

240 PAGE GIANT GEAR ISSUE

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**DUCK GUNS
OF A LIFETIME**

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HUNTING'S MADMAN**

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**HONORING
DECEASED
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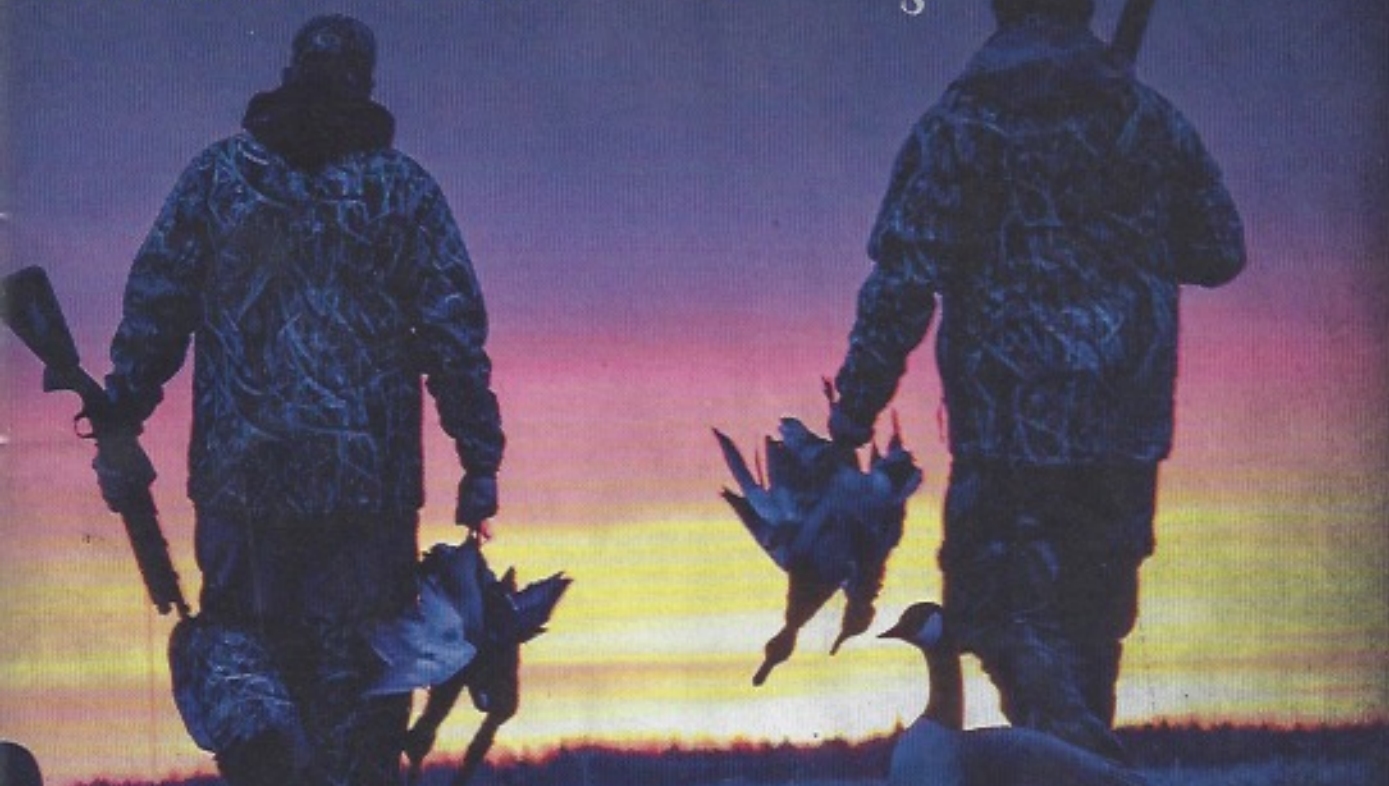
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UNRIVALED SASKATCHEWAN

