



# MEXICO'S RENAISSANCE

OUR OLDEST, BEST, WINGSHOOTING DESTINATION IS BACK!



by Frank Stavros

Hunters face a tough choice when heading to the famous destinations abroad like South America or Africa: Do I go for dream volume dove hunt or exotic upland where I shoot more birds than I ever could at home? Or do I go chase new species of beautiful foreign waterfowl?

How about this: Buy a cheap plane ticket and fly a few hours to Old Mexico, and forget having to choose. There will be ducks or Pacific black brant in the morning like you have never seen, followed by torrid evening dove shoots that will leave your shoulder sore and your heart full of memories. Best of all, you can leave the dreary U.S. winter behind and enjoy sunshine, T-shirt weather and condensation running down the side of a fresh lime margarita in the dead of January. Then you can take your spouse to the beach, head offshore for billfish, or get into heavy rod-bending largemouth action at the very best bass lakes that exist on this planet.

Most of us do not enjoy people telling us what to do, but when Ramsey Russell calls demanding I go on a trip somewhere, I moan and groan, declare I don't have time, then I make time and do exactly what he says, because the man has never once been wrong when it comes to world-class wingshooting destinations. As I write this, I'm headed to Mexico for the third time since he introduced me to Obregon.

When Ramsey called and said, "Hey man, we gotta gitcha on one a' these Mexico white winged dove hunts. It's not Argentina. You ain't gonna kill 5,000 birds a day, but man, it's a lot closer to the states, the weather's perfect and white-wingeds are a hell of a lot prettier bird than that little eared dove," I was much less resistant than normal. It simply sounded amazing.

Americans are schizophrenic about Mexico. We love the people, the culture, the seafood especially, the climate, the beaches...the list goes on. Yet we fear the place, because let's be honest, most of the headlines coming out of there in the past decade have not been the stuff of travel brochures. But that is changing quickly. And there is no denying this is the affordable and not so-very-far-away destination our fathers and grandfathers ventured to.

Part of the reason I embraced the dove hunt so quickly is because I'd taken his advice and gone to Obregon brant hunting to film a TV show the year prior and had been blown away at what a quick easy trip it was to the tropics to escape winter. And the hunting, oh my...the very first duck I shot was a drake cinnamon teal (bucket list bird for most of us), and we took down limits of the stunning black sea geese every single day in time for brunch.

I shall never forget watching the joyous flight of brant weaving shoreward in long, snaky, dancing lines



undulating in off the open sea to our stand-up blind on the sand bars. From the wide open ocean, they came for miles and somehow zoomed straight in and finished right in your lap, feet down in the dekes. Always a lover of the aristocratic, understated elegance of the pintail over the more colorfully painted species, I found the handsome brant, in all his stately mystery, with that lovely white collar and chestnut brown against black and white, to be the absolute embodiment of feathered elegance. Combined with the love of the ocean so many of us have, they are a profoundly beautiful and evocative bird...as well as fabulous eating.

The biggest thing about the trip, (besides ducking out of a Midwest blizzard to put on shorts after landing on the Sea of Cortez and being handed a cold 'rita upon arrival) was that I never felt threatened or uncomfortable with my people or surroundings in the slightest. It was nothing like being in any large American city. Like duck hunting, but warmer, is what I tell friends. And the ducks, oh the ducks.

Glorious late winter shovelers in full nuptial plumage were striking against the blue skies, only outshined by bands of pintail with long quills flowing off their backsides. Moon-faced bluewinged teal zoomed all over, and we scored on a true North American trophy subspecies: Mexican mallards. It was a mind-blowing experience, just as I expected it would be. The dove hunting, however, blew my expectations away. Rumored to swarm like gnats in these hills, I simply didn't believe it. I thought it would be like Texas hunting but better, as most of our birds funnel down here from the U.S. I was wrong,

because they don't. These birds are not the U.S. birds, I'd learn. They are local populations that migrate only back and forth between the lower agricultural fields around Obregon to the nearby mountains, following grain harvest patterns and breeding virtually all year...just like Argentina. The shooting was more like Cordoba than Texas, only more challenging.

At times black clouds of birds would build up in the fields and for the next hour, you could not load your gun fast enough as birds swarmed back and forth—a high concentration of birds (Dovenado!) than I ever quite saw in South America.

And these were white-winged. Just as Ramsey promised: bigger, stronger prettier birds than mourning or eared doves, each one a lovely trophy in its own right. I was giddy with joy, smiling and shooting with a lovely loaner Benelli 20 gauge. In late season, October typically, the birds are more congregated, which is why the swarms. Earlier in September or even August is terrific hunting but bloody hot, though that is not a big deal because you normally quit by 9 a.m.

Again Ramsey was right—It's not the endless river of doves in the sky that sometimes (not always) happens in Argentina, but it's a much shorter trip, and we burned 20 boxes of shells in the morning and that many again in the evening. That's all the banging I ever want to do, thank you, but Ramsey says some hunters do kill 700 doves in a morning here. And in Mexico, that is true dead doves in hand, not a click on a counter because a feather floated down. It was clear to me and Ramsey that if we'd worked two guns and had bird boys reloading, you could easily kill a thousand birds an outing here on good days, just like Argentina. We opted instead to pick our shots, try to shoot as many birds as we could from out from under our partners and heckle each other endlessly...having fun like kids on their first dove hunt, in other words.

I've been lucky to hunt five continents, and the service at this outfitter's lodge is among the very best in the world. The steaks, barbecue chicken, skewers of shrimp, and, of course, Mexican food night, with the best tortillas and fajitas on the planet...was barely the start. Yet it was a hunter's lodge, without that stuffy five-star Four Seasons ambience.

**I shall venture to other continents  
for exotic waterfowl and big game,  
but I will never fly over Mexico again  
to go somewhere else dove hunting.  
A few friends still think I'm crazy  
to go to Mexico, but I think they are  
crazy not to.**

**- Frank Stavros**

