, blackberries and ferns that provide excellent cover for deer, turkeys, small game and even a few black bears. There's enough dry ground that hunters can walk right into the area using established foot trails, although for access to the interior, they might need to bring a small boat to traverse some of the bayous, which are small, sluggish rivers. Major bayous include the Little and Big Alabama bayous and Bayou Des Glais. Many people use these to get to the more remote areas.

Woodcock thrive in the thick cover of the hardwood bottomlands of Sherburne

(continued on page 2)

Dateline: Southern Africa

Update - Who's Doing What In Wingshooting

Editor's Note: There's no question that Africa is a big game oriented continent; however, over the past few years a number of dedicated African bird shooting operators have come on line, and it seems that a new one crops up every year. Here's an update on what's available in Southern Africa and what the newest operator has to offer. Senior Correspondent Gary Kramer filed the report.

Business was brisk at the recent Safari Club International Convention in Las Vegas, with some African bird shooting outfitters nearly full for 2002 and

starting to book 2003. And no wonder; although Africa is a long way to travel, once you arrive, the mixed bag shooting and the African experience cannot be duplicated anywhere else in the world. I visited with a number of operators I've reported on in the past and one new one I came across on the convention floor. Before I tell you about him, though, I'd like to give you an update on what some of the veteran operators are doing.

The first is the **Rovos Rail** train-shoot safari operated by **Peter Johnson**, first introduced by Gamebirds Southern Africa Inc. in 1990 and booked by **Orvis (Historic Rt. 7A, Manchester, VT 05254; tel. 800-547-4322; web site:**

www.orvis.com; e-mail: Orvistravel@orvis.com) and **Blue Charm Expeditions (25 North Walnut St., West**

(continued on page 3)

Inside:

East Coast	p.4
Florida	p.5
Hunt Report Of The Month	p.6
Texas	p.7
Firearms Requirements	p.8
Morocco	p.9
Outfitter Critiques	p.9
New Zealand	p.10
Argentina	p.10

rior of the management area, there are two private boat launches on the northern portion of the area, and two public launches, one on Big Alabama Bayou, and one on North Little Alabama Bayou. You can get a map of the man-

agement area online at www.wlf.state.la.us/apps/netgear/index.asp?cn=lawlf&pid=332; or contact the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries at 5652 Hwy 182, Opelousas, LA 70570; tel. 337-948-0255 or 337-

566-2251. A nonresident small game, three-day license is \$75. Note that the limits for woodcock last season were three per day, with a possession limit of six.

- John N. Felsher

Southern Africa ... (from page 1)

Chester, PA 19380; tel. 800-644-2244 or 610-696-7100; e-mail: Bluecharm@comcast.net. This train-shoot safari concept has brought remote areas of the African wilderness within reach of the sporting traveler. Clients travel the Rovos Rail aboard the "Pride of Africa," a completely restored 1920s train. The train's air-conditioned suites, historic dining salon, panoramic observation car along with superb cuisine and a world-class wine cellar make for arguably the most luxurious bird shoot in the world. Shooters and non-shooters use the train as their base of operations during six-, seven- or nine-day itineraries that take clients to South Africa, Botswana and Zambia. All this comes with a serious price tag - the cost per couple (shooter and non-shooter) ranges from \$15,640 for 12 guns to \$20,410 for eight guns. The expeditions can accommodate 12 guns (safaris into Zambia are restricted to 10 guns).

The six-day, train-shoot safari runs between Pretoria and Victoria Falls and incorporates four days of shooting. Along the way, the guns enjoy driven guinea fowl and francolin shoots in the Northwest Province of South Africa. These are grand affairs with up to 120 native beaters and 25 field assistants to help the shooters. The non-shooters experience a day of diamonds, visiting the mines and jewelers in Kimberley. Then the train goes onto Botswana where the clients board a charter aircraft in Gaborone and fly to the Okavango Delta. Here in a pristine wilderness setting, the guns enjoy flighted (pass) shooting for doves, and driven and walk-up shooting for francolin while the non-shooters have unsurpassed big game viewing literally minutes from camp. The itinerary ends in Victoria Falls with the next train safari retracing the route back to Pretoria.