Chasing specks, snows and ducks with the Sure-Shot gang

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ULTIMATE CANADA

- Manitoba Honkers
- Awesome Alberta
- Underhunted B.C. Geese

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[12] MUST-DO HUNTS

Arkansas, Mississippi, Washington & Kansas **GREENHEADS**, Texas **CRANES**, Mexico **BRANT**, North Carolina **SWANS**, Delaware & Alaska **SEA DUCKS**, Holland **GEESE**, North Dakota **SNOWS**, Argentina **DUCKS**

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8 GREAT HUNTS: Best Bang Per Duck

WF STAFF REPORT

These must-do stateside destinations will fuel your passion and not require a second mortgage



EDITOR'S NOTE: There is nothing better than a good guided hunting trip and few things more frustrating than a bad one. Do some research prior to handing money over to an outfitter by speaking to individuals who have hunted with them about their experiences. You will know if something sounds fishy, and it's a red flag if an outfitter won't produce contacts. For these trips, check out Getducks.com and Ramsey Russell.



1 NORTH CAROLINA SWANS & DUCKS

You may not feel like a complete waterfowler if you haven't at least dreamed of going after a tundra swan, and the go-to place to do it is North Carolina, where some outfits run success rates close to 100 percent. The Mattamuskeet Refuge area is the hub of hunting North America's largest legal waterfowl. It's a simple outing and affordable for this ultimate trophy. Hunts run \$550 to \$600 with lodging per day for up to three guys, so you and a few buddies can have a three-day package and that's about all of you will pay in the end. "My kid out there mowing grass this summer could afford this hunt. Go for two or three days, so you can pick a nice mature bird and enjoy it," Ramsey Russell of Getducks.com says. "Instead of seeing a few you will see hundreds if not thousands, and when you get your swans you can chase pintails, scoters, long-tails and all kinds of fun stuff." Experience boat blinds for decoying ducks in the shallow flats, true traditional East Coast tidal hunting. It's the place to go to get your hand on a beautiful plumed out swan for taxidermy in January.



2 DELAWARE SEA DUCK COMBO

Historic Chesapeake gets all the hype, and Delaware Bay is not on the radar of many hunters, but it should be. One of the biggest bodies of water on the East Coast is home to massive ledges where deeper waters come right up to oyster shoals and the hunting is terrific for white-winged, surf and common scoters. Experience classic layout boat hunts, with plenty of cool options if the weather gets too rough for sea ducks. Chase mallards, geese, black ducks or brant, or score that trophy long-tail in a place that also has plenty of Eastern Shore-style Canada goose hunting. "We quit booking Maine because weather can screw you up so quick and there's not much you can do when you can't chase sea ducks," says Russell. It's a good trip to bring spouses along, because it is



surrounded by civilization, yet it has fantastic hunting and is off the beaten path, without the pressure of the famed bay to the south. An affordable

hunt at \$250 to \$300 per day, and it's not too expensive to get to, because any major airline flies to Baltimore or Washington D.C.

3 PACIFIC NORTHWEST GREENHEADS

When guys say "greenheads" the Northwest is not the first place that comes to mind...yet. Editor Skip Knowles cut his teeth on mallards in the Columbia Basin, with absolutely no idea how good he had it. With a seven greenhead limit and tornadoes of pintail, wigeon

and Canada geese flocking through eastern Washington, this is one of the most consistent bets in the country. Russell's hunts run \$350 a day and for \$1,500 you can get lodging meals and everything for a three-day hunt. There are many reputable outfitters at all levels hunting Washington on both public and private lands.

Thousands of acres of impoundments and standing flooded are routine on private lands you can bring your boat and Columbia, McNary and other scattered around the big river refuges. Southern Idaho is a short stopper of greenhead and can be excellent, too.

