

An



Adventure

Doves & ducks with Four Seasons Adventures

*text & photos by Gary Kramer*

Argentina





◀ A popular duck in Argentina is the rosy-billed pochard, which is about the size of a mallard and acts like a puddle duck—though it is technically a diver.

▼ Argentina offers world-class duck hunