



Dateline: Africa

Editor's Note: Thinking about a bird hunt on the Dark Continent? Then read on, because there's plenty of great shooting when you know where to look. Correspondent Gary Kramer provides the following overview of some of the exciting options available in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Botswana and Kenya. With wingshooting in North America over for the season, many hunters turn their attention to the southern hemisphere. Some pick Argentina or Uruguay for their wingshooting, a few travel to New Zealand and an increasing number of U.S. shooters are going to Africa. The growing demand has prompted a number of outfitters to offer birdshooting safaris. Many of the in-country outfitters were and still are professional hunters who have expanded their big game hunting operations into the world of wingshooting. The following is a sample of some of the well-established shoots along with several new ones.

South Africa: This country has long been the leader in African birdshooting. A wide variety of dove and pigeons, along with several species of francolin, guineafowl and at least 10 species of ducks and geese are available. A relatively new outfitter who has received numerous accolades from subscribers is Mark Haldane of Bird Hunters Africa. The 1996 season (May through August) will be the third year he has been represented by Trek International Safaris (800-654-9915). In 1994, I hunted with Haldane and found the quality and variety of birds outstanding and the operation first class. The current program is 13 days, incorporating seven

days of shooting, two days of game viewing and two days touring the Cape region. The shooting is equally divided between the Dundee area northwest of Durban and the Hilton region, both in Natal Province. This is a mixed-bag hunt that includes francolin over well-trained pointers, ducks and geese over decoys, driven guineafowl and pass-shooting dove and pigeon as they flock to grain fields. The shooting is not hot-barreled, but you will have good steady action



each day. The all-inclusive price, including airfare from New York is \$5,295 for shooters and \$4,695 for non-shooters.

In March, we reported on an interesting wingshooting adventure which uses as its base of operations the Rovos Rail, an Edwardian-style, steam-driven train. It seems that, in addition to the June 14 to 23 shoot offered by the travel division of Holland & Holland, a company called Bushsports African Expeditions (800-995-8689 or fax 011-44-181-7805861) is offering six train-based and two fly-in shoots between June and the end of August. The train shoots will be on the Rovos Rail traveling from Johannesburg to

Victoria Falls, Victoria Falls to Pretoria, Pretoria back to Pretoria or Pretoria to Victoria Falls with shooting along the way. Of the six scheduled shoots, only two have openings in 1996. Depending on the trip, the shooting will be for greenwing/redwing francolin over pointing dogs, driven guineafowl and francolin and pass-shooting for ducks, geese, dove, pigeon and sand grouse in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Zambia. The price of the train shoots range from \$11,000 to \$16,600 per couple (one shooter and one non-shooter). The trips are all-inclusive from the point of departure including shells and tips. Bushsports also offers fly-in shoots and currently has openings on a late-August wingshooting trip to Zimbabwe and Zambia. The cost of the seven-day, seven-night trip which includes four days of shooting is \$7,200 for shooters and \$1,600 for non-shooters.

Zimbabwe: One of the newest outfitters in Africa to enter the U.S. market is Hunyani Safaris represented by Frontiers

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(800-245-1950). The safari area lies about two hours northwest of Harare and is based on the 37,000-acre Gombera Estate. The operators, Steve and Moira Seward, also have arranged for exclusive bird hunting rights on several neighboring properties. The hunting is a mix of shooting over pointers for francolin, driven shooting for guinea fowl and francolin and pass-shooting (flying) for pigeons and doves.

Some waterfowl hunting may be available as well. The upland shooting is good and of high quality and the bags are moderate. In contrast, the dove shooting (primarily redbreast doves) is hot-barreled and, under the right circumstances, can yield large numbers of birds. Guests divide their stay between a well-appointed cottage and a comfortable bush camp. While there are no formal seasons or limits, the hunts take place between early July and early October. Limits are liberal and set by the landowner. A typical seven-day program includes four days of shooting and is priced at \$2,770 for shooters and \$2,150 for non-shooters (from Harare).

Another new wingshooting operator is African Game Bird Safaris (booked by J/B Adventure & Safaris; 303-794-1485) which operates Lion's Den Camp in the Chinhoyi region, 75 miles northwest of Harare. This will be the second year of operation and they offer the full range of upland bird shooting - francolin over pointers, driven guinea fowl and francolin and dove and pigeon flying. Bags range from 30 to 50 birds per hunter per day for all species combined.

In addition to upland birds at Lion's Den Camp, hunting for waterfowl can be arranged on Lake Kariba. Here, hunters stay at a lake-side camp and hunt water-

fowl (including spurwing and Egyptian geese) during the morning and evening with an expected bag of 20 to 30 birds per day. The upland bird safari is seven days and includes five days of shooting. Cost is \$3,250 for one or two shooters and \$2,550 for three to eight guns. Observers pay \$150 per day. Waterfowl hunting is additional at \$500 per day plus the air charter to Lake Kariba.



Botswana: Long famous for its big game hunting, Botswana offers some of the finest bird hunting in Africa. A well-established operation is Mark Kyriacou's Bird Safaris (booked by Frontiers; 800-245-1950). They operate two traditional tented camps — one near Lake Ngami and a second at Sum-Sum on the edge of the Okavango Delta. A few years back, I joined Mark at his Ngami Camp and enjoyed outstanding hunting for francolin, guinea fowl, dove and pigeon. When Lake Ngami floods, the waterfowl shooting is legendary. Otherwise, there is ample waterfowl shooting at Sum-Sum throughout the season. The season for upland birds is

April to mid-November and waterfowl can be hunted between early May and mid-September. There are no limits on game birds in Botswana. An eight-day program that includes five days of shooting is priced at \$3,200 for shooters and \$2,320 for non-shooters.

An interesting two-and-a-half-day add-on to the standard program is a Kalahari sand grouse extension. The hunting takes place on the 200,000-acre Eaton Ranch, a one-hour chartered flight from Maun. Here, you will shoot spotted sand grouse, along with dove and guinea fowl.

Kenya: Formerly one of the original safari countries, sweeping reforms



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targeting poaching prohibited all hunting in 1977. Several years later, birdshooting was reopened. Today, up to 15 species of upland game birds and a variety of waterfowl are available. The outfitter is professional hunter Brian Nicholson (booked by Frontiers; 800-245-1950) whose biography reads like

the Who's Who of East Africa. Formerly a game warden and wildlife reserve director, he operates wingshooting and game viewing safaris with the standard program of seven days (four shooting days) priced at \$2,900 per shooter and \$2,200 for non-shooters. Guests live under canvas in a traditional safari style and

enjoy fine cuisine. The trips are offered between June and February. Limits are imposed, but are generous, considering a variety of birds can be shot at the same time. Daily limits are 15 francolin and guineafowl in combination, 20 sand grouse, 25 pigeons/doves and 15 ducks/geese. — Gary Kramer

SNOW GEESE: Atlantic Flyway

Editor's Note: The bad news is the ban on Canadas along the Atlantic flyway, the good news is an overpopulation of snow geese. With a 100-day season and a bag limit of five birds, snows provide an exciting substitute along the entire Atlantic flyway. Granted, they don't decoy as easily and won't respond to calls as readily, but snow geese more than make up for these shortcomings in sheer numbers. Correspondent Bill Burton provided the following round-up of what's available and where.

It is becoming increasingly obvious that the shooting of migratory Canada geese in the Atlantic Flyway is, at best, several years away. Add a few more years if waiting for good shooting action and attractive regulations. Problems persist on the Arctic nesting grounds.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service shut the season down last year, driving most outfitters and guides of the Delmarva Peninsula out of business, along with many in New Jersey, as well. Some survivors turned to ducks; others switched to snow geese, with mixed reaction among their clientele.

No one expected the snow goose to replace the Canada, but despite seasons of more than 100 days and daily bag limits of five, many shooters and outfitters aren't willing to make the switch at this time. Some might change their minds.

Snow goose hunting is erratic and it's work. Until the honker decline started in the late 1980s, goose shooting was easy, competent guides were usually an assurance of filling liberal bag limits. There were a million Canadas in the flyway; shooting was fast on Maryland's Eastern Shore, in Delaware, and much of New Jersey.

It's different with snows. Snow

geese don't decoy as easily, calling is not nearly as effective and the white birds are not nearly as dependable. They don't set up shop for long at one place, which makes planning shoots difficult for outfitters and exceptionally expensive.

Like Canadas of the past, mid-Atlantic snows are moving from water to agricultural fields. Combine that with their pattern of continually changing feeding areas and lease costs can be



prohibitive.

With Canadas, guides could plan on going today where they did well yesterday. It doesn't work with snows, though they are a bit more reliable in marshes adjacent to waters such as Delaware and Chesapeake Bays, also smaller bays in New Jersey, and the larger national wildlife refuges in those states.

In refuge areas, much shooting involves birds leaving sanctuaries to feed on surrounding farms, thus gunning is more predictable. Some refuges have shooting programs and all welcome hunting in nearby areas as a population control measure. Snow geese eat-outs are salt marshes.

Thus far, the flyway harvest within

the United States has had little impact on their numbers. Fish & Wildlife Service figures indicate annual kills the past dozen years ranging from 20,000 to 82,000. The big seasons come in years of high nesting success when there are more juvenile birds which are more vulnerable to the gun.

It wasn't until 1975 that waterfowl managers decided there were sufficient snows to reopen shooting after a 31-year close. Now their populations are close to those of migratory Canadas, which number between 350,000 and 500,000. Not far behind at 200,000 or more are non-migratory honkers often referred to as nuisance geese. They could, in the near future, open another alternative for traditional Canada goose shooting.

The past several years, the shooting of non-migrant Canadas has increased dramatically in popularity, prompting some guides to consider hunting programs. However, 10-day nuisance goose shoots close in mid-September on Delmarva to insure early migrants aren't taken.

A combination of improved duck flights and increasing snow and non-migratory honker numbers could be sufficient to keep some guide services operating until the hoped-for return of shootable numbers of Canadas. Much depends on improved nesting success in the Arctic.

A turnabout in nesting success won't be a quick solution, waterfowl managers say, because Canadas need three or four years to become efficient breeders. Also, decision-makers figure a very conservative approach will be necessary to insure rebuilding populations are not overshot. There is concern, too, the current moratorium will make honkers less cautious, more vulnerable to the gun when shooting resumes.