The seven-day train series takes clients from Pretoria through the acacia savannahs and red sand desert areas of South Africa's Northern Cape and Northwest Province. Again this is world-class driven guinea fowl, francolin and doves complete with a legion of beaters and helpers. Additionally, there is flighted dove shooting, waterfowl hunting and classic sandgrouse shooting in the Northern Cape's Kalahari District. The trip ends up back in Pretoria. The nine-day shoot travels from Pretoria to Victoria Falls and then returns. Depending on the timing, the safari includes



driven shooting in the Northwest Province, walk-up, flighted and driven shooting in the Okavango Delta and sandgrouse in the Kalahari. After July 15 when the sandgrouse season in South Africa closes, the trip includes driven shoots in Zambia. The train shoots are offered between June 15 and Aug.30.

In addition to the train-based shoots, Gamebirds Southern Africa inaugurated several new lodge-based shoots for 2002. These itineraries visit the same properties as the train-based safaris but instead of traveling and living on the train, clients travel by commercial aircraft and charter flights to the lodges and camps, which become their "shoot hubs." There are currently two offerings. The South Africa itinerary starts

in Johannesburg and visits properties in the Northwest, Northern and Western Cape provinces. The trip ends in Cape Town and can be booked for six or nine days and includes four or six days of shooting. These itineraries are operated in June and July. The shoots include two of Africa's most sporting birds - greywing francolin over pointers and sandgrouse, plus driven birds and waterfowl.

The second lodge-based shoot can be booked as a seven- or nine-day safari, incorporating five or seven days of shooting. This itinerary includes the wilderness camps of Botswana where flighted dove, as well as walk up and driven francolin and guinea fowl, are the quarry. Then it's on to Zambia and the Choma District via chartered aircraft for driven guinea fowl and francolin. The trip ends in Victoria Falls. These shoots are offered July through September. The prices for both lodge-based shoots are \$750 per day for shooters and \$300 per day for non-shooters in parties of four to eight guns. The price is all inclusive from Johannesburg except for commercial airline flights and tips.

The second veteran bird shooting outfitter is **Mark Haldane** of **Bird Hunters Africa**, represented by **Trek International Safaris** (PO Box 1305, Ponte Vedra Beach, FL 32004; tel. 800-654-9915 or 904-273-7800; web site: www.treksafaris.com). Haldane is one of the most respected professional hunters in Africa and continues to operate bird shoots from Zulu Wings Lodge in northern KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The lodge has four double rooms, each with a bath and serves quality meals. It is located near Dundee in an agricultural area devoted to corn, milo, peanuts and grazing land. The grain crops along with grazing land have created a habitat base that supports high densities of game birds and waterfowl. The shoots take place within

a 50-kilometer radius of the lodge, making the drives to the hunting area no more than 45 minutes, some as close as five minutes. Haldane has more than 100,000 acres leased for shooting. With this much acreage, he has the luxury of hunting a particular piece of ground only once or twice a season. He shoots doves in harvested corn fields, francolin over seasoned pointers, driven guinea fowl, decoyed rock pigeons and ducks over decoys. He also has an area a few hours drive from the main lodge that delivers some of the finest goose shooting in Africa. It's grain field shooting from pits for spur-winged and Egyptian geese.

Trek offers two-week all-inclusive trips from Atlanta that include six days of shooting, two days game viewing, two days touring the Cape region and international/domestic airfare for \$5,595 for shooters, and \$4,995 for non-shooters. This is an excellent trip for non-shooters, and a licensed tour guide is available to handle a special itinerary for them. The trips are operated June through August.

