

## Dateline: South Dakota

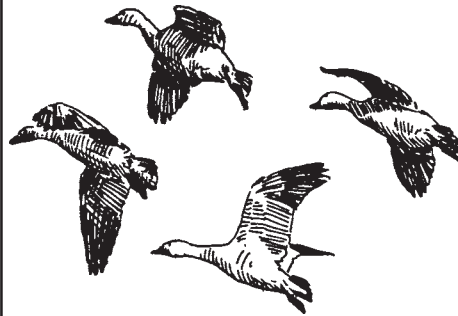
### Springtime Snow Goose Bonanza

#### Part I: Snows A' Fallin' in South Dakota

- Tens of thousands of birds
- No frills guide service
- **Timetable:** Late-March to early-April
- **Accommodations:** Local motels
- **Food:** Local restaurant
- **Hunt:** Easy to moderate

Imagine lying in a coffin blind, on the frozen ground (until mid-day when it turns into thick muck), surrounded by corn or soybean stubble, maybe simply in a cow pasture, watching a cloud of smoke rise from two miles away. Imagine the aching anticipation of watching

them transform as they approach, from that cloud into a flock of birds. Imagine beginning to hear their puppy-like barks and then being surrounded by 3,000 of



yelping, barking geese.

Further, imagine the flock drifting back and forth overhead at a height of 500 yards, wings locked like drifting

gulls. Imagine them coursing back and forth directly overhead, ever so slowly drifting down. Imagine another flock joining in above them. Then another. Now the birds appear as a layer cake, slowly shifting. A cake with six thousand eyes searching for anything out of place, anything out of synch, any hint of the unnatural.

**Hunters who can imagine themselves beholding a similar scene might want to plan to head to South Dakota in the spring.** That might not be the first season that comes to mind when waterfowl hunting is brought up, but when it comes to snow and blue geese it might just be the best. **Northeastern South Dakota just might offer the best gunning in this, the best of seasons.**

**Tracy Northup, owner of Up North Outdoors,** chases these snow geese from

*(continued on page 2)*

## Dateline: Saskatchewan

### Part II: Snows in Saskatchewan

- Plan to hunt Canada's "Land of the Living Sky"
- Play an active role in conservation
- **Timetable:** April – May
- **Accommodations:** Comfortable house/lodge
- **Food:** Excellent and substantial
- **Hunt:** Easy

In April and May, Central Flyway geese stage on the prairie and fatten up while the ice thaws on Hudson Bay. Over the last few decades, snow geese have thrived on farmers' crops in the Midwest U.S. and Canada. Now, flocks in the Cen-

tral Flyway are so large they're destroying the environment on their breeding grounds. If there are too many birds, there won't be enough food to carry the young goslings into flight stage.

In the spring, hunters have the chance to do something for the environment and waterfowl by going to the Canadian prairie with a shotgun and a case of steel shot. Because of the threat the high numbers of snow geese pose to the tundra and to themselves, federal agencies in Canada and the U.S. have implemented a series of spring hunts.

Each of the last two springs, Saskatchewan soaked up a lot of precipitation, which translated to substantial

crops and plenty of water for waterfowl. The low, rolling fields are a smorgasbord of wheat, barley, peas and other crops. From

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## South Dakota... (from page 1)

Missouri to South Dakota each year. With a stable of four to six guides working with him, he moves his team in mid-March to the fields in the general vicinity of Aberdeen. **The reason they move here is the Sand Lake National Wildlife Refuge.** The refuge attracts well over 250,000 snows and blues at a time each spring. Throughout the spring nearly a million birds use the area.

Northrup has agreements with a large number of property owners in the area to utilize their fields. These fields run the gamut from croplands like corn or soybeans to old grass pasturelands. Guides will set up 500 to 1,000 decoys in each field, most, thankfully, of the sock variety. (It's "thankfully" because if changes need to be made, the clients need to help make them.) Coffin blinds, electronic callers and unplugged and/or extended magazine shotguns are legal for this hunt because snow geese are dangerously overpopulated. Their breeding grounds are ripe for a disaster of biblical proportions. The entire population could be decimated by a disease, and might be by a lack of food. They are destroying their own breeding grounds because of their burgeoning numbers.

**Hunting the spring birds is a crapshoot. It is absolutely weather dependent.** If a warm spell enters the forecast, the birds might continue heading north into Canada. If it gets sub-freezing, the birds might head south. When it all comes together perfectly, it is magic.

Some days the birds come into range regularly and will drop like flies. Other days they'll tease hunters flying just out of range, never quite coming quite low enough. The numbers of birds we shot over the four days my three-man group hunted were 8, 52, 21 and 65. The fourth day we were joined by another hunter and only hunted the morning. The weather, for our late March hunt, was next to perfect.

The coffin blinds we used were well worn but quite usable. The notable ex-

ception is that one of them was flooded from the knees to the feet. We were being hustled into the field early on the second day and didn't notice the water until it was much too late. Hunters would be well advised to pack a foam sleeping pad that will provide comfort and warmth as well as keep the blind's frame from digging into parts that they don't want dug into.

Getting to and from the blinds is either simple or misery. In the morning with the ground frozen walking in is generally simple. If it gets warm during the day,

the rich black earth turns to sticky sludge. Hunters using the croplands will face a long, slow trudge back to their vehicles. Since they'll also be carrying the birds, balance might become an issue as well. Well-supported, insulated waterproof boots are a must.

Lunch is left up to the hunters. We opted to take ours at a local diner near the fields we hunted. There is a lull in the shooting at midday, which makes it a good time to leave the field for a spell. Hunters should expect to pay for the guide's lunch. The meals, however, are very reasonably priced.

**Groups of fewer than six hunters will be combined with other groups who have also booked with Northrup.** A group of fewer than six hunters willing to pay a premium may elect to have a field to itself.

**Limits are liberal at 20 birds per day. There is no possession limit.** That might present a problem, though, for people who expect all the amenities: **Up North Outdoors doesn't offer bird cleaning services;** hunters must clean their own and maybe a few more. If hunters do not agree upon the numbers of birds each wants before the guns start to sound, there might be a few left over. The guide will be shooting, too, and there's a 99.9 percent chance that he won't be taking any birds at the end of the day. Since there is no lodge or headquarters, hunters need to find places to clean the birds and to dispose of the car-



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casses. When asked, our guide offered no suggestions as to where to do either the cleaning or disposing. We used the back parking lot of a local motel. We double-bagged the carcasses and used a convenient dumpster.

Hunters who reserve a field for their group should feel free to bring their own dogs to help retrieve the birds. **For those who are hunting a combined-group field, dogs are strictly forbidden.**

Storing birds is also an issue that hunters need to come prepared for. **There is no storage facility, so they need to bring coolers, lots of them, if they plan on shooting their limits.** My group arranged for **Frohling's Meat Processing in Hecla** to process our birds after we cleaned them. And by the way, I highly recommend their snow goose

jerky, cheese and jalapeno summer sausage and smoked brats.

Hunters are responsible for getting themselves from their lodging to the fields, then to lunch and back. Folks who fly into Aberdeen will find the car rental agencies know of the hunting and the messes that vehicles can become. They warn of an exorbitant cleaning fee if they see mud on the carpets. What we did was to get some heavy-duty trash bags to cover the seats and the floor.

During our hunt the Up North team stayed at a Super 8, which we did, too. When I go back I'll be staying at the Ramkota, a half-mile away. **The Super 8 was just fine, the staff friendlier than most. The issue was there was no restaurant within walking distance.** After

returning to the motel an hour after dark, then cleaning birds, the last thing we wanted to do was to drive around looking for a restaurant every night. **The dinner we had at the Ramkota convinced me staying there would be in my future plans.**

Up North Outdoors offers three- and four-day packages: Friday through Sunday (\$500 per hunter) and Monday through Thursday (\$675 per hunter). They can also arrange for shorter hunts if their scheduling allows.

**Up North Outdoors, Tracy Northup, 563-382-0530, [www.huntupnorth.com](http://www.huntupnorth.com).**

**Best Western Ramkota Hotel, 606-229-4040, [www.aberdeen.ramkota.com](http://www.aberdeen.ramkota.com).**

**Frohling's Meat Processing, 605-994-2632.**

—Dan Donarski

## Saskatchewan ... (from page 1)

the air, the traveling hunter sees water everywhere. Creeks meander through the farmland, and strings of potholes and ponds sparkle like blue sapphires.

In the third week of April 2007, my flight plans intersected with the itinerary of the snow geese on the prairie east of Saskatoon.

I hunted with **Sykes Mitchell of Living Sky Outfitters**. Mitchell, of Sisters, Ore., is one of only seven U.S. residents to own an outfitter's license in Canada. His permit grants him the hunting rights to 13,500 square miles of Saskatchewan.

From the airport in Saskatoon, it is a 2 1/2-hour drive east to Mitchell's lodge on the banks of Duck Creek near Kelvington.

The lodge is a comfortable country house that Mitchell has converted to serve the traveling hunter. It sleeps eight. When we were there, work was under way on an addition that will house up to 20 hunters.

There is no shortage of food. The daily routine goes something like this: Wake up, get a cup of coffee and a piece of toast and go hunting. Return from the fields about 10:30 a.m. for a breakfast of French toast, pancakes, Canadian bacon, bacon encrusted with brown sugar, scrambled eggs and orange juice. During the afternoon, there are sausages and cheese to sample. Dinner is served when

the hunters return after dark. This isn't standard hunting camp fare. The food is prepared by a chef and is worthy of the finest restaurants.

After breakfast, hunters have the op-



tion of returning to the field or taking a nap before heading to the field again about 3 p.m. Hunters have the additional option of hunting amid decoys or pass-shooting. The guides are experienced callers and veteran waterfowl hunters. Spreads are large, with up to 600 decoys. Guides use mouth calls, electronic callers and motion decoys.

Mitchell employs a scout to monitor flock movements and to obtain permission from nearby farmers and ranchers. Most of the hunting is on private land. It is rare to hunt the same place twice in one week.

Hunters ride to the field in Chevrolet Suburbans. **Drives to hunt-**

**ing areas average five to 10 minutes.** It is usually a short walk to the layout blind or to a pass-shooting setup.

Temperatures here average 30 to 65 F. To access some of the best shooting spots, hunters must walk through flooded fields. Mitchell recommends hunters pack rubber boots or hip waders and raingear, too.

Mitchell has extra shotguns in camp but advises hunters to bring their own. We borrowed a 12-gauge Beretta over/under and a Remington 1100 autoloader. Ammunition is available in camp.

The Spring Conservation Hunt runs from April 1 through May 31, with a limit of 20 birds per day, 60 in possession. A license for this hunt costs \$17 CDN.

**A four-day, five-night package costs \$2,200.** This includes **guided hunting, food and lodging.** Extras include airport transportation, shotgun shells, license, bird cleaning and gratuity. A six-day, seven-night all-inclusive stay runs \$3,800.

The outfitter has bird cleaning facilities on-site and can arrange for a local bird cleaner at a cost of \$4 per bird. Secure kennels are provided for customers who want to bring their own dogs.

**Prospects for spring snow goose hunts appear strong for the next eight years** as wildlife managers attempt to get populations under control.

Living Sky Outfitters also offers fall hunts for waterfowl and upland birds. The season starts Sept. 10 and runs through Nov. 10. Ruffed grouse, sharp-tails and

Hungarian partridge can be hunted within minutes of the lodge. The fall nonresident license costs \$134 CDN.

**Sykes Mitchell, Living Sky Outfit-**

**ters, P.O. Box 1923, Sisters, OR 97759; 541-549-6030, 541-771-4976 (cell); www.LivingSkyOutfitters.com.**

—Gary Lewis

### Dateline: Alabama

#### Action-packed Quail Hunting in Alabama's Black Belt

- Traditional plantation-type hunt
- Books only one group at a time
- **Timetable:** December – February
- **Accommodations:** Rustic lodge with elegant interior
- **Food:** Fine dining
- **Hunt:** Easy

Located in the heart of what was once Alabama's premier cotton producing region, **Cottonwoods Sportsman's Lodge** brings a touch of refinement to a remote location. Manager **Montgomery Smith** oversees 1,600 acres of Alabama Black Belt land with four bird courses.

