

Serving The Hunter Who Travels

tion (2.97 million) and average production.

The use of electronic calls, more liberal limits, longer seasons and more subsistence harvest have all been discussed as ways to increase the harvest and reduce the population. As a result of these concerns, the daily limit on white geese (snow, blue and Ross') has increased from 10 last season to 20 birds in most areas. That's right, 20 birds and no possession limit! The season length will remain 107 days and can occur anytime between Oct. 1 and March 10.

This year, seasons and limits for Canada and whitefronted geese will be basically the same as last year and variable from 70 to 107 days. Limits are one, two or five birds a day depending on the area and species.

Pacific Flyway

A decade ago, the Pacific flyway whitefronted goose population was in

bad shape. Cackling Canada geese weren't doing well either and both seasons were closed or severely reduced. Since that time, both species have seen impressive population increases and seasons have been re-opened and liberalized.

The number of whitefronted geese has increased an average of seven per cent annually during the past 10 years. Productivity for the Pacific population of whitefronts was good and another large fall flight is expected. Cackling Canada goose populations have increased an average of 12 per cent annually for the past decade. Other Canada goose populations experienced average to good reproduction.

This year, the Pacific flyway goose season will be 100 days. The cackler limit will remain at one, the whitefront limit will be two and, in some areas, up to four Canada geese can be harvested.

Unlike the snow geese that breed in

the central Canadian Arctic and winter in the Central and Mississippi flyways, the snow geese that winter in the Pacific flyway are not damaging their nesting habitat. In fact, some of the birds that winter in the Pacific Flyway breed on Wrangell Island in Russia where long-term population trends have been down. This year, average reproduction occurred in the western Canadian Arctic while Wrangell Island snow geese experienced only fair breeding success and a fall flight smaller than last year's is expected. The limit throughout the Pacific flyway has been three snow geese for years and will remain the same in 1998.

Pacific brant experienced mixed breeding conditions and the fall flight will be smaller than last year. The season on brant will be 16 days in Oregon and Washington and 30 days in California with a two-bird limit.

— Gary Kramer

Dateline: Africa

Editor's Note: So what's happening on the bird hunting scene in Africa? Who is doing what and who is hunting where? Senior correspondent Gary Kramer has recently returned from South Africa and reports that the hunting just keeps getting better and better now that most of the operators have a few seasons plus their skills honed in organizing big game hunts to fall back on. The infrastructure is solid and a hunt with one of the recognized outfits is a truly memorable experience.

Once considered the exclusive domain of the big game hunter, Africa is being recognized as a premier bird shooting destination and a number of outfitters are offering bird hunting safaris. They have dedicated time and money to hone their bird shooting skills and have developed the infrastructure to meet this new demand.

A prime example of a professional hunter who has developed a strong bird shooting program is Mark Haldane of Bird Hunters Africa (represented by Trek International Safaris, P.O. Box 1305, Ponte Vedra Beach, FL 32004;

800-654-9915 or 904-273-7800). Four



years ago, when I first hunted with Haldane, he was primarily a big game professional hunter and started offering bird shooting in 1991 as an add-on to his big game hunts. Eventually, he offered bird hunting on a custom itinerary basis. In 1994, he operated from a leased hunting lodge/ranch house in the Natal Midlands. The hunts yielded good mixed bags that included guineafowl, francolin, ducks, geese, pigeons and doves.

I recently returned to South Africa and spent a few days with Haldane. In just four years, his operation has evolved from hosting a handful of bird hunters to one that hosts four to six hunters vir-

tually every week during the bird season from May 31 to Aug. 31.

The location of his hunts have moved to northern KwaZulu-Natal near Dundee. In addition, he has purchased several hundred acres of land and built his own lodge -- Zulu Wings. He houses his hunters in four double rooms, each with a bath, and quality meals are served in a thatched roof building with a view of the countryside.

The hunts take place within a 30-mile radius of the lodge, making the drive to the hunting area no more than 45 minutes and some as close a five minutes away. Altogether, Haldane has about 110,000 acres leased for bird shooting. With this much acreage leased, Haldane has the luxury of hunting a particular piece of ground only one or twice a season.

The lodge is just outside Dundee, an agricultural area devoted to a variety of crops, including corn, milo, peanuts, pasture and pasture. The grain crops, along with grazing land, have created habitat that supports both variety and high densities of game birds and waterfowl.