4 MISSISSIPPI DELTA DUCKS

Public opportunities in the Deep South are getting tougher, but private land hunts with outfitters are becoming more affordable, and this is a place you just have to experience. Duck country down here is so different from the rest of the U.S., with some of the best dirt in the nation in regions with the lowest, wettest spots imaginable, places where rivers come together and the flooding creates some of the best habitat in the world. Cypress breaks, ag fields and flooded impoundments host mallards, gaddies, teal, wigeon and just about everything else. For \$350 a day in Tallahatchie County you can stay in an antebellum plantation home and enjoy top-notch meals and drinks on the delta, where in spots so many mallards trade back-and-forth at eyeball level around the refuge you won't believe it. Mississippi is simply full of great guided hunts at all levels.



5 NORTH DAKOTA DUCKS & GEESE

Come pay homage to the duck motherland, a place that produces birds, stages birds, and funnels millions of spring snows when they come back through. If the snows get stalled due to weather, you're in for the trip of a lifetime. Russell doesn't book North Dakota trips but does make referrals and that Devil's Lake region is some-

thing special, he says. Where else but NoDak can you legally hammer 15 Canada geese in the month of August? For \$350 a day, you can have British Columbia-style bag limits. Nobody is shooting 15 Canadas per man per day (the birds are just too tough to dial that efficiently) but some of the guys have killed 10 or so apiece. "Six of us shot 65 big resident birds

one day, so it happens," Russell says. Great mallard hunting is a given in central ND, and the state's laws are set up so outfitters have to play by many of the same rules as resident hunters. "It's a mighty damned state," Russell says. "I know you're going out there for 15 years who get off the beaten path far enough to avoid competition."

6 TEXAS PANHANDLE CRANES

One of the best kept secrets for years, a sandhill crane hunt on the Texas Panhandle is at the top of our list. Thousands of tiny glacial lakes left after the Ice Age are scattered across terrain now surrounded by countless acres of beef country full of wheat, corn, milo and soybeans. The result: a vast and beautiful habitat. Some lakes have ducks, others geese, still others cranes. Most lakes offer a mixed bag of teal, wigeon and mallards right at daybreak and then geese are the late arrivals doing their thing along with the cranes. "A



guy can go out and shoot ducks, geese and score a bonus crane on any day," Russell says. "Texas has always been

the place to go to shoot cranes and it hasn't slowed a bit." Affordable, from \$250 a day and up.

7 KANSAS DUCKS & GEESE

For duck and goose hunters, this is paradise, and it's no longer a secret. Kansas has been getting lots of attention because the central area is simply unbelievable, and guided hunts are reasonable at \$300 to \$350 a day with lodging for skies filled with mal-

lards, teal and wigeon. Goose hunts can get legendary in a hurry when flocks group up en masse, and the limits are relaxed by U.S. standards. There is good public hunting at Cheyenne Bottoms and Quivira (among others) for those willing to do their homework, and some of the country's best gunning for

wild upland birds if you like to chase prairie chickens, pheasants and quail for afternoon fun. The state has a wonderful cooperative private land farming (WIHA is a program for public-private hunting) that can turn up some gems, too. Kansas is now definitely on the list of places you need to visit.

8 ARKANSAS MALLARD MECCA

Stuttgart? Sure, you gotta do it. But there is so much more to

Arkansas. Example: One of Russell's favorite hunts is just over the border heading north out of Monroe, Louisiana, where a wide spot in the road called Wilmont, Arkansas, just may be near heaven for the duck man. It hardly has a place to eat, but one of his outfitters has 300 acres located in the middle of a 6,000-acre federal sanctuary, a few hundred yards from where 100,000 mallards sit all day long. With a 10-man blind, they limit nearly every day. "I couldn't believe it. I didn't want to hunt with nine other guys, but I looked out and my whole peripheral vision was full of moving flocks of mallards," Russell said. "There are little X's in this world and this boy has it. Ten people with limits by 10 a.m.," he says, "and they did that all but one day of the entire season." Pony up \$600 for this dream hunt, with lodging and meals.