The lodge is an impressive structure overlooking a 40-acre bass lake. Smith and **Bill Glass**, the property's owner, conceived the idea for the lodge and shooting preserve and brought it to fruition five years ago, shortly before Glass's untimely death. Constructed from hewn logs cut from the property, it has a rustic look, complete with stone fireplace. The porch is an excellent place to sip coffee in the morning or cocktails in the evening. While the construction style is rustic, the interior is elegantly decorated with a large couch and deep, soft chairs. A large, wooden, well-stocked bar covers one wall. The lodge is very clean and inviting and a large fire is very enjoyable. The lodge has satellite television.

Four double-occupancy bedrooms feature two full-sized beds each. Two rooms share spacious, clean bathrooms. The lodge accommodates eight hunters with a minimum party of four. Parties booking Cottonwoods have the lodge to themselves because the lodge doesn't mix parties.

Cottonwoods serves meals on expensive, fine china and food is fine dining with some southern touches. The lodge serves the night meal with wine and features a two-inch thick filet mignon

wrapped in bacon. **Smith has the "Cottonwoods Cut" special ordered at a meat market an hour's drive away.** Green beans, twice-baked potatoes and salad are served from a lazy susan. The meal always features a homemade dessert. Hunters who stay more than one



night get a two-inch thick grilled pork chop on the second evening. A heavy southern breakfast of bacon, sausage, grits, eggs, biscuits and gravy is typically served between 7-8 a.m. The lodge serves a light lunch of sandwiches and chips. The overall food quality was excellent.

The lodge hunting property is mostly converted crop and pasture land with wooded edges. Smith has worked to create appropriate quail habitat. Efforts include poisoning exotic pasture grasses, burning, disk and planting grain crops. The courses have the birdy look of fallow fields. Some areas are very thick and moderately difficult to walk through. But Smith mowed lanes through all of the courses making for easy walking. Wooded areas are thick and difficult to hunt. On my hunt, virtually all shooting took place in the open and was relatively close and easy. We pursued several singles into the woods but were unable to see the birds that flushed.

Hunters ride in buggies towed by ATVs. They can walk as much or as little they like, or dismount only for points.

We hunted two setters named Rock Star and Joe. They appeared to be well-trained, disciplined dogs that held points and obeyed commands. Hunting in poor

scent conditions during a drought, our dogs had some difficulty pinpointing birds and they bumped some. Because they worked close, we had shots at most of the birds they bumped. They also had difficulty locating dead birds and were reluctant retrievers. We lost four or five birds in heavy cover.

Cottonwoods pre-releases birds in September and adds "insurance birds" before most hunts. We had no insurance birds and were hunting only those pre-released or left over from a previous hunt. Large numbers of birds clustered in the thickest cover. The birds often ran until they reached open ground, at which point they flew. Flight quality ranged from poor to excellent. **We had at least three explosive full covey rises and we had four or five short hoppers.** Smith said that the cover had yet to die back and the birds

*(continued on page 6)*

### BHR Field Staff

The *Bird Hunting Report* is always looking for people to join its Field Staff, subscribers who go above and beyond the call by filing extensive reports on great places to hunt (or to avoid). These subscribers who file the reports found in our "Field Notes" section remain "on staff" for a year and receive a special *BHR* cap.

This month, **David Rhoads** extends his stay on our staff, which includes, **Kenneth Raessler, Nassos Michas, Deke Welles, Curt Frisbie and Wayne H. W. Latta.**

Reports need to be honest and balanced, indicating the bad as well as the good. So instead of just filing the usual "Hunt Report Form," why not join our Field Staff by submitting a complete account for "Field Notes" at *The Bird Hunting Report*, PO Box 328, Boyds, MD 20841; 301-528-2497 (fax); support@pnmsi.com.

preferred to stay on the ground in the thick cover rather than fly. The birds that flew poorly when first flushed flew very well when pushed, and the birds flew better as the day progressed. Birds were very plentiful, and finding large groups made for exciting shooting.

Our half-day, morning hunt included 27 points, not counting birds that were flushed and pointed again. We flushed 91 birds and killed 55. Other birds escaped without flying.

The base price for that half-day hunt is \$250 per hunter with a limit of 12 birds per hunter. The extra birds are \$7.50 apiece, bringing our total to \$732.50. Full-day hunts cost \$600 per hunter with

a 15-bird limit, and include lodging, three meals, cocktails, bird cleaning, guide, dogs, in-field refreshments, field transportation and free fishing in the lodge's lake before, between or after hunts.

Cottonwoods limits hunting parties to four people with only two shooting at one time. An eight-person party may be broken into three groups.

Hunters must provide a valid Alabama hunting license, shotgun, shells, boots and clothing. Thorn bushes and briars make brush pants necessary. Alabama's unpredictable winter weather with its frequent rain and wide temperature swings means hunters should prepare for anything from temperatures in

the high 20s to shirtsleeve weather. Rain gear is necessary and hunters would be well advised to pack both light hunting boots and rubber boots.

Cottonwoods is located three miles from Uniontown, Ala., a two-hour drive from either the Montgomery or Birmingham airport. The drive from Montgomery is virtually all four-lane divided highway. The drive from Birmingham is split between interstate and two-lane roads. Transportation from either airport can be arranged in advance.

**Cottonwoods Sportsman's Lodge, Montgomery Smith, 334-289-0188, [www.cottonwoodslodge.com](http://www.cottonwoodslodge.com).**

—Robert DeWitt

### Wing Shooting in the Shadow of Colorado's Book Cliff Mountain Range

- Hunt for pheasant, chukar, Hungarian partridge
- Combo trips for big game, trout available
- **Timetable:** September through February
- **Accommodations:** Rustic guesthouses
- **Food:** Hearty country cooking with a regional flare
- **Hunt:** Easy to Moderate

The owners and camp management of **High Lonesome Ranch** have worked tirelessly over the past decade to create a world-class sporting experience. With a 70 percent repeat business, they clearly have succeeded.

