

boy cut some branches with his machete, and with them I improvised a blind. I found that the bird boys are not duck hunters themselves, and they don't know all the requirements of successful duck hunting strategy. All that said, I spoke about this with **Ron Stafford**, program director for Nicaragua at **Trek International Safaris (PO Box 1305, Ponte Vedra Beach, FL 32004; tel. 800-654-9915 or 904-273-7800; fax 904-273-0096)**, the booking agent for this hunt. He was headed to Nicaragua himself, and he assured me that all would be corrected before next season.

As for the dove shooting, these hunts take place over fields of corn, sorghum or sesame seeds. The birds are whitewings and mourning doves, and there is no limit on them. Based on my experience, I would say that most shooters fired six to 10 boxes per shoot and killed 30 to 60 doves. Shooting percentages were low in general because there were always gusting winds of 15 to 25 miles per hour, and that made the shooting difficult in the extreme. However, members of our hunting party who had been to Nicaragua previously said that this was an unusual situation.

Townsend pointed out that the bird numbers are down considerably from pre-revolutionary days. Back then, it was routine to shoot 300 doves or 50 ducks in a half day. Now, however, there is much less land cultivated in seed and grain crops. Although the Sandinistas were defeated in an election almost 10 years ago and Nicaragua has had a democratic, free-market government since then, the

Sandinistas still remain a force to be reckoned with. Therefore nobody is willing to risk capital to cultivate crops. Vast expanses of land that once grew sunflowers, sorghum, corn and rice now lie fallow. Nobody can say for sure when this situation might change.

Shooters are headquartered in the



Hotel Los Volcanes in Chinandega, located in western Nicaragua about an hour drive from Managua. As the hotel name implies, it commands a view of two nearby volcanoes. This is a clean, comfortable place with such amenities as air conditioning, a swimming pool, cable television, large beds with good mattresses, excellent service, a lively bar and a restaurant that serves up very appetizing local and international specialties. Also, because the primary economic activity in Nicaragua is fishing, the seafood is excellent. Another plus to this hotel is that it is only about a 30- to 45-minute drive over

surprisingly good roads to the duck lagoons and the dove fields.

The bird hunting season runs from November through March here. The whole season is good, but Townsend says the first half is usually slightly better than the second half. In general, it is best to avoid booking a duck shoot during the full moon. Weather during the season is very dry and warm, with midday temperatures averaging 85 to 90 degrees. Aside from the shooting, other attractions include excellent shopping for rum, cigars and alligator-skin belts, wallets and purses. One final note - visiting shooters need have no worry about their safety. Nicaragua is a totally safe country, certainly far more so than just about any large US city.

Trek International Safaris offers a package trip that costs \$2,295 from Miami and includes four nights accommodations and all meals at **Hotel Los Volcanes**, seven half-day shoots (four for doves, three for ducks), all transfers and ground transportation, assistance through customs and round-trip air fare. Not included are tips and shotshells, which cost \$10 per box for dove loads and \$12 per box for duck loads, plus a departure tax of \$25. All shells provided are of American Remington manufacture.

American Airlines provides twice-daily flights from Miami to Managua, and **Continental** has one daily flight from Houston to Managua. Gun entry is a very simple formality, and visas are not required of US citizens.

— Stuart Williams

Dateline: Africa

What's Doing In Botswana and Zimbabwe

Editor's Note: South Africa isn't the only country in Africa offering good birdshoots these days, as witness the opportunities correspondent Gary Kramer just turned up in Botswana and Zimbabwe.

When it comes to wingshooting in Africa, the Republic of South Africa is known to have the most developed programs and the most outfitters. But now it seems that operators in Botswana and Zimbabwe are jumping on the bird shooting bandwagon and are offering some well-developed programs. Here are several you may want to consider.

Probably the best known of the new outfitters to offer birdshooting in Botswana is **Mark Haldane of Bird Hunters Africa (PO Box 1985, Dundee 3000, South Africa; tel. 011-27-34-2123624; fax 011-27-34-2123113; e-mail: gamehunt@dundee.lia.net)**, who is probably already known to you for his very popular birdshooting program in the Dundee region of South Africa. Haldane's Botswana hunts take place in three areas. The first is on a large ranch in the Ghansi District about an hour charter flight from Maun on the edge of the Kalahari Desert. Here the main draw is shooting for doves and sandgrouse at water holes in the morn-

ings plus driven guineafowl in the afternoons. The second camp is in the heart of the Okavango Delta, where there is good action for doves, double banded sandgrouse, guineafowl and francolin. What's intriguing about the Okavango camp is that the birdshooting takes place in the untamed wilderness, where lions, elephant and Cape buffalo are found in abundance. His third hunt takes place near Lake Ngami, south of the Delta, where sandgrouse, dove, guineafowl and francolin are available. Clients stay in a first-class tent camp featuring *en suite* bathrooms. Haldane charges \$550 per day per shooter for all his hunts and is increasing that to \$600 next year. I've

hunted with Haldane in South Africa twice and found his operation first class. I'm scheduled to shoot with him in Botswana in August and will file a first-hand report when I return.

