

Dateline: South Africa

Mixing the Bag in High Style

- Hunt from several locales
- Plenty of shooting all season long
- **Timetable:** April through October
- **Accommodations:** Hunting Lodges
- **Food:** Regional Dishes /Fine Dining
- **Hunt:** Easy to moderate

The African continent has long been a favorite destination for big game hunters from all over the world. In recent years, the demand for wing shooting has increased and more outfitters are offering bird-shooting safaris. There's no question South Africa has the best-developed programs, quality outfitters and a diverse array of species. And among the South African wing shooting outfitters, **Mark Haldane of Bird Hunters Africa** is a well respected professional hunter who has been offering dedi-

cated bird-shooting safaris since 1986. I recently returned from my fifth wing shooting safari with Haldane since 1993. As before, **the service, equipment**



and the quality and variety of shooting was first class. After arriving in Johannesburg, the next leg was an hour flight to Bloemfontein. This is a rich

agricultural region where sunflower, corn and wheat are the primary crops. As a result, huge concentrations of rock pigeon and dove descend on the area to take advantage of the abundant waste grain. The shooting starts in April and peaks in May when the sunflower crop is harvested. **At that time, the shooting is hot-barreled and it's easy to shoot up to 1,000 rounds per day.** Some fields are used primarily by pigeons, other by doves and few have both.

Early in the season it's mostly pass-shooting. From June through August it is both pass and decoy shooting, and while the action tapers off, the shooting is still good. In July we average 40-50 pigeons per half-day shoot. The dove hunting holds up throughout the season, and during the last trip it was easy to fire 500 rounds per day and bag several hundred

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Dateline: Texas, Times Two

A Pair of Reports from the Lonestar State

Part 1

- Wild bobwhites and blue quail
- New lodge closer to the action
- **Timetable:** Late October to late February
- **Accommodations:** Upscale lodge & restored farmhouse
- **Food:** Regional home cooking
- **Hunt:** Easy to moderate

Great dog work and lots of quail ought to go together like butter and biscuits but with wild bobwhite populations

down by over 80 percent over the last two decades throughout much of the bird's historic range, hunters have found their field fare pretty dry of late. Those seeking quail hunting like it used to be — wild birds aplenty shot over classic pointers — might want to consider looking to **Mike Wyatt's First Shot Outfitters, headquartered in Coleman County in northwest Texas**, just south of Rolling Plains country. Wyatt offers a wide variety of hunting opportunities throughout the year — from spring turkey to dove to ducks to deer—but his first love is catering to discriminating quail hunters.

Now in his ninth year of operation, Wyatt is considered by many one of the

best independent quail guides in Texas — which, given the state's size and bird-hunting traditions, sounds like big talk.

But I don't doubt it. Last year Texas

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doves. The doves are a combination of cape turtle, laughing and red-eye. Doves and pigeon are considered agricultural pests and there is no limit or season. Last year was the first season the Bloemfontein area was added to Haldanes' bird shooting venues. Clients are housed at the Oude Kraal Guest Lodge, a property well known for its excellent accommodations. Each night, the private dining room features five-course meals, accompanied by vintage South African wines.

To reach the second hunting area, we took a short flight of one hour and 20 minutes from Bloemfontein to Durban followed by an hour vehicle transfer to Mbangweni Lodge near Baynesfield. The lodge overlooks a lake and sleeps eight in four cabins, each with a bath. The hunt-



ing is on the 22,000-acre Baynesfield Estate where Haldane has been operating for eight years. This location has some of the best goose shooting anywhere in Southern Africa. Both Egyptian and spur-winged geese are hunted over decoys from pits dug in corn, milo and soybean fields. The action reminded me of top-notch field goose hunting in Canada. Our group of five was split and put in two separate fields, and after the morning shoot we had 50 geese in the bag. All were shot inside 35 yards and over decoys. There also is pass-shooting for pigeons (rameron and rock) and red-eye doves, decoy pigeon shooting and francolin hunting over pointers. The decoy pigeon shoot was outstanding and in two hours the average bag was 40 to 50 pigeons.

The final leg was a two and-a-half-hour drive to Zulu Wings Lodge in northern KwaZulu-Natal near Dundee. The lodge was built in 1996 and has six double rooms each with a bath. The quality of the food was excellent and the service impeccable. The region is dominated by agricultural lands with corn, peanuts, wheat and dairy farms prominent along with scattered native habitats. This habitat base supports a variety

of game birds and waterfowl and as a result, mixed bag shoots are the strong point of this safari. During a typical stay, clients will shoot doves in harvested grain fields, francolin over seasoned pointers, driven guinea fowl, rock pigeons from pits and waterfowl over decoys. The hunting takes place within a 50-km radius of the lodge, making the drives to the shooting areas 10 to 40 minutes each. Haldane has more than 100,000 acres leased for shooting and with this much acreage, has the luxury

of hunting a specific piece of ground only once or twice a season.

Although any trip can be customized, typical safaris are 10 days and include a combination of all three areas with a two-day break at a five-star game reserve in the middle.

Trip cost is \$5,000/hunter and \$4,000/non-hunter, excluding international airfare. The trips are available between May 31 and Aug. 31. Daily customized activities are arranged for non-hunters, including visits to local crafts markets, the Drakensberg Mountains, Zulu villages and battlefields and game reserves.

Bird Hunters Africa also offers waterfowl collectors' trips in central Mozambique. Mozambique is one of the few places where African pygmy geese can be collected along with spur-winged geese, hottentot teal, comb ducks, red-billed teal, white-backed ducks and white-faced and fulvous whistling ducks. Crested guinea fowl, crested francolin, and red-necked spurfowl also are available. Collectors' trips are available in September and October. Clients fly from Johannesburg to Beira. Then it's a 50-minute charter to camp. Collectors' trips are \$500/day, not including transportation to camp.

To book: Bird Hunters Africa, 011-2733-343-2247, www.birdhuntersafrica.com; or Trek International Safaris, 800-654-9915, www.treksafaris.com.

—Gary Kramer



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Circulation..... 301-528-0011

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Sedgwick Publishing Co.

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The Bird Hunting Report (ISSN: 1084-8789) is a newsletter for the active hunter/conservationist who travels in search of the world's best birdshooting and waterfowling, and is deeply involved in efforts to save that wingshooting for future generations. *The Bird Hunting Report* is not a booking agent, nor is it affiliated with any booking agent, outfitter or guide. All recommendations contained herein are based on the best information available at press time. A one-year subscription costs \$49. Single copies cost \$5. Back issues cost \$5.50. In Canada and Mexico add \$6/year. Overseas subscribers add \$21/year and send payment via major credit card or US bank draft. Material herein may not be reproduced without permission of Sedgwick Publishing Co.

The Bird Hunting Report USPS (1084-8789) is published monthly by Sedgwick Publishing Co, PO Box 328, Boyds MD 20841. A one-year subscription costs \$49. Periodicals postage paid at Boyds, MD and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster send address changes to: *The Bird Hunting Report*, Sedgwick Publishing Co., PO Box 328, Boyds MD 20841.

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