The terrain, like the different bird species available, is a pleasant mixed bag. Some walk-up hunts are through wheat, sedan grass, milo or rye fields, while others are held in sagebrush that provides ample hiding places for birds. Walking through the grasses is easy, but the going gets a little tougher in the low, scraggly, sagebrush. It seems, though, that there are always pathways through the brush. It's exciting to see birds flush into the open from the brushy cover. The ranch has over 50,000 acres, which means there is no shortage of cover to hunt.

### Dateline: Colorado

**There are native blue grouse on the property, but their small numbers make them a fringe benefit to any hunt.** On our hunt, daily flushes on the grouse averaged around eight, with as many as 24 starts on a good day. High Lonesome is looking to work with an adjoining property that has



a significant blue grouse population, and if the deal concludes, then grouse hunts will be prioritized for 2008.

High Lonesome has six resident bird guides and six lodge dogs. **Todd Weiszbrod** is the head bird-hunting guide and uses one of the five pointing labs or the golden retriever for hunts. Many times he will run two dogs in tandem and favors the pointing dog/flushing dog combination. Additional off-ranch guides are brought in to accommodate larger groups. The close-working dogs are never more than 20 to 30 yards in front of hunters, but when the birds clear the cover, they don't wait around.

Weiszbrod suggests clients bring either 12- or 20-gauge shotguns choked modified to full. He favors shot sizes 5 or 6. The lodge has a selection of Ruger and Browning 12- and 20-gauge shotguns for rent, and shells and other hunting gear are available for purchase in its pro shop.

**The lodge offers two types of warm-up shooting: Five-Stand and a Pheasant Walk.** Shooting typically starts at the well designed Five-Stand which offers a mix of technical and hunting shots. The Pheasant Walk moves from the formality of shooting butts to the field; the 15-minute walk-through-cover course features clays flung to simulate various bird-flushing patterns. All clays are thrown from state-of-the-art electric traps.

After a suitable warm up, it's time for the hunt. A typical day involves two hunts, three hours each, with a break for lunch. Ranch policy is for no more than three hunters per guide. Rain is seldom a variable in the Western Slope of the Rockies, but both heat and altitude play a factor. Temperatures during the hunting season range from 45 to 75 degrees with the warmer temperatures in September and October. Every guide's truck is fully stocked with bottled-water and soft drinks to ensure a guest's proper hydration. There's no such thing as drinking "too much" water here. The ranch's elevation is around 6,000 feet, so hunters from near sea level will want to exercise prior to visiting High Lonesome.

**Aunt Linda, the camp cook, makes**

sure that no one goes hungry at **High Lonesome**. A Louisiana native, Aunt Linda prepares delicious gourmet/country meals with a Southwestern flare. Breakfast varies from pancakes with Maine blueberries and Vermont Maple syrup to Huevos Rancheros and homemade bread-toast. Custom-built sandwiches with potato salad and fresh fruit are common lunch meals. Prime rib, fried chicken or steak enchiladas with cornbread, fried okra or a side-salad are for dinner. Her pheasant quesadillas are not to be missed. Aunt Linda features 10 different desserts, each of which is baked from scratch. Strawberry shortcake, cream puffs with homemade chocolate sauce and fresh-whipped cream or berry cobblers with ice cream are favorites. White or red wines, soft drinks, sweet tea or lemonade accompany dinner, and coffee follows with dessert.

The rustic, ranch-style guesthouses were recently remodeled. Large bedrooms are off a main living room and a full kitchen. **Camp Manager Buzz Cox** stocks each guesthouse with a variety of non-alcoholic beverages in the refrigerator, several bottles of red and white wine and a variety of snacks. **The views from both houses are spectacular: they over look mountain ranges, trout ponds and fields with mule deer or elk feeding at first or last light.** Cox frequently brings in different Bluegrass bands for after dinner “around-the-campfire” performances. Guests supply their own hard liquor or beer.

High Lonesome’s location means that mobile phone service and wireless Internet access are minimal to non-existent. The lodge does have hard lines for phone calls, and high-speed Internet is available in the main lodge.

2008 bird hunt costs: \$2,300 per person for a two-day/three-night all-inclusive package; \$3,000 each for three days/four nights. Shotgun rentals: \$50/day; shells, \$6/box for target loads and \$13 for field loads.

The ranch has over 300 shallow, spring-fed ponds loaded with big trout, as well as a trophy elk and mule deer herd. The lodge does a significant amount of combination packages, from a trout fishing/bird hunting trip to a big game/bird hunting trip. High Lonesome Ranch can accommodate large or corporate groups as well. It is located in De Beque, a 40-minute drive from the Grand Junction airport.

**High Lonesome Ranch, Buzz and Rose Cox, 970-283-9420, [www.thehighlonesomeranch.com](http://www.thehighlonesomeranch.com).**

—Tom Keer

## Dateline: Missouri

### The Fort Knox of Ducks

- Hunt success determined by weather
- Nearby refuge attracts thousands of waterfowl
- **Timetable:** Early to mid-November
- **Accommodations:** Converted farmhouse
- **Food:** Plain fare
- **Hunt:** Easy

I felt as if I were standing outside Fort Knox but without the keys. There were an estimated 198,000 ducks on Squaw Creek National Wildlife Refuge in Northwest Missouri and I was hunting 50 yards from its boundary. But big numbers of birds don’t always equal daily limits. **In three four-hour hunts with Pro Outfitters, I did not fire a shot and my son killed the only suicidal duck we saw. It wasn’t for lack of potential.** Thousands of ducks streamed westward off the refuge, headed probably to the Missouri River. Few even paused at the sound of a hail call before flying high enough to cause nosebleed even in a duck. There are so many light geese on the refuge that, when they fly and are spotlighted against the distant loess bluffs, they look like a blizzard.

