

GIANT ANNUAL GEAR ISSUE

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EQUIPMENT ISSUE 2016 | VOLUME 31 | NUMBER 4

**HOW TO HUNT SHEETWATER
SURVIVE DEADLY WATERS
SITKA'S TIMBER SLAYER
USE MOTION SMARTER**



15 DREAM HUNTS

- AMAZING LOUISIANA
- ALL ACROSS CANADA
- SOUTH AMERICA
- MEXICAN MALLARDS

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TIME**

**FALL IS CALLING: GET READY
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August Equipment Issue 2016

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ROAD TRIP



A few bucket-list hunts worth an escape if the migration doesn't flow your way

BY WILDFOWL STAFF

LAST YEAR SAW HISTORIC HIGHS in bird numbers in most flyways, but it sure didn't seem like it in many places. "South of Canada and east of the Pacific flyway was just tough last year," said Ramsey Russell of GetDucks.com. "El Niño can kiss my ass." Some places benefited from the warm weather weather. California reported some of the best brant hunting in decades because the birds stopped well north of normal. "Even in western Mexico, guys got their birds but I could see the staff was having to work three times harder than normal," he says.

This year, look forward to your old reliable local spots, but make a backup plan and book a trip if you can. When you look at all the gear you need to waterfowl hunt, airboats and mud motors and blinds and trailers of decoys, and expenses from leasing land, ATVs and dog care...you quickly realize that guided duck hunting is the best value in all of hunting as far as hiring a pro. It is not an indulgence, as it is in big game hunting, it is a bargain.

Instead of the usual king eider destinations type stuff, for this year's "dream trips" feature we picked a few "El Niño-proof" hunts, because while

El Niño may not recur, the warm weather probably will. Ramsey tries to select one really great outfitter in each region that he books hunts and we are confident endorsing them. Anybody can be anything on the internet, and that's the problem. Ramsey vets them, and if they are on the list he has been there boots on the ground and guarantees above all that you will

see a true effort from the outfitter. Most of these are on his booking site USHuntList.com, or on GetDucks.com. Yes, he books Argentina, Mexico and Netherlands...but has plenty of more affordable hunts. And if you are ready for that once-in-a-lifetime hunt, his outfit makes the headaches of foreign travel awfully easy.





NORTHEASTERN LOUISIANA

Louisiana kills some 20 percent of all ducks killed in the entire country, nearly a million more ducks than Arkansas. It truly is the sportsman's paradise, says Ramsey, adding, "We have three programs in that northern tier, that Duck Commander and Mojo country of rice and bean fields, specklebellies, and not just ducks but lots of mallards, unlike the rest of the state. It's more like Arkansas. It's something a duck man needs to experience. Louisiana is near and dear to my heart. I love Louisiana and Louisiana food and the people."

About \$300 per day

SOUTHEASTERN LOUISIANA

Head down to Venice at the mouth of the Mississippi about an hour south of New Orleans and you will feel you are at the end of the world. It's where the road stops and it is all marsh. You have access to thousands of acres of marsh and will stay on a big old houseboat, very nice inside, and it's a three-step duck hunting program. "In the morning they pick you up by boat, that's one step. Run to the Mississippi where they have 10,000 acres leased, and now you take that second step—into the airboat. You run back in the potholes and cane and the third step is into the blind. Floating and foundation blinds are the rule. Even when it was tough last year and the area lacked the normal numbers of cans, redheads and pintails, Ramsey went down and had the three best days he had all year in the Mississippi Flyway, mostly shooting blue- and green-wing teal, gadwall, a little of everything, a few mottled ducks.



Then a storm hit and it was lights out for redheads...limits every day. "After that we went fishing and hooked a bunch of redfish and speckled trout. As someone who has been all over the world, I have this thing for southern food and this is the God's honest truth, I have never eaten better than when Chef Richard Young cooks

down there. Blackened swordfish, ceviche, coconut soup, crawfish, shrimp and duck poppers stuffed with pickled ginger root, and he made those deliberately with the duck species that I refused to eat." Head down in September for teal, and Nov.-Jan. for the rest.

