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EQUIPMENT ISSUE 2016 | VOLUME 31 | NUMBER 4

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# The OTHER Down Under

Bagging exotic ducks and bonding with buddies...  
it doesn't get better than Argentina

BY SKIP KNOWLES

THE TV CAMERA GUYS WERE pouting, and MOJO mogul Terry Denmon was growing frustrated. Once again, at the urging of outfitter Diego Munoz, my old friend, the entire party had limited with way too many ducks before the light was very good for TV work. Smoking gun barrels showed we were pretty much all guilty, Denmon included.

"We gotta get one thing straight," Denmon started, making it clear this could not keep happening because he'd come to film MOJO Outdoors. But it did happen, again and again, to just to a slightly less degree. A little different from the normal TV experience where you pray for enough action to can a show. We kept blowing it because we'd all been to Argentina and had good shooting before, but this year was different. The hunting was ridiculous.

Finishing fast pleases Munoz, as he doesn't like to burn his duck holes. We were hunting a couple hours north of Diego's base camp in Las Flores where he outfits with his lovely wife Cody. There was simply a lot more water to the north this year. That's what makes Diego such a top duck killer—he will

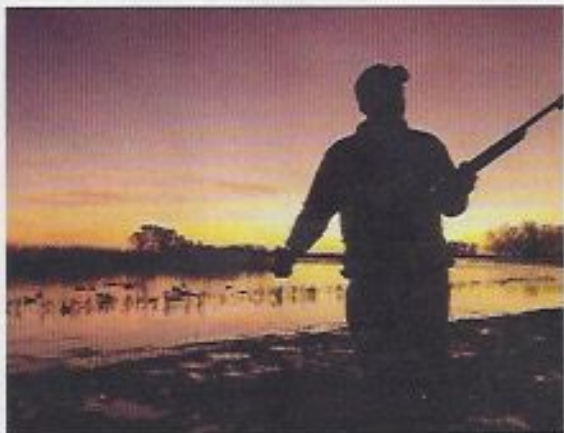
go where the ducks are; most outfitters here will not. And despite the shift in locale we were still just a few hours' drive from Buenos Aires, in the same grassy flat farmlands and marsh country that teems with ducks.

A lot of water had come to northern Argentina, and Diego lives for that. Three years prior, we had been flyfishing Patagonia when dire reports came in that the north was flooding and people in Buenos Aires were suffering. You would have thought Diego had won the lottery, he was so happy. This year, he had been torturing us for months with reports of the lights-out duck hunting. Now it was late July, and finally it was our turn.

Gone were the comfortable blinds at the edge of the water of past years; all submerged. We stood in a deep cold marsh in the reeds, ammo pouches underwater. A large American fellow took a swim after

stumbling. It was tough wading and Denmon's strange-looking new wading staff proved as brilliant as his magnetic Pick Stick was for picking up empty shells on these volume shoots.

Without a staff, you were just one nutria hole away from a dunking, but all that is forgotten the second a gun goes off. Mild weather, mobs of birds and epic food and camaraderie...it's a heady mix when you are with guys who know how to keep it fun. It's hard to get in a bad mood, impossible to stay in one.



"Why you do that?" Diego shouted, after we had agreed to stop shooting. He was talking to the ducks still dropping in and hovering right over us. "WHY you do dat!" he shouted, grabbing my gun, stuffing shells in it and blasting away. The suave green-eyed Argentine is a phenomenal shot, fast and liquid smooth. He is a larger-than-life character, crass but funny, a man who speaks five languages and was halfway through med school when he snapped and went hunting for the rest of his life, starting Las Flores wingshooting and lining up with Ramsey Russell, that globe-trotting waterfowl travel broker.

Diego commented constantly on my shooting. "Nice shot, ass-munch!" he'd say when I clobbered a bird. He says the exact same thing every time I miss, but with sarcasm.

The non-stop banter between Denmon and Ramsey is a gut-buster, for two sharper-tongued rednecks never lived. And Diego, even though an out-fitter, is an honorary South American redneck. Like when he tries to get me

to shoot some fierce-looking predatory bird stalking our spread.

"Keel dat bird, Skipper, they eat my baby ducks," he'd say, pointing.

"No way man, I don't know what's legal," I'd say.

"Ah, come on, Munch, shoot it, keel dat mother..."

Terry cackled at this exchange and made fun of Diego the rest of the trip, a running joke, faking his accent but sounding more Mexican than Argentine, with an odd Mississippi flair. "Ah come on, Skeeper, keel dat bird, choot dat mudder," Denmon would say, pointing to some harmless songbird. "They eat the baby grasshoppers, I love my baby grasshoppers..."