During my recent visit, we hunted doves in a harvested corn field and seven shooters bagged about 400 doves in one afternoon. That equates to nearly 60 doves per hunter and, by African standards, was an excellent shoot. Francolin were hunted over pointers and guineafowl were shot as they were driven over the shooters. Both were excellent hunts and shooting the fast-flushing francolin over good English pointers was a treat.

In addition, we hunted ducks and geese a couple of afternoons on small lakes and stock ponds. The bag included spurwing geese (one of the largest geese in the world) and Egyptian geese along with redbilled teal, yellowbilled ducks, whitefaced whistling ducks and southern pochard. While the duck shoots were not hot-barreled and some hunters fared better than others, 10 to 12 birds per shooter was average. Haldane also arranged one shoot for rock pigeons over decoys which yielded 10 to 25 birds per shooter. Overall, the hunting was excellent and among the most varied I have seen anywhere. In fact, the variety and good solid shooting makes this hunt first-class.

Trek offers a two-week, all-inclusive trip from Miami that includes six and a half days of shooting, two days of game viewing at Itala Game Reserve, two days sightseeing in the Cape region and international and domestic airfare for \$5,395 for shooters and \$4,795 for non-shooters. Incidentally, there were two ladies present during my recent trip and Haldane's wife Paula arranged a ladies' itinerary that met with nothing but praise. In addition to shoots operated

from Zulu Wings Lodge, Haldane also offers greywing francolin and rock pigeon shooting in the Eastern Cape: After a few days with Haldane, we moved to the Winterberg Mountains in Eastern Cape, about three hours by car north of East London. There we hooked-up with Mike Ross of **Mike Ross Safaris** (28 Edgware Rd., Diepriver 7800, South Africa; telephone/fax 011-27-21-



7131335). Our quarry was greywing francolin or partridge as the locals call them. They are birds of the mountains that hold well for a dog and form coveys similar to Hungarian partridge or chukar. They are one of the few game birds South African hunters pursue with regularity and are held in high esteem, much like the red grouse of Scotland.

While we were able to drive to the top of most mountains and high plateaus to hunt, a fair amount of walking at elevations between 5,000 and 6,000 feet was necessary. Granted, we spotted a couple of coveys long the road but, by and large, walking (some of it strenuous) was necessary to consistently put birds in the bag. The season for

greywings is May, June and July with a limit of six birds daily.

We hunted on a large private game ranch and the accommodations were in a ranch house where superb meals were served.

In addition to shoots for greywings, Ross organizes birds shoots throughout South Africa, including mixed bag shoots in KwaZulu-Natal, waterfowl in the Western Cape and mixed-bag shoots in the Northern Province. Accommodations vary, depending on the area hunted and include hunting lodges, country inns and tent camps. Ross charges \$300 a day for shooters and \$150 a day for observers.

Finally, a new South African bird shooting outfitter has come to our attention. Graham Jones of **Graham Jones Safaris** (represented by **The Detail Company**, 3220 Audley, Houston, TX 77098; 800-292-2213 or 713-524-7235) has been catering to big game hunters for several years. Recently, he put together a 10-day bird safari that looks interesting. While we have no first-hand knowledge of his operation, he has good recommendations.

The trip includes shooting in four different areas -- the Northern Transvaal for guineafowl and francolin, Western Transvaal for dove and pigeon, South-eastern Transvaal for redwing and greywing francolin, along with waterfowl and the Northern Cape for sand grouse. The price is \$3,500 for shooters and \$1,500 for nonshooters. Airfare, both international and domestic is not included.

— Gary Kramer

Dateline: Ukraine

Editor's Note: In our ongoing search for new bird shooting destinations, we recently discovered an exciting opportunity to hunt for European woodcock and quail in Eastern Europe. Correspondent Stuart Williams looked into this hunt and provided us with the following report on the new offering.

Over the years, bird shoots in the former Soviet Union have been plagued with lack of game, poor guiding, less-

than satisfactory accommodation, excessive competition from local hunters, poor-quality shotshells and undependable domestic air service. Most of the hunts have been for waterfowl.

Now, for the first time that I am aware, an upland bird shoot is on offer. **Outdoor Adventures** (616-895-9340 or Fax 616-895-9345) has put together a trip in Ukraine for European woodcock and European quail. There may also be an opportunity to shoot snipe and ducks.

European woodcock are a much-prized and coveted species. They are about three times as big as North American woodcock and fly much faster and more erratically. The limit is 10 birds a day.

European quail are slightly smaller than bobwhite quail and they hold quite firmly for a dog, presenting an excellent opportunity for a pointing dog to really show its style. The birds do not covey up and generally flush as singles, pairs