About \$500/day
(includes top shelf open bar)

SOUTHWEST LOUISIANA

Deep in the Lake Charles region, it's pure rice field country and lots of crawfish come from this part of the world, but it is a speck mecca. White-fronts are the culture here. "I wouldn't dare to guess how many champion calls and callers are from there," Ramsey says. "I was hunting there with the guys from RedBone Calls on a field the specks were not using, just little dots in the sky passing by, and he would call the loudest most ear-piercing call you have ever heard and the minute those birds heard it they locked their wings and started calling and coming down." Specks are king but you will shoot teal, pintail, wigeon and gadwalls. They will tailor your experience in a manner you probably have not enjoyed on a guided hunt.

Nov-Jan \$500/day



TEXAS TWO-STEP

A dynamic duo of terrific hunts await in the Lone Star state for people who live further up the flyway. Fly to Houston and drive about an hour west to Matagorda, and Ramsey has a ringer in some young go-getter outfitters, loads of quality coastal Texas marsh, some 50,000 acres leased. This outfit is really working to improve the habitat. Start off on blue-wing teal, and then move into geese, specks, snows...not many mallards but loads of pintail and redheads. Go to the coast to shoot redheads maybe scaup or pintails, then move into fields and shoot the puddlers hunting from an 11,000-square foot master lodge during your three-day trip to God's country of coastal Texas. Or for option two, try a safari to El Campo for teal with Steve Biggers' legendary outfit. "We walked down a levee there last September and 8,000 to 10,000 blue-winged teal come up, one of the top spectacles I've seen in waterfowling. I was told about the numbers and just didn't believe it, figured they were exaggerating. It was like Cordoba but for teal coming off that rice field. I've been other places and it was hit or miss for teal, but Biggers' hunt is the unequivocal best blue-wing action on the North American continent," Ramsey says.

Both hunts are about \$400/day



Jon Berry and son Lane are veteran Pacific Northwest mallard morticians

WASHINGTON STATE

"These guys have mallards unlike ANYTHING I have ever seen," Ramsey says. "I went out there freelancing 20 years ago and never forgot it and our team out there in the Tri Cities part of the Columbia Basin has greenheads on a whole different level. I went down too early and they said they aren't 'really' here yet. They put out decoys and in the headlights on that pothole 2,000 ducks got up and my mouth hit the ground. They said, 'you should see it when we really have ducks.'" Mallards use big water here but when the wind kicks up they come to the small water. They've built 1- to 2-acre impoundments and they do plant a tiny bit of corn. "Just a beautiful hunt," he says. "We get another tough season in the deep South and I tell you what, personally I'm just going to throw all my money toward hunting out there."

Nov-Jan. \$1,500 for 3 days



WESTERN MANITOBA

In the Fall it's geese in the morning and mallards in the afternoon from a cabin situated right on a trophy trout lake, and there is good diver hunting by boat, too. "I was so sick of snow geese before going with these guys," Ramsey says. "This outfitter said 'I guarantee the best snow goose hunt you have ever been on.' I told him, 'I'm from the south and a guarantee means something'. He said 'if it's not the best you've ever been on I'll pay for your ticket.'" That was nine years ago, and I did not see a bird on the three-hour drive to his lodge. He said the main migration was over three weeks past but 'we have some birds.' I was skeptical but we shot limits every day of 20 birds." And that is part of the reason that outfitter possesses a staggering 95 percent return rate on clients, they so love the experience. Super nice lodge. Fall hunts are mallards and Canadas with a possibility of snows. This is a trip everyone needs to put on their list; go experience Canada, at the headwaters of the migration. Expect to see it done right with this outfit, not the 1970s decoys so many Canuck outfitters use, but the latest and best. Go to USHuntList.com and look up Manitoba to book Chris at Manitoba Outfitting.

\$2,500 for 4 nights, 3 full days and you just show up. Ammo, food, bird-picking—all of it is included. Sept-Nov.

Yeah, it's Something Like That



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