Light geese always tend to spiral upward toward the stratosphere within the refuge boundaries, then line out for distant corn stubble to feed. There was a full moon, which may have accounted for the lack of ducks — they ate their way well into the wee hours while we



slept, then slept while we hunted. We saw ducks in historic numbers, but ice-up and maybe just plain bad luck conspired against us. No outfitter can promise a limit or even many good shots.

Pro Outfitters offers five pit blinds, each accommodating a half-dozen or so hunters. A policy of guiding a maximum of 10 hunters at a time, however, leaves clients free to arrange as many or as few hunters per blind as they want. There are

two or three guides available, depending on circumstances. **Pro Outfitters owner Brad Hannaway** leases 7,000 acres in four areas in Northwest Missouri.

The converted farmhouse can sleep 10 hunters in a comfortable, but no-frills situation: bunk beds or single beds, four persons to a room. Dogs are welcome. There are three motels nearby, two in Mound City and one several miles south on Interstate 29, but virtually all hunters opt to stay in the farmhouse. The guides do the cooking and they’re good at hunter fare, simple things like deer chili or pork chops with baked beans: ample and hearty.

There are plans to build a modern lodge in the loess bluffs overlooking the wildlife refuge, but that won’t be fact until at least 2009. Hannaway is looking for additional hunter housing for 2008.

In addition to ducks, goose species available include Canada, light and speckled belly. Daily charges for waterfowl hunts at Pro Outfitters are \$250.

In addition to a federal waterfowl stamp, nonresident permits required are migratory bird (\$6) and small game (\$75 or a daily permit, \$11). Hunters need proof of hunter certification.

Pro Outfitters also offers deer and wild turkey hunting.

Nearest airports: Kansas City International and Omaha's Eppley Airport each are about 100 miles away. Clients may rent vehicles or arrange for Pro Outfitters shuttle service. Private pilots might be interested in Mound City's grass strip or a 4,000-foot paved strip that accommodates twin-engine planes in Falls City, Neb. Each is about a dozen

miles from Pro Outfitters headquarters.

The weather can be highly variable; it was 76 degrees two days before my hunt, then a less-than-balmy 20 degrees with an inch of ice by the time I arrived. No need to worry about overheating from a long hike in warm clothes: hunters are ferried within a few yards — if not within a few feet — of their blinds.

Though my hunting was so poor, from past hunts in the same area I know

how good it can be. Obviously much depends on weather. Unpredictable November weather can bring freeze-ups that either drive ducks out or concentrate them on the refuge.

**Pro Outfitters, 10440 County Rd. 230, Oronogo, MO 64855; 417-434-8915; [www.huntprooutfitters.com](http://www.huntprooutfitters.com); [info@huntprooutfitters.com](mailto:info@huntprooutfitters.com).**

— Joel M. Vance

## Subscriber Field Notes

### Waterfowling in Oregon's Klamath River Basin

On March 6, 2007, I flew to Portland, Ore., to do a late season speckled-bellied goose hunt. My good friend Jim Girod met me at the Portland airport. We collected my bags and took a short trip downstate to his house to spend the night. In the morning, we took a leisurely ride downstate on Interstate 5 to Milford, then over the mountain pass to the western side of the state to the upper Klamath Basin area.

Upon our arrival in Klamath Falls, we checked in at the Shilo Inn, which is centrally located just off the highway. We had a lower level room that was very spacious so we had plenty of floor space to spread out our hunting gear. The inn was a nice facility with a pool, spa, workout area and a very good restaurant onsite. Naturally, the off-season rate was nice, too. After we settled in, we called our guide **Shawn Howe** of **Howe Guide Service** for a hunting update and his plans for the next morning's hunt.

Shawn met us at 6:30 sharp the following morning. We loaded up Jim's rig and followed Shawn out of town to a ranch that he had exclusive goose hunting rights to. In our hunting party we had two gentlemen from northern California, Wayne and Dave. That gave us a total of four hunters and our guide. We made quick work of setting up the decoys and putting the white cloth covers over our blinds. Shawn had scouted this field the night before. He laid out the blinds based on the wind conditions and the way the birds were flying toward our

decoy spread. It didn't take long for the geese to begin landing in our decoys. We collected a couple of specs our first morning and took an early lunch break. We returned to the field shortly after 1 p.m. and chased the geese out of our decoy spread.

Oregon's waterfowl regulations per-



tained to this hunt with the only difference being a two speckled-bellied goose bag limit per day. This hunt was designed to move the geese off the private grazing lands back onto federal land or to encourage the geese to start moving north toward the Arctic. The speckled-bellied goose population has grown immensely and they are now doing a lot of damage to the farmers' grazing land and winter wheat fields. That is why this specially designed hunting season could take place only on private land. The geese were absolutely beautiful as they were in full plumage, which was great for the hunter who wanted to have one mounted.

On our first morning of hunting we had a light snow with about a half-inch

of ice on the standing water that was in the pasture. By mid-morning, the temperature had gotten into the upper 40s and was sunny and beautiful the rest of the day. The next morning, it was cold, rainy and overcast with a little bit of wind. Klamath Valley is on what they call the eastern side of the state and is about four weeks behind the coastal side of the state, which had beautiful green grass and trees that were beginning to bud. It is important to come prepared for the best waterfowl weather Mother Nature can throw at you.

Shawn Howe Guide Service offers spring and summer fishing trips and fall duck and goose hunting. His equipment was fairly new and in good working condition. His new Argo made it a lot easier to move all of the hunting equipment and the hunters in and out of the muddy pastures. The coffin blinds were quite comfortable. He has a "go get 'em style" of hunting, and he's not bad on a goose call, either. He does a great job of getting his hunters in front of the birds.

Because Howe is such a great guide, I booked another hunt for December of 2007.

This hunt will take place on a large, free flowing river after all the inland lakes freeze up. This is going to be a real cold hunt, but the ringneck, redhead, lesser scaup and greater scaup should be in full plume and beautiful for mounting.

Thanks again, Shawn, for a great hunt.

**Howe Guide Service, Shawn Howe, [www.klamathduckguide.com](http://www.klamathduckguide.com).**

—David Rhoads

## Briefly Noted

### Things to Do, Places to Go, New Developments

#### North Dakota — Update on Game Violation Prosecutions

Here's a follow-up on the big wildlife violations case reported on by **Contributor Patricia Stockdill** in the **October issue of BHR**.