Unlike most hunts down here where you are just starting your journey by getting to BA, with Diego you will decompress from a 14-hour flight the same day you arrive, just like we did: Wade out into a reedy small wetland, deploy a couple dozen decoys, kick back and slowly work into the rhythm of smacking teal and pintails that are

humping it with a strong tailwind, screaming over-the-shoulder-shots at birds going so fast they would carry far from where you shot them. I had a blind to myself, nice because no rush to shoot. A few birds buzzed so fast I didn't even get my gun up, and got burned a lot. A few rosey-billed pochards showed, the big black corn-eating duck with the hump nose that is the prized target down here, but mostly the seven species of exotic teal showed along with two types of pintails. The soft white Argentine winter light bathed us, a perfect launch to the trip.

Next morning, the excitement thrummed in our stomachs as thousands of ducks flushed in the headlights of the truck before we threw out decoys, birds like giant bats coming at us in the dark. Denmon was grinning ear to ear. When the shooting started at dawn it was roseys right, left, almost too much. Which is why we got in trouble with the camera guys.

Me and Ramsey defended the left, while Denmon and his girlfriend Annette Manpier took down birds from the right, Diego running commentary non-stop, prodding everyone to shoot, shoot, shoot...

Denmon still prefers U.S.-style duck hunting over South America, but loves to come here for the overall experience, like getting to hunt wild pigeons over decoys, which he loves. I asked him why he preferred Louisiana duck hunting over the amazing shooting here.

"They don't tend to get as big flocks down here," he said, "and there's nothing more exciting than a big flock of greenheads. And the ducks here don't decoy real well and they don't call good, either."

That is true: Guides in Argentina mostly whistle at the ducks. Mojos are simply murderous here, as lethal as when they very first appeared in the U.S. It's a different experience, Denmon continued, in that the hunt camps emphasize good food and wine, and relaxation. It's a bit like travelling back in time to an older, less-industrialized American landscape.

"A lot of it reminds me of the rural south where I grew up, and I like that. Their farming methods are behind North America's. Down here you see the gauchos (cowboys on actual horses) all over the place, and they still do more



things with people than machines.”

Howard Whybrew of Cupped Up Outdoors, maker of the Muskrat Hut, was in camp, and slaying ducks over both water and land. His cameraman Jeff Berg, an accomplished fowler from Washington state, noted that the roseys were a real challenge to shoot. “For a big duck they really turn and burn like no mallard.” Berg, who had never been to Argentina, was overwhelmed the first morning when dozens of ducks were downed in no time. Berg is the kind of guy you love to meet on these trips. Another American in camp explained why he does not see hunting Argentina as elitist, just smart. Leon Ghetti, of Byram, Mississippi, owner of Dump Trucks, Inc., takes time away from running 50 trucks to hunt here each year.

“I worked for 50 years without a vacation and ended up on a hunt down here by asking someone if I could come with them. I thought I needed an invitation or something. Since then I’ve been six times. Also Uruguay and Nicaragua, but nothing compares to a hunt with Diego. The reason is, he participates. He eats with us, goes out in the field and hunts and calls the ducks...he’s a hands-on operator, a working guide who does his best to make it the best hunt you can have. I have already planned three seven-day trips for next year.”

“And Diego will go find the ducks,” he continued. “Other guides have one spot and if it’s a bad water year there, well that’s it. I met guys on the plane on the way here that said where they’d planned to go it was flooded out so the outfitter told them they’d have to go to Cordoba and go dove hunting. To a duck hunter, that ain’t right.”

“The expense is relative. It’s cheap compared to the duck club racket,” said Ghetti. “Back home the only clubs that kill any amount of ducks you have to spend a quarter-million dollars to join. On the river near me they’ve bought up 4,000 acres, created a club, built 40-acre ponds and have a full-time attendant, and just the dues alone will pay for a seven-day trip to Argentina where you will kill more ducks in seven days than in 10 years in the U.S., with no standing in the freezing water with ice all over you. It’s a no-brainer. This is wingshooter’s



paradise.”

Ramsy books for Diego, but it’s where he hunts, too. “Diego’s deal is volume and shooting ducks. There are fancier lodges, but with Diego you are going to shoot your birds.”

Everyone in our camp thought the food was plenty fancy. You will eat enough duck here to assuage your conscience. Roseybills prepared by cute little Rosy, camp chef, are marinated in an herb and egg batter, dredged in crumbs and fried Milanese style. Deadly. With a glass of Malbec, we constantly wrecked our appetite before the main courses of famed Argentina beef (regarded as the best in the world) and steady plates of Argentine enchiladas, empanadas, more ducks, red deer...it’s a culinary cultural immersion.

And the hunting is like compacting a few seasons in the states into a few days. A retriever could never keep up here. You shoot unplugged guns, yet only load two shells at a time because you will burn through your ammo too fast. And when the roseys are thick, these big ducks push all the pretty smaller birds like ringed teal and white-cheeked pintail out of the area. It’s a place a duck man needs to go once just to see the incredible species.