4 Once in a Lifetime HUNTS

Expensive but worth it, these amazing trips are what dreams are made of

1 NETHERLANDS GEESE & DUCKS

1 We have never hunted wearing wooden clogs, but maybe it's time. In his global rock-flipping to seek out great fowling, Russell turned up a ringer in the animal-rights hub of Holland, of all places. Land in Amsterdam and enjoy the town, then head out and hunt in one of the best places in the world to shoot a barnacle goose, which is "a beautiful bird, vocal, roughly the size of a Ross's goose, vaguely similar to a brant...and they decoy like frat boys to nickel beer," Russell says.

Some hunts are over decoys while others involve hiding on an X in this goose paradise with no pressure. It's a cordial yet casual hunt. "Sometimes you are on the X and you can make the angels cry killing geese, and other times you are running traffic, hunting out of little blinds or buried in the reeds," he says. "It's the newest goose hunting destination and one of the best." Barnacle, greylag, white front and Egyptian



geese join giant mute swans, wigeon, mallards and more on the menu. It's a trip for species collectors and those who have done it all, and one of the best on which to bring a non-hunting spouse because the hosts will entertain with tours and other fun. Do it now, because they will eventually ban the sport in this extremely anti-hunting country. Holland even has an Animal Party in their government that got 180,000 votes and a few seats in the House of Representatives! It takes reams of

paperwork for the guides to even be able to host hunters. The stupendous gunning, ironically, exists because of decades of over-protection of the geese. Plan your trip for spring, fall or summer. On an average day you will shoot 15 to 20 birds, but when the stars line up you can shoot a hundred graylags, a big goose up to 10 pounds. All kinds of weird bands are collected, too. Europe is expensive, (fuel is nearly \$9 a gallon) so the hunt is pricey at \$4,600 for five days (excluding ammo and tips).

2 ALASKA SEA DUCKS, BRANT & MORE

2 Imagine, a place in Alaska called Cold Bay has some of the hottest sea duck action on the planet. Fly into the town of Cold Bay out in the Aleutians and fish for salmon, halibut, trout or grayling and also shoot ptarmigan, mallards, pintail and teal, or later on chase harlequins and sea ducks, or collect your Eurasian wigeon. This is the definitive trip of a lifetime (at \$4,800 for a full week, it better be). The season starts in September, when you can go up and shoot mallards, pintail and brant, and it runs clear to the first week of December, when you can chase Pacific eiders, the largest of



the five subspecies, a massive duck that will test your toughest waterfowl loads. Some people who come up here come back year after year at a different time

in the season and report that it's like four different experiences. Trophy sea ducks, brant and eiders are main prizes but by no means the sole targets.

3 MEXICO PACIFIC BLACK BRANT

If there's something cooler than ditching the dead of winter in the states and heading to Margaritaville to shoot brant and ducks in T-shirt weather in January, please tell us what it is. Head to Obregon on the Sea of Cortez or go south from California to chase birds in Baja, your choice. The Obregon hunt is booked up for some time but is the option where you can hunt ducks and doves, too (WF staff scored a cinnamon teal here on the first day last year). Baja, on the other hand, is about \$1,500 cheaper: From San Diego you will pay \$2,300 for a three-day hunt with all included except ammo and guide tips (Obregon is \$3,880 and up). The outfitter will pick you up in San Diego to hunt Baja for a classic brant hunt on salt flats where you play the tide and get a crack at eight or so birds a day (may be more liberal next year, as the Pacific birds are doing quite



well). You will stay in a hotel and enjoy the fresh seafood Baja is renowned for, with one of the highlights being a Saturday night feast. One of the guide staff takes you to their home and cook

brant, oysters, clams, stone crab claws and more food straight out of the bay. A big Baja feast, while your friends in the Midwest are freezing to death! Trips run in January and February.