By *Brad Dokken, grandforksherald.com*:

On Nov. 9, the former operators of Sheyenne Valley Lodge near Goodrich, N.D., were sentenced in **the largest federal wildlife prosecution in North Dakota history**.

Ted Mertz, 42, and his father, Orlan Mertz, 72, pleaded guilty in U.S. District Court in Bismarck to misdemeanor violations of the Lacey Act, which prohibits the transport of illegally taken wildlife.

Meanwhile, the lodge, which operated as a Limited Liability Partnership, pleaded guilty to a felony violation of federal game laws.

U.S. District Judge Dan Hovland ordered the Mertzzes to pay \$90,000 in fines and restitution as part of a plea agreement. Of that total, \$35,000 goes to the North Dakota Game and Fish Dept., \$10,000 to the Dakota Zoo Raptor Rehabilitation Program in Bismarck and \$45,000 goes to the Lacey Act Reward Account.

According to court records, investigators documented hundreds of violations, which included routinely encouraging hunters to shoot more than their limit of waterfowl and upland game birds, shooting raptors and wasting unwanted birds by throwing the carcasses into dump pits to rot.

As part of a plea agreement, Ted Mertz and Orlan Mertz each were placed on probation for two years. They also were banned from guiding and outfitting for life and may not hunt in North America for two years.

The Mertzzes ceased operation in 2005, and the lodge now is under new ownership.

Orlan Mertz apologized in court. He called the incident "the biggest mistake I've made in my business life." Ted Mertz said he knew crimes were being committed and accepted responsibility. "Basically there's no excuse," he said.

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#### Texas — Update on Guide's Services; New Bird Hunting Operation

We heard about this guide in a hunt report from **subscriber Mike Telesmanic** in **June 2007**.



By *Ray Sasser, dallasnews.com*:

Mark Meissenburg, a California native, takes more hunters after sandhill cranes than any other Texas hunting outfitter, and his clients are successful at filling their bag limit 98 percent of the time.

A mature greater sandhill (the largest of three subspecies) may weigh 14 pounds and ride the wind currents on wings that span more than seven feet. If birds truly descended from dinosaurs, you could shake the sandhill's family tree and a pterodactyl would fall out. The grain-fed crane is sometimes referred to as the "rib-eye of the sky."

Like other waterfowl, cranes migrate south from summer nesting grounds on the prairie potholes of the western U.S. and Canada. Their ringing call is so loud that you can often hear migrating cranes that are flying so high they cannot be seen.

Sandhills winter in farming country from the Texas Panhandle to the Gulf Coast. The Amarillo to Big Spring corridor is a sandhill freeway, mostly due to vast fields of alfalfa, milo, maize, corn, wheat and other crops that serve as a crane cafeteria spread over several thousand square miles.

For his success, Meissenburg relies on three key factors.

He uses large, portable blinds that totally conceal his hunters. The oversized structure may look obvious to a human observer, but cranes tend to

ignore the straw-colored blind, as long as they cannot see humans or movement. Meissenburg uses a decoy spread that features mounted sandhill cranes. Finally, he wears the cranes down through persistence.

"I probably drive 40,000 miles during the course of a hunting season," Meissenburg said. "When I'm not hunting cranes, I'm scouting where the birds are moving and what time they're using certain fields and waterholes.

"Our hunters come from all over the country. Many of them have hunted cranes before, but they've shot them at long range. They can't believe how readily the birds come to mounted decoys."

They come so close that Meissenburg shoots a 20-gauge shotgun with an improved cylinder choke. So do many of his repeat clients. Meissenburg is so successful that he commands \$400 for a crane hunt. The daily bag limit is three birds.

Meissenburg guides hunters for ducks, geese and cranes, but crane hunts make up 50 percent of his business. He owns covered trailers designed to store gear for each specialized type of hunting. By mixing decoys later in the season, the guide often pulls cranes and geese to the same spread.

Some crane facts:

—The North American sandhill population is estimated at 500,000 birds. About 90 percent of them winter in Texas.

—Cranes migrate to nesting areas as far north as Siberia, about 2,500 miles from Texas. The one-way trip takes three to four weeks.

—When wind conditions are favorable, migrating cranes fly as high as 10,000 feet.

—In addition to hunting licenses, federal and state migratory game bird stamps, crane hunters must have a Federal Crane Permit, free through Texas hunting license vendors.

—An estimated 5,383 Texas license holders hunted cranes in 2005-2006. They bagged about 13,542 birds, more than half of the national harvest.

For info: **Mark Meissenburg 806-467-0273, [www.panhandlesbest.com](http://www.panhandlesbest.com)**.

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By Ron Henry Strait, [www.my-sanantonio.com](http://www.my-sanantonio.com).

**The San Miguel Ranch and Lodge just south of Uvalde** has a reputation among hunters as a place to pursue trophy whitetails in an open, free-range setting.

That top-quality reputation in the South Texas field is shared by the veteran outfitter's hospitality and lodging facilities, developed by Mike and Holly Gardner.

**To complement those amenities and the seasonal hunting operation, the Gardners have now added a bird hunting preserve, or Private Bird Hunting Area.** The 670-acre area is comprised of alternating strips of heavy brush and wide, marginally manicured buffle grass senderos arranged at the base of the lodge hill. The configuration of the preserve pasture is ideal for hunters in the field. Each segment allows for about 20 minutes of flush/shooting with a short break as dogs and hunters are moved to the next sendero. The layout is great for non-hunters, too, as they can look down on the action from the lodge's arched portico.

Regardless of the season, guests can arrange to hunt chukars, pheasants and quail in the preserve area.

For info: [www.sanmigueloutdoors.com](http://www.sanmigueloutdoors.com).

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**California — Lead Shot Ban Approved:** Upland Bird Hunters Exempted  
By *Samantha Young*, *Associated Press Writer*, appearing in *SFGate.com*:

It will be illegal for hunters to possess or fire lead ammunition when they are in California condor habitat under regulations adopted Dec. 7, 2007, by a state commission.

