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All hail the quail

Bush to Banquet; Spanish flair

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# The marvel of Mexico

**America is renowned for opportunities to hunt ducks but south of the border near Mazatlán, Mexico, the Pacific and Central flyways converge providing a tremendous variety of waterfowl and an irresistible bucket list addition for keen hunters like James Iocanese.**

It took me three long years to get around to organising this trip. I would go through stages of scouring the internet for guides and locations but something else would come up and my aspirations were put on hold.

Finally, one day I committed and booked a four-day waterfowl hunting trip in Mexico.

I decided to go with Ramsey Russell's [Getducks.com](http://Getducks.com), as his operation on paper looked immensely professional, and, in reality, it delivered so much more.

All the bookings were taken care of, right down to the smallest detail; all I had to do was show up at the hotel.

After a sightseeing week in Los Angeles I was keen to get down and hunt some new species. A short flight later and I was waiting in line at customs at the small Mazatlán Airport. Straight-faced, I passed through without any worry and was quickly whisked away to my hotel and off to bed as the first hunt would begin the next morning.

The alarm went off at 4 am, which meant time for breakfast. I headed down to the hotel's dining room where I met a few American hunters who I would be shooting with over the week. This trip is frequently booked by hunters and their partners because you can go off and hunt during the morning and be back by lunch to do some sightseeing or relax by the resort pool.

After a quick feed, we were all bundled up into the vehicles and we headed off to the chosen location for the day.

The first morning we were to be hunting on a shallow salt lake. The birds would come into the freshwater creek that fed the lake to drink and clean. There were many existing hides set up from previous

hunts that we had access to, so my guide selected one for me and proceeded to set up the decoy spread.

This morning I would be hunting with a father and son from Georgia.

With the number of birds I could see on the water I decided to pace myself, as it was a 20-bird bag limit per day and I did not want my hunt to be over in a matter of minutes.

After a short break the birds started to filter back to the fresh water. I could see both green- and blue-wing teal buzzing the decoys along with the occasional northern shoveler. The first mob of birds into the decoys were a flock of green-wing teal; they twisted and turned just like the teal at home. The males stand out with the green patch on their heads flashing in the sun. They flared early and made their way across to the Georgians' spread and with a few shots, they had a couple of birds on the water. With the noise from the shots the lake erupted and there were birds everywhere. A single bird made its way straight for my decoy spread and as it got within range I stood up and fired. With one quick shot out of the Benelli I had my first green-wing on deck. After a flurry of shots I had managed to bag quite a number of birds and as it was still early in the morning I decided to pick and choose my shots. Looking to bag a nice shoveler, I decided to wait until one came within range.

I waited a bit longer until I saw one cruising towards me; its big bill stood out from across the lake. As it got within range I put the gun to my shoulder and fired. Finally I had bagged my first shoveler for the trip. Running out to collect the bird I was a little bit disappointed in its condition. Never the less the guide reassured that we

would shoot many more this trip so I kept my hopes up. I shot a few more birds and reached my limit quite quickly. I handed the gun back to the guide and headed back to the car while they packed up. A short car ride and I was back at the hotel, sitting by the pool enjoying a cocktail.

Once again the alarm went off and I was down in the dining room selecting what I wanted for breakfast. Today we would be hunting a small swamp concealed within a large mango farm and after driving through what seemed to be endless rows of mangos we arrived at the water's edge. A short boat ride and we were set up in the hide on an island in the middle. I asked the guide what birds we would be likely to encounter on today's hunt. In addition to teal and shoveler, he suggested we would also be getting a



crack at some ruddy duck. Now, these little birds are about the same size as our blue-billed duck and they fly in a similar manner: fast wing beats and close to the water. I was excited to tick another species off my list along with any others that we would encounter throughout the morning.

As the guide set up the decoys, I loaded the auto in anticipation of what would come past the hide. After a few minutes and a few shots coming from my fellow hunters across the other side of the swamp, the birds began to lift off the water and make their way towards us. As they were low to the water I knew they had to be ruddy duck. As they got closer I raised the gun and started swinging, then firing off a few shots only to have them fall short and the ducks continue past me. Shaking my head, I realised that I would have to put a bit more lead than I assumed if I was going to bag one of these birds.

More ducks started to head our way. They lined up the decoys, cupped their

iridescent green head was in full colour whilst his neck was pure white. He would make a fine bird for the wall had I not had any issues getting him back to Australia. Once we had both reached our limit, the guide went out to retrieve the fallen birds; in Mexico it is cheaper to pay someone than use a dog to collect the birds. Once again, I was soon back in familiar repose by the pool.

