



Exceptional shooting waits in South America

By John N. Felsner

“I’ve been bird hunting many times, but this was exceptional,” said Jeremiah Williams, an Austin, Texas, attorney who visited the Gaucho Lodge near La Granja, Argentina with 5 Star Sporting in February 2008. “Eight of us hunted five days and we shot about 19,000 birds. I will definitely go back!”

While an exceptional shoot by any standard, Williams experienced a typical dove hunt in the Cordoba Province of Argentina. Located in the north-central part of the country Cordoba Province covers about 63,831 square miles with a population of more than three million. The land slopes from the Grande Mountains in the west, which rise to about 9,462 feet, eastward to the Pampa grasslands. Known for its rich agriculture and livestock operations, the province also harbors an enormous dove population.

Between 30 and 50 million golden-eared doves (*Zenaida auriculata*) thrive in the region. Locally called “paloma,” golden-eared doves do not migrate, but live and die only a few miles from where they hatched. Similar to mourning doves, palomas typically raise five to six broods of up to five hatchlings in each brood annually. In some years, doves destroy more than 40 percent of the crops in the province, so local farmers love when sportsmen come down to shoot them, which they can do all year long without limit.

“The shooting is unbelievable,” said Ron Brittan of 5 Star Sporting, a native Texan who now lives in Argentina. “Sometimes, we can do pigeon hunts at certain times of the year, but

our operation is mainly for doves. I’ve had guys shoot more than 1,000 birds a day three days in a row. Our sportsmen can expect to shoot more than 2,000 rounds per day. In a spot with good feeding, resting and available water, more than one million doves may pass through in just one hour!”

In a typical day, lodge guides take the hunters to the fields for three to four hours of shooting after a hearty breakfast. Then, depending upon the season, the hunting party stops for about three hours to eat barbecue in the field and possibly take a siesta to let their shooting shoulders rest a while. Then, they go back to shooting, perhaps in another place, for three or four hours until dark.

“I didn’t think the shooting would be that challenging, but it was,” Williams remembered. “It was not flock shooting. We’d see singles, groups of three to five birds and small flocks coming over us all the time. We didn’t just throw up a wall of flak. We had to pick out individual birds. The field cooking was phenomenal. We had some of the best beef I’ve ever eaten -- and I’m a Texan.”

The lodge assigns each sportsman a “bird boy” as an assistant. The boy picks up the birds, gets snacks or drinks for the hunter, collects spent shells or performs whatever task the hunter tells him to do. Since the birds move around, the sportsmen and bird boys might shoot in one type of terrain during a morning hunt and another that afternoon. They might shoot a brushy field, over crops, in a rough chaparral plateau with thorns and thistles or

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other terrain that somewhat resembles the Texas Hill Country.

“The birds move around at different times of the year depending upon the food supply,” Brittian said. “We usually hunt one field in the morning and a different one in the afternoon. Sometimes, the shooters are hunting along a tree line or in a hilly area. The bird boys usually cut some tree limbs to make a little blind.”


In the evening, the party returns to the lodge for socializing and a gourmet dinner. The 13,000-square-foot lodge looks more like a Beverly Hills mansion than a hunting lodge. It offers seven air-conditioned bedrooms with private bathrooms including one huge master suite. Four rooms hold oversized twin beds with two others each containing two queen-sized beds. The lodge can accommodate up to 14 people per night. Unlike other operations, the Gaucho Lodge does not mix groups. Groups enjoy the entire lodge by themselves.

At the Gaucho Lodge, guests may enjoy the outdoor Jacuzzi, swimming pool, steam room, massage room, pool table, game room with cards and music, outdoor barbecue, wireless Internet service and other activities or facilities. They can make or take free phone calls to and from the United States.

“I can’t say enough about the lodge,” Williams emphasized. “It was first-class all the way. When we walked into the lodge, we saw a grand staircase with someone playing the piano at the top of the staircase. That was nice. They showed us wonderful hospitality. I’d take my wife there and she’s not a hunter, but she likes to be pampered.”

Non-hunting guests might visit some historical sites in the area or shop in local villages. Some go on specially arranged tours or visit spas. Some ride horses over mountain trails. Some just enjoy the service, comfort and amenities of the lodge.

“Our business is new, but we are not new to the business,” Brittian said. “We have been customers ourselves with several Argentine outfitters over the past 15 years, so we fully understand and cater to the discriminating tastes of the international sportsman.”

Most people fly to Buenos Aires and then take about an hour-long flight to Cordoba. For booking trips with Brittian, call 469-449-2578 or visit www.5starsporting.com. 

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