By a vote of 3-1, the California Fish and Game Commission expanded the state's lead ammunition ban in an effort to safeguard North America's largest flying bird.

"It's pretty clear lead poisoning is one of the major factors preventing recovery of the species," said Jeff Miller, a conservation advocate at the Center for Biological Diversity. "It's another step in getting lead out of the food chain."

The condor was once found from coast to coast, but hunting, pesticides and development drove the birds to the brink of extinction. The federal government declared the bird endangered in 1967.

Scientists for years have said condors are poisoned when they ingest lead while feeding on the bullet-ridden carcasses of other animals. But regulators have been slow to act.

Commission president Richard Rogers said the panel needed concrete evidence before it could act. That came this summer when a team of scientists from the University of California, Santa Cruz, linked the lead in condors' blood to that in lead bullets.

"The problem was we could never identify what lead it was because there are multiple sources of lead in the environment," Rogers said. "Now we had a smoking gun and we were able to have direct connectivity between the lead in the bullet and the condor."

The regulation bans hunters from using lead ammunition in .22 caliber or smaller guns — often used to kill smaller animals like squirrels and rabbits — that lawmakers did not include because there are no non-lead bullets on the market for those guns. Commissioners said they hoped their rule would encourage manufacturers to make alternatives.

The owners of antique guns and hunters who make their own ammunition must also carry nonleaded bullets or pellets when they are in condor habitat, an area that encompasses most of California's central coast. Ammunition will be considered lead-free if it contains less than one percent lead.

**The rules do not apply to game partridge and quail or to game bird hunters** or permits given to people to shoot nuisance or predatory animals.

In 1987, the last 22 wild condors were trapped and taken to zoos for a breeding program that raised their population to just under 300. Now some 200 condors are in the wild, with about 60 flying in California.

The regulation will take effect July 1, 2008.

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**Colorado — Duck Hunting Hot Spots**

From *MetrowestFYI.com*:

The seasoned Colorado duck hunter most likely will have good duck hunting grounds on which to hunt this season. For those who do not belong to a private hunting club, there are encouraging hunting opportunities on the Division of Wild-

life State Wildlife Areas, which are either leased or owned by the DOW.

**Of the 241 statewide SWA, most allow waterfowl hunting.** SWA along the South Platte River have expansive areas adjacent to the river itself. There are 20 SWA from Jackson Lake near Fort Morgan to the Nebraska state line and all but two offer waterfowl hunting.

Duck hunting as a practical matter has two seasons: early fall and mid- to late-winter with cold temperatures and limited open water (mid-November through the Jan. 27 closure).

The late season will find ducks concentrated on the larger irrigation reservoirs that have some open water and the South Platte River and warm water sloughs.

**Most SWA have South Platte River access and that is where most mid to late season ducks will be found.** Thanks to the DOW, not every duck hunter has to be a member of a private club.

For more information on Colorado SWAs: [wildlife.state.co.us](http://wildlife.state.co.us).

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**Arkansas — Duck Hunting Lodge Near Stuttgart**

By *Martin Couch*, *arkansasbusiness.com*:

Adam Newcomb, of Benton, is a professional hunting guide, and along with help from his father, George, and long-time friend Mark Balisterri, **Newcomb manages Bayou Meto Lodge. Located 15 miles south of Stuttgart, the lodge sits in the shadow of the 34,000-acre Bayou Meto Wildlife Management area.**

In the heart of the Mississippi Flyway, this area is considered to offer the best duck hunting in the country when migrating waterfowl move south to winter in the agricultural fields and flooded timber bottom lands.

In its fifth year of operation, the lodge sleeps 24 people and has four baths, a game room, full kitchen and outdoor fire pit to give hunters a homey feeling. There is a full kitchen staff on board to cook and clean.

The cost is \$350 per day for one person and includes three cooked meals, a guided hunt, transportation to and from the field and trophy dressing. For those who just want to hunt without the extras, the cost is \$150, and all a hunter has to do is bring his or her gun. Ducks that are killed on hunts can be dressed

by the staff for a minimal charge.

Says Newcomb, "We lease 5,000 acres of duck hunting, and we have all kinds of step ups — blinds, pit blinds, walk hunting. We bring them in either on a four-wheeler or Suburban — it's really pretty easy." He adds that 85 percent of his clients are nonresidents.

The lodge is the official outfitters for Cabela's, and many corporate groups, such as Bass Pro Shop and others, visit annually. The guided field hunts offer the shooting sportsman countless opportunities for mallards, teal, gadwall, pintail, widgeon, shovelers, ringneck, ruddies, greater and lesser scaup and occasional canvasback and redhead. Flooded timber hunts provide the hunter with numerous opportunities for mallards and wood ducks.

For info: **Bayou Meto Lodge, Adam Newcomb, 501-860-3903, [www.bayoumetolodge.com](http://www.bayoumetolodge.com), [info@bayoumetolodge.com](mailto:info@bayoumetolodge.com).**

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**Georgia — New Quail Preserve to Open;** Hunt Waterfowl on Nearby "Ex-

otic" Isle

Barnsley Gardens Resort of Adairsville, Ga., has announced the opening of a new quail hunting preserve for the 2007–2008 season. The preserve, known as SpringBank Plantation, was named for a historic site in Bartow County. **The approximately 300 acres of hunting grounds will be operated by The Orvis Co. of Manchester, Vt.**

For more information: **877-773-2447, [www.barnsleyresort.com](http://www.barnsleyresort.com).**

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By *Peter Ottesen recordnet.com*:

If "a world apart" ever applied to any natural environment, the scene at Little St. Simons Island, with its golden salt grasses glowing in the early-morning dawn, was the clincher.

Never in my travels had I encountered such a tranquil, luminous scene framed by Spanish moss that draped from trees on the edge of the pristine island — a part of Georgia's Barrier Reef.

The place features seven miles of

shell-strewn beaches that meet forests of live oaks, cedar and slash pine - intersected by tidal creeks and marshes that are abundant with wildlife.