Before light the next day we were off again. I had heard a few of the other guys asking when they were going to get a chance at some cinnamon teal and in broken English they were informed that today would be the day.

We all piled into the guides' cars and the convoy left the hotel. Heading along the highway we stopped abruptly, took a right turn down a side street past houses to reach the costal swamps alongside the beach.

After negotiating a maze of tea trees, we arrived at a small opening. What was

colours; it made our Grey teal look like the poorly dressed cousin.

The shooting began to slow down until we heard the roar of the V8 engine come around the corner and in front of the boat was a large mob of ducks. We had gone from having no ducks to having birds everywhere. I didn't know where to point the gun. I picked out a few in a small flock, emptying the magazine and pulling down a pair of blue-wing. As the day progressed my pickiness had paid off as I managed to bag quite a few cinnamon. After a short ride in the airboat we had arrived back at the cars. The obligatory photos were taken and the best birds bagged up to head back to everyone's taxidermists. Cue pool and cocktails; yes, it is a tough life.

The following morning would be my last day hunting in Mexico and the target species would be black-bellied whistling duck. Pat and I would be shooting together again, which was good because we had developed quite a rapport. Not to toot my own horn but I feel as an Australian duck hunter I am used to birds moving a bit quicker and over the years have learnt to make every opportunity count whilst there were occasions with Pat where I was left wondering how anyone could have missed those shots.

The guide set us up on a large dam and his assistant went off to spook the birds off the neighbouring salt farms. It was not long until we had some birds heading our way to the decoys. Again we were presented with some green-wing and a few shots between Pat and I put four birds on the water; a good start. More and more teal came into the decoys and very few left.

Then, from the tree line, came the faint sound of whistles. A flock of black-bellied whistlers rose from behind the trees and headed towards the decoy spread. As they got closer my American friend got up and fired two shots and they began to flair away. I took my opportunity: bang, bang, two birds began to fall from the sky. I had just added another species to my Mexican bag.

As I walked to collect the ducks I noticed another species circling the decoys. It was a little out of range but I thought to myself: "I have travelled half way round the world." I put the gun to my shoulder and fired. The shot connected and I bagged my first pintail; another highly prized bird in Mexico.

Once the last bird was collected, reality set in that this was the end of a hunt that had taken me three years to plan. In the back of my mind I was already planning my return.

The rest of the trip was spent sightseeing and soaking up the sun; a fantastic way to end any hunt and a good way to recharge the batteries before the 18-hour flight home.

Mazatlán, Mexico, is a fantastic hunting destination and I highly recommend it to everyone for the volume of birds you will see in an untouched landscape. It truly is a hunter's paradise.



wings and started to commit. This time it was a flock of green-wing teal. I raised my gun and fired. The shot connecting, I realigned and fired; this time I shot two from two. Quickly I reloaded the gun as more birds were approaching. They were coming in low and fast again. I put the gun to my shoulder leading the first bird I fired and down it went. I continued to swing and did the same with the second, third and fourth birds; four from four. The guide was ecstatic and we shared a few celebratory high fives. However, the celebrations were short lived as more birds were coming into the decoys. A few quick shots and I had a few more teal on the deck.

The action had slowed down a bit so the guide quickly walked out to collect the fallen birds and as he was walking out I saw him wave his hands and point to something above the hide. I looked up and I could see a male shoveler directly above me. I put the gun to my shoulder and fired but missed. I gave it one more go and the shot connected, the bird fell and splashed into the water. My guide hurried over to collect him and what a bird he was. His

waiting for us would be today's mode of transport: a fan boat, powered by one hell of a V8 engine. The trip was a noisy but what an experience, although I doubt he had the throttle fully open.

I was dropped off with my new American friend Pat and the guide, and the fan boat disappeared into one of the many channels created by the trees.

Today I was going to be fussy; I planned to take only male birds and preferably a cinnamon teal. A few ducks began to fly over and as these were mostly green-wing and blue-wing; I wanted to let them pass but I picked one off.

After the shot birds began to take off. A loan dark bird made its way towards us and I could hear the guide softly say, "cinnamon". As the bird banked around you could see its beautiful red body shine in the sun. I raised the gun and fired. The bird folded and my guide quickly ran out to retrieve the bird. Cinnamon is a highly prized bird for the collector and the population is greater in Mexico than many US states. He handed me the bird to inspect and I was taken aback with the