Another relatively new bird shooting operator in Botswana is **Chris Collins of Game Safaris**, booked by the **Detail Company (3220 Audley, Houston, TX 77098; tel. 800-292-2213 or 713-524-7235; fax 713-524-7244; e-mail: dove524@aol.com)**. Formerly with Safari South, Collins started his own operation a few years ago and truly knows and enjoys bird shooting. He shoots in the northwestern edge of the Okavango Delta where the full range of African species is available, including both mourning and laughing doves, pigeons, sandgrouse, guineafowl, and red-billed and crested francolin, plus Egyptian geese, knob-nose ducks, yellow-billed teal and spur-winged geese.

Clients fly into Maun, then take either a three-hour drive or 30-minute charter flight (at extra charge) to the camp. Collins houses guests in a 10-bed permanent tent camp, with bathrooms attached. At times, he uses mobile camps to get to areas too far from the base camp. The dove and sandgrouse shooting is over water, with Burchell's sandgrouse coming to drink in the mornings and double-banded sandgrouse flying in during the evening shoot. In contrast, the guineafowl and francolin are generally driven shoots, with some francolin shooting over pointers and some duck/goose hunting also available. Daily rates are \$450 per shooter and \$300 for observers.

Still in Botswana, **Blackbeard and Hepburn Safaris (PO Box 104, Kasane, Botswana; tel. 011-267-650254; e-mail: cbhsaf@botsnet.bw)** have offered big game safaris since the early 1970s. Three years ago they developed a birdshooting program as well. Most of the action they provide takes place in the Selinda area in northern Botswana near the famous Chobe region. All of the African game birds are present in abundance in this area. Blackbeard and Hepburn also hunt in the Panadamatenga area, which has excellent dove shooting adjacent to some farms and an abundance of guineafowl. They are currently developing a program in this area to hunt francolin over dogs. In groups of four to eight shooters, daily rates are \$450

per shooter. Three hunters cost \$500 per day per shooter, and two are \$600 per day.

Rounding out the bird operators in Botswana is **John Chase of John Chase Safaris (PO Box 444, Francistown, Botswana; tel. 011-267-213280; e-mail: johnchase@info.bw)**. Chase offers birdshooting from mobile tent camps in the Okavango Delta and Makgadikgadi Pan areas. His rates depend on the region, level of service and safari duration but are competitive with the other operators. While he's already booked out for this season, interested wingshooters should contact him for next year.

Bird operators in Botswana offer wingshooting safaris from April 1 through the end of September. Generally, hunters should also expect an extra charge of \$100 for a gun permit and \$120 for a bird hunting license...

Moving on to neighboring Zimbabwe, it's no secret that there has been a great deal of internal strife in this country. Farm invasions, violence, food and fuel shortages and government corruption are a reality, and one result has been a significant decrease in tourism. I was in Zimbabwe in September 2000 and saw the problems first hand. I never feared for my safety, but there was obvious turmoil, particularly in the cities. That said, a number of hunters went to Zimbabwe with reputable outfitters this past year and enjoyed outstanding hunting trips, despite the problems. One such operator is **Bembesi Safaris**, run by **Dave Joubert** and booked by the **Detail Company**.

Joubert offers bird hunts on a 60,000-acre ranch about 45 miles north of Bulawayo. Here the habitat is a mixture of riverine woodlands, hardwood forest and bush. All of the primary African species are available here, with francolin shooting over pointers a normal part of the operation. Accommodations are in a thatched lodge built of natural stone overlooking a lake on the Bembesi River. Non-hunting guests are welcome, and Bembesi can arrange day trips to tourist attractions for them. Bembesi representatives will meet clients in Bulawayo and transport them to the hunting lodge. Daily rates vary from \$250 to \$400 per day, depending on the number of clients and duration of the safari. The bird hunting season runs July 1 to Sept. 30. Recently, Bembesi Safaris

signed an agreement with Chris Collins of Game Safaris to offer eight-day packages that include wingshooting in both Zimbabwe and Botswana.

In closing, I should point out that hunters traveling to Africa should not expect volume bird shooting such as that found in Argentina or Uruguay for dove. You may fire several boxes of shells some days, but the real draw here is the opportunity to hunt multiple species while enjoying a unique African experience.

- Gary Kramer

*(Postscript: As regards the security situation in Zimbabwe, it was very fluid at press time. If you are interested in hunting there with Joubert, do stay in touch with him right up until the time you leave for the airport. We also recommend that you watch international news accounts and check the "Zimbabwe Crisis" Update posted on *The Hunting Report* web site (www.huntingreport.com). While *The Hunting Report* is a publication that serves big game hunters, its Zimbabwe Crisis Updates (found under *What's New*) are useful to anyone interesting in traveling to this country.)*

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