It will celebrate its 100th anniversary next year, and its owners describe it as "a place to learn about the geology and the ecology of the island, to bird-watch, fly fish, observe wildlife and get away from people while stepping back in time."

Sportsmen will also find limited waterfowling opportunities available.

A maximum 30 people can visit at any time, and the cost — starting at \$450 per couple — is all-inclusive with deluxe lodging, Southern style meals and activities, even horseback riding, canoeing, kayaking and fly fishing for red fish and sea trout.

The island's old hunting lodge with its inviting fireplace is rated the "Best Small Hotel in North America" by Conde Nast travel magazine.

For info: **Little St. Simons Island, 888-773-5774, [www.littlestsimonsisland.com](http://www.littlestsimonsisland.com).**

### Outfitter Critiques: the Good, the Bad, the Ugly

*This section of The Bird Hunting Report is based entirely on subscriber-written Bird Hunting Report forms received by our offices. It is designed to provide first-hand opinions on what is happening in the field. Our policy at The Bird Hunting Report is as follows: We publish excerpts in the newsletter of Bird Hunting Reports as received, except in cases when booking agents or outfitters submit reports on hunts in which they have a financial stake or when we have reason to question whether there are ulterior financial or personal motives on the part of the person submitting the report. It goes without saying that a single report in this section should not be taken as the final word on an outfitter's competence. Many elements of a hunt are subjective. What is wrong for one hunter may be right for another. Moreover, personality conflicts often occur on hunts. It is obvious that hunters, as well as outfitters, can be the cause of a ruined hunt. We think all seasoned hunters can sort this out and make proper use*

*of our Bird Hunting Report Program. Our pages are open for a rebuttal of equal length by any affected party.*

Subscriber **C. Donald Van Wart of Houston, Texas**, took a hunt he rates as "superb."



In early January 2007, he visited **Gabino's Outdoor Adventures**, located in **Obregon, Sonora, Mexico**. The hunt included pass-shooting in fields for doves and platform blinds in lagoons

for ducks. He gauges the numbers of both species to be "Abundant."

He gives all aspects of the outfitter and personal guide categories an "Excellent," with the exception of the dog work, which he does not rate.

He says he'd recommend this trip to a friend because "it's as good as it gets."

**"Frank Ruiz and his staff have it down so well** they could conduct a school on how a hunting operation should be run. It could not have been any better."

**To book: The Detail Company, 713-524-7235.**

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**Walt Miller**, from **Coto de Caza, Calif.**, recommends a hunt with **Los Gauchos Outfitters** in **Argentina**.

He hunted there May 21–25, 2007, in the Bahia Blanca area. He found ducks, doves, pigeons and perdiz to be "Abundant" and geese to be "Scarce." His group employed a variety of techniques including blinds, lay out and walk-up hunting.

Miller rates as "Excellent" the equipment condition, accommodations and cuisine. Nevertheless, he adds, "Rental guns needed to be cleaned better as there were numerous problems." He rates the dog works as "Fair." He offers no assessment of the personal guide.

Though he generally recommends this trip, he had a few "negative outcome" experiences. He calls it a "big disappointment" that he missed the migrations of geese and rosy-billed porchards. "June and July are the months to come to Argentina."

He gives a one out of 10 to American Airlines, which, he says, "was late. We missed a connection plus AA personnel did not know about importation of whole birds (with feathers), and made our lives hell. Very poor!!!"

Subscriber **David West** of **Perris, Calif.**, also visited Los Gauchos during the same time frame, May 18–25, 2007.

He, too, mentions his displeasure with American Airlines, rating it a three. He says the airlines, "did not want to permit us to bring birds on board (frozen) back to the U.S. (two hour argument)."

He agrees with Miller on the abundance of ducks and dove. Perdiz, however, he rated only "Average," but that's also the same rating he gives to the geese.

He rates the condition of the equipment "Good," the accommodations and

cuisine, "Excellent," and the dog work both "Fair" and "Poor." He says he hunted with several guides and rates all of them "Excellent" in their knowledge of the hunt area. To all other aspects of the guide category, he gives a "Good" rating.

West would not recommend this trip to a friend despite the "great food" and the "many ducks." Among the reasons for which he would withhold a recommendation: "local dogs need more training, loaner guns need better cleaning."

Add to that the problems caused by American Airlines when he tried to return with his birds. "I am a collector. The airline contended it was against policy. U.S. Customs in Miami refused to let a licensed broker accept the birds."

**Los Gauchos, 8204 Elmbrook Dr., Ste. 136, Dallas, TX 75247; 714-6954746; www.losgauchos.com.**

• • •

From **Windsor, Ontario, Canada**, subscriber **Robert Little** has provided us with two more reports on hunts in **South America**.

He writes, "I have hunted in South America for at least eight years and most of the time two estancias each year. I plan on going back to **Estancia Hasparren**," near the town of **Trinidad, Uruguay**.

From May 15–18, 2007, Little walked hunted for perdiz and ducks, both of which he found to be "Abundant." He particularly noted that the perdiz hunt was "excellent."

He rates both his personal guide and outfitter categories "Excellent" in all areas. He also mentions, "Beautiful estancia, friendly, capable staff. Superb cuisine."

He explains, "From field staff to owners, the people are friendly, helpful, knowledgeable and courteous."

"Game is plentiful. Dog work is the best I have encountered with 10 outfitters in South America (and I own a top German shorthaired pointer). Accommodations are very comfortable. The kitchen is staffed by an excellent chef who works a hotel in Puente del Este in summer."

"Obviously, I was impressed."

For these reasons, he would recommend the trip to a friend.

A few days earlier last May, Little hunted **La Escondido Estancia in Argentina**, a place he would also recommend.

There, he hunted for ducks from temporary blinds. He found their numbers to be "Abundant."

Little rates all aspects of his personal guide as well as the dog work to be "Excellent." The other aspects in the outfitter category merit a "Good" rating.

Overall, his experience was most positive: "Good staff. Excellent hunting — high volume ducks. Comfortable accommodations."

Booking agent for both outfitters: **Sports International, 800-375-5692.**

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