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4 ARGENTINA MIXED BAG

Disney Land for duck hunters, Las Flores is just over an hour west of Buenos Aires by car. It's a longer flight than Mexico, but the duck hunting is simply extraordinary. "It's my favorite duck hunt in the world. The truth of the matter is I can't find a better duck hunt than Diego (Munoz, who Getducks.com has hunted with for years now)," says Russell. "You are going to shoot your birds, end of discussion. We have divested ourselves of most of the hoity-toity lodges. The upscale lodges invest too much in the lifestyle aspect, in my opinion, and as soon as you get a tough water year or a little drought, they start making all kinds of excuses. We've found that even rich clients really care more about getting their birds than fancy lodging. We have tons of repeat customers who go with Diego and will not hunt anywhere else." In other words, if you want to stay in a polo pony estate owned by an



English baron, this ain't it. Argentina overall is simply astounding, with almost no hunting pressure from locals and only widely scattered outfitters.

There are more classic hunts in La Paz and other areas far north of BA to experience, but they are 8 hours from the big city you must fly into by car. A typical day in Las Flores involves a torrid dawn shoot of 50 ducks per gun and a nice casual evening bonus hunt of 15 to 20 birds. You will hunt more than a dozen species of ducks, from beautiful chilo wigeon and tree

"you are going to shoot your birds, **end of discussion.**"

ducks to a wild array of ringed, spotted, silver and other teal, with loads of rosy-billed pochards and stunning white-cheeked pintail. Expect lots of close shooting, good food, a gorgeous landscape and mild weather. When it's scorching hot across the U.S. in late July, it's just above freezing at night and in the 50s all day in Las Flores. Ducks for dollars there's no exotic hunt that quite compares: \$2,475 for a 3-day duck hunt (guns, ammo extra). Sadly, you can no longer bring ducks back for the wall.

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Northway Outfitters) were still just being harvested. That meant the birds were farther to the south, which also meant a 90-minute drive to hunt every day and 3 a.m. wake-up calls. If I had been with group of buddies, we might have buzzed by the southern flocks and been scratching our heads

up your local customs agent at the nearest airport. They are a wealth of knowledge, and will provide the right forms.

CANADA RISING

The first morning was wrought with anticipation, and we weren't disap-

buddy Jack Jameson of Beretta, Curtis Arnold of Sure Shot and the rest of the gang. Draped in white and butts planted on the ground in those silly foxholes, it must have looked like we were all on the commode, absent the Sunday paper.

But soon the action turned very Canada-esque. Mallards and pintails rushed the decoys as we swatted mosquitoes. Our guide Walter kept razzing us over our lackluster shooting: "Wished I was the owner of that Hevi-Shot, eh?" Walter had set the spinner to our backs. I guess he thought the ducks would cup out front on their way to the motion. But with the wind going from blustery to non-existent, ducks whirred around the guns, forcing us to turn and shoot directly into the sun. I thought to myself, "Wish you'd move that flapper, Walter, eh?" But we limited on greenheads and pintails by 8 a.m., so it was hard to complain.

With such a quick duck limit, we stuck around awhile for the geese. Some Canadas, a few white geese and

The whites and blues were on the deck, dropping and rising with the rolling prairie.

wondering where the ducks and geese were; another reason to utilize an outfitter or scout.

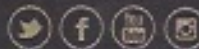
Also, if you're going to bring a dog, guns and ammo into Canada, make sure you do the proper research. Look

pointed. Snobs barked from the night roost on a nearby slough, sounding off like hyenas. They were probably laughing at us, because just after shooting light they all rose like a swarm of locusts, flying high over myself,



Netherlands Duck Hunting

Best couples hunting trip ever is how guests qualify Netherlands. The small country's idyllic culture, rich history, and "friendliest guides ever met" complement this superior goose hunting experience. The barnacle goose hunting is unrivaled. Greylags, white fronts, and Egyptians are plentiful. Leave the waders - knee boots are perfectly fine. Inclusive 5-day package begins in Amsterdam. Netherlands goose hunts are available only through GetDucks.com, the foremost recognized expert for international wingshooting and trophy bird hunting.



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