

Fax Number: 301-528-2497
Order Line: 301-528-0011



For Birdshooters and Waterfowlers

Vol. 16, No. 10

October 2004

Dateline: Mexico

A Place for Late Season Dove & Waterfowl

Editor's Note: The old marketing adage, "location, location, location," particularly applies to hunting operations, and this month correspondent Luke Clayton reports that this outfitter has set up in the right place. Here's his report.

Much of the whitewing shooting in Mexico takes place in August and September, but I recently found an outfitter who can provide abundant shooting through February. He can do that because his operation is located at the very southern end of the migration route in the Mexican state of Sinaloa. **Terry Hollan of Reel Mexican Adventures (tel. 806-359-6288. Web: www.mexicanadventures.com)** has 200,000 acres of grain fields under lease between Los Mochis and El Fuerte in west-

ern Mexico. Besides doves, huge flocks of various duck species also winter in the wetlands and marshes adjacent to the



nearby Sea of Cortez.

Hollan offers both dove and duck hunts, as well as combination hunts with ducks in the morning and doves in the

afternoon. First, let's take a look at the dove hunting opportunities, which are well underway now and will hold steady throughout the winter. The day begins with an early wake up call and large country-style breakfast before heading out to the fields. Vehicles start taking hunters to their shooting spots around 5:40 each morning. After a few hours of shooting, hunters are transported back to the lodge, where they can take it easy until the gourmet lunch is prepared. Later that afternoon, they return to the fields for round two with the doves. Holland says whitewings make up the lion's share of the birds, but the area also holds large flocks of mourning dove.

Hunters are back in camp to enjoy the open bar and rest up a bit before their next meal, which Hollan describes as an

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Dateline: Southern Africa

This Outfitter Offers A Whirlwind Shooting Tour

Editor Note: We've previously featured multi-destination trips to Europe and Argentina, but here's one that takes you to four camps in three African countries. Senior Correspondent Gary Kramer has the details on this hunt.

I just returned from my 20th trip to Africa since 1990. I'll admit, I've been bitten hard by the Africa bug and find myself returning year after year. The reason is not the high-volume dove shooting reminiscent of Argentina or Columbia nor the clouds of ducks you often find in Mexico or Uruguay, but rather

the combination of good shooting for a variety of species in a picturesque and unique environment that ranges from farmland to untamed wilderness.

Over the years I have hunted with several outstanding professional hunters who specialize in bird shooting in Botswana, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Zambia and Kenya. One I have hunted with several times is **Mark Haldane of Bird Hunters Africa**, represented by **Trek International Safaris (Tel. 800-654-9915 or 904-273-7800; web: www.treksafaris.com)**. Haldane is one of the most respected PH's in Africa and since 1996 has operated bird shoots from his **Zulu Wings Lodge** in northern

KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Last year he opened a second bird hunting camp in Botswana. The new destination is near

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Panda Matenga in the Chobe District of Botswana. The camp is located about an hour's drive from Kasane and 1½ hours from Victoria Falls.

In addition to shoots in South Africa, Haldane now offers an 11-day itinerary that includes shooting at **Baynesfield Camp** and **Zulu Wings Lodge** in South Africa, fishing at a deluxe tented camp on the Chobe River in Namibia and bird hunting at Panda Matenga in Botswana. I recently joined Haldane and a group of clients and experienced the new itinerary. The first leg took us to Durban, where we were greeted by Haldane and transported just over two hours to Banyesfield Camp in time for an afternoon dove and pigeon shoot. We hunted the edge of a cornfield and managed to bag about 15 birds per hunter. It was more of a warm up than a serious shoot. A hot shower at the comfortable tented camp, dinner and a good night's rest were welcomed after the long flight to South Africa. The next morning we were up early and in the field before dawn. The hunting area was a cornfield only five minutes from camp. We jumped in the pits surrounded by decoys, and it didn't take long for the Egyptian and spur-winged geese to arrive. The action started almost immediately, and before the sun peaked over the horizon there were 15 birds on the ground for five hunters. The birds decoyed perfectly, and by 9:30 am the action slowed, and the count was nearly 50 geese. After lunch, we drove to Zulu Wings outside Dundee and arrived before dinner.