Haldane also operates a network of other bird shoots in Southern Africa. Last year I had the opportunity to see one of his newest operations first hand. It was a hunt in the vast untamed wilderness of the Okavango Delta in Botswana. The group stayed at a first class tent camp deep in the delta accessible by charter aircraft only. The

shooting was for driven and walk-up guinea fowl and francolin along with doves that flocked to water holes. In short, the shooting was superb. The highlight of this trip is the wilderness setting. It was not uncommon to come upon a herd of Cape buffalo or a pride of lions on the way to a bird shoot. From the Okavango we traveled to the Kalahari Desert and the Eaton Ranch where sandgrouse, dove and driven guineas were the quarry. The only change to the Kalahari portion this year is that the sandgrouse season does not open until October 1 when all the other seasons close. Haldane and Eaton are working on a special permit to hunt sandgrouse in August and September on private land, although this has not been solidified yet. This trip operates July through September.

Haldane also has a new area in Botswana for 2002. The shooting takes place in the Chobe District in a region that is a combination of native bushveld and agricultural crops, including sorghum and corn. The area is loaded with guinea fowl and doves and promises to deliver fantastic shooting. Haldane also offers greywing francolin hunting over pointers in South Africa's East Cape and waterfowl collector trips in South Africa and Mozambique.

Finally, the new kid on the block is **Shozhaloza**, owned and operated by **High Adventure LLC (6075 Roswell Rd. NW, Ste. 304, Atlanta, GA 30328; tel.**

800-999-7180; web site: www.highadventurecompany.com). This is a new operation, and the 2002 season will be their second year. They offer mixed bag bird shooting in the Free State, a two- to three-hour drive from Johannesburg. Clients are met at the airport and transported by minivan to the first shooting venue where they hunt doves and pigeons over grain fields and water holes. Two nights are spent in the dove area at a guest house or safari camp. Then it's a short drive to their main lodge Shozhaloza, which is a newly renovated ranch house circa 1900 with double occupancy rooms, each with a private bath. At Shozhaloza the shooting is for ducks and geese over decoys, francolin over pointers that were trained and imported from Texas and classic driven guinea fowl.

The operation is the brain child of John Burrell and Chuck Larsen who own and operated quail and turkey hunts on the Burnt Pine Plantation near Atlanta, Georgia, as well two lodges in Argentina. The nine-day South African itinerary with six days of shooting includes international airfare and is operated from March through August. The all-inclusive price is \$4,895 (March - May) and \$5,139 after June 1. Non-shooting companions are welcome at a reduced rate, and High Adventure can arrange for photo safaris and sightseeing excursions.

- Gary Kramer

Dateline: East Coast

This Outfitter Offers European-style Shoots in Quebec and Maryland

Editor's Note: You don't have to cross the Atlantic to enjoy a good driven shoot. Correspondent Kinsey Robinson says he has found an operator who offers pheasant shoots on par with those in Europe, albeit without the old-world charm. What's more, you can combine this shoot with traditional upland bird shooting and fishing. Here are all the details.

Do you yearn for a first class driven pheasant shoot, but don't have the available time or disposable funds to make the long and costly trip across the Atlantic Ocean? Look no further. An operation called **Whistling Hill (9104 Maplesville Road, Boonsboro, MD 21713)** offers classic and affordable high

bird continental shoots here in North America. The company is operated by **Joe Michael (tel. 301-416-7771; e-mail: JoOldStone@aol.com)** and **Braith Kelly (tel. 860-546-6109; e-mail: BraithK@aol.com)**, and they have put together a program for driven pheasant shoots reminiscent of those in Europe.

Now before you scoff at the idea of a European-quality shoot in North America, allow me to say that over the last 10 years I have participated in dozens of continental, tower, driven, flighted (or any other term that can be used) shoots organized by Americans claiming to replicate a genuine old country pheasant shoot. Although many have been fun, most presented only a meager resem-

blance, and none have measured up to those fine events held in Ireland or the United Kingdom, until now. Admittedly Whistling Hill does not offer white-gloved butler service, the extravagance of a pampered stay in a medieval castle or candle-lit gourmet meals. What it does offer is hard, highflying blue-back pheasants, scenic properties and a professionalism that stand above all the rest that I have experienced in the United States.

Whistling Hill generally schedules eight shoots annually, with plans to increase that number for the 2002-2003 shooting season. The first shoot of the year takes place at Cold Spring Camp, Matapedia, Quebec, during the last week in September. This is a four-day cast and blast affair where participants ("sports"