“Brazilians!” yelled Diego and I

swung and dropped a teal that honestly gave me chills when I held the bird in hand. The entire back of its wings shone metallic blue-green, not just the speculum.

On one evening field set on the edge of a muddy corn pond, loads of ducks came toward us but rose too high at the last minute because of a powerline in front of us. Still, we knocked down five- or six-dozen, including some stunner white-cheeked pintails, one of the more beautiful ducks on the planet, along with a pile of whistlers.

Next day, Ramsy and I were having a slow hunt tucked in a big reed patch, with no wind, when suddenly the sky lit up and so did the shooting. Rainstorms were dropping buckets on us. I admired the old battle axe gutting it out in his ratty wax cloth jacket that I wouldn’t let my dog sleep on, hunkered under an equally old Jones cap, his belt-banoliier of shells ensuring his demise if he fell in. With no hood, it rained right down his neck. I was warm and dry in a fancy new BANDED jacket.

“I’m fine, shoot, don’t worry, this ain’t nothing,” he said when he saw my concern.

The mornings were always a mad shootzen-fest, but evenings could be

like stateside hunting. Birds zipping in right and left, promising to finish, only to flare, hook the wind and blow out. The next morning with Denmon, we waded into duck weed just under our armpits, in deep, cold water. We saw no birds at all. Trust your guide. It came on like a switch. Ducks hovered all around the Mojo like moths at a flame.

Early in the trip, I had not shot the greatest, so Diego took us for an evening pigeon shoot, a trick that always makes his hunters improve. Difficult shots in the trees on high-flying birds, and I shot a few dozen squab. The next day I could not miss ducks. We all have those days when we couldn't hit water if we fell out of a boat, but the inverse is true, too. Down here, you can really hit your groove. I was snapshooting the afterburner zipping-past birds like a nervous twitch, tripling a few times, and somehow sucking to earth a pair of whistlers so high they should have been "seats locked and in the upright position." You forget how lethal a shotgun can be.

It never gets old. Just as the hunts start to feel routine, tree ducks show up, or white-faced whistlers, or gorgeous chilo wigeon, or silver teal...

Denmon shot so well I started calling him Terry Demon. Like he says, the shooting is cool, but it's the broader experience. I went for a mid-day jog, trying to run away from all that food, and passed a gushing stream. Young and old people were hauling out catfish and some kind of bass. Hiking up a country lane, I wondered why this entire country is more crammed with birds than back home. Brown upland rockets, perdiz, feed all over the roadside while giant pigeons flock in



the trees, amid huge nests of gorgeous green parakeets bursting from every other eucalyptus tree. Giant, heavy, raptor-looking birds called "screamers" glare from the fields. And, of course, las palomas—doves, doves, doves.

Seeing these strange things is why travel is renewing. Like a random pile of small snakes still wiggling in the road. Diego theorized that a huge bird of prey had eaten too many and puked them up. Then there was the injured green parakeet that became Diego's buddy, sitting on his shoulder in the marsh.

One memorable shoot was the slowest, a morning hunt in tall reeds in too-deep water, due to 12 more inches of rain flooding the country just prior to our visit, blowing out roads and railways. Pintail and teal swerved in left, and we lost them in the sun. We were too close to Ramsey and Leon, but it became a good time, more like a dove hunt, as we yelled back and forth. Ducks crumpled as they flew over our friend's blind, then a few seconds later you hear the shots.

I challenged Diego to a triple, but just then two long skinny ducks flashed in the sun and headed our way...white-checked pintails! My favorite. "You got right, I got left," I said, down to my last shell as they came in straight but high. I swung through from the rear until the bird disappeared, just like



daddy taught me, Diego fired in unison, both ducks splashing behind us. It had taken us a few hours to get our share, but hunting with an old buddy was as good as it gets, and at times we'd wrecked flocks of roseys like Texans banging teal.

Our final morning shoot was one big fluid memory that slowed time. We started being more selective as our collective consciousness told us a grand moment was unfolding, one of those you live for. We started letting all the overhead zingers have a pass along with the backside swingers because far more than we could ever shoot were doing it right, low and straight in.

That is why you suffer through that 14-hour flight. The only bad thing about hunting Argentina? Well, the shooting does get a little too hot for TV cameras at times.





## Argentina Duck Hunting

Ready to pull the trigger?! Our selection of destinations were carefully hand-picked from many to ensure superior hunting experiences. Something for everyone - programs include ducks and client-favorite combos to also include your preferences for doves, pigeons, perdiz, trophy game or fishing. Review hundreds of guest testimonials at our website or follow us on social media for real-time updates. Contact Ramsey Russell to discuss the best duck hunting of your lifetime.



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