At Zulu Wings, hunters are housed in well-appointed double rooms with ensuite bathrooms, and the meals are served in a large dining area. The shooting is close by, and driving times from the lodge to the hunting areas are 10 to 30 minutes. Haldane decided to build Zulu Wings in this area due to the diversity of game birds available. During the course of the next four days we hunted driven guinea fowl, francolin over pointers, ducks over decoys, doves as they flocked to grain fields and decoy pigeons from pits in a cornfield. The highlights for me were the francolin over pointers (Haldane has a dozen seasoned pointers) where we bagged up to 10 birds (mostly Swainson's francolin) per hunter, per out-

ing. Then there were ducks over decoys where up to 40 birds (mostly yellow-billed ducks and red-billed teal) per two-



person blind were taken. And finally, there was the decoy rock pigeon shooting where bags of 30 to 40 birds per shooter in an afternoon were common.

From Zulu Wings we went to Johannesburg for a commercial flight to Victoria Falls. At Vic Falls, we were met by Dylan Holmes who operates the **Panda Matenga** camp for **Bird Hunters Africa**. Once we cleared customs, the drive to Ichingo Lodge was about 1½ hours. Ichingo Lodge is on the banks of the Chobe River near Kasane and offers tiger fishing and game viewing by boat. The lodge is actually on the Namibia side of the river, and we cleared customs at a small border post near the lodge. The lodge is upscale, with double bedded East African style tents and ensuite bathrooms. The dining area and lounge overlooks the river where the boats are docked. Access to the lodge is by boat, and you are literally seconds from good fishing areas. It so happens some of the best tiger fishing of the year is in June, July and August, which coincide with the bird shooting season. We spent two days at Ichingo fishing and game viewing in Chobe National Park. At Chobe we saw elephants at point blank range, along with various antelope, Cape buffalo, hippos and some giant crocs. While tiger fishing is productive on both spinning and fly tackle, my fishing partner and I used fly tackle. We managed to land at least a dozen tigers. The largest was a 12-pound monster, but most fish were in the three- to eight-pound range. We hooked at least triple the number we

landed. Tigerfish are notorious for their impressive set of teeth, hard mouths, spectacular jumps and ability to throw hooks.

From Ichingo it was about an hour drive to Panda Mantenga. The new camp was completed last year and consists of six East African-style tents covered with thatched roofs with ensuite bathrooms. The camp is in a farming area carved out of the native bush where corn, sorghum and sunflower are grown. The combination of agricultural land surrounded by native habitat supports some of the largest guinea fowl populations in all of Africa. We saw flocks of at least 500 birds. They are hunted by driving or pushing them over a line of guns using beaters, as well as by walking them up. If you've ever hunted guineas, you know in most places they are impossible to walk up. At Panda Matenga, it works well because of the terrain. First the birds are pushed out of the grain fields and into the native habitat that is a mixture of acacia trees and grassland. The grass cover is heavy enough that once the birds have been flushed from the harvested fields many of them hold and offer shooting for singles, doubles and small groups. There is also good walk-up francolin shooting and dove shooting over waterholes in the afternoon. Victoria Falls and Chobe National Park are nearby, and visits to these areas can be arranged. After the last morning shoot, hunters are transported back to Victoria Falls for their flight to Johannesburg.

This 11-day itinerary is \$5,250 for shooters and \$4,050 for non-shooters from Johannesburg and includes everything but airfare. Overall, the food was excellent, the service impeccable and the shooting very good. Custom itineraries to the Kalahari for sandgrouse, dove and guinea fowl; the Okavango Delta for francolin, guinea fowl, dove and sandgrouse; the East Cape for grey-wing francolin; collector hunts to South Africa and Mozambique and mixed-bag hunts at Zulu Wings and Baynesfield are available. Custom trips can be booked through **Trek** or direct with **Bird Hunters Africa** (Tel. 011-27-3421-23624; e-mail: gamehunt@trustnet.co.za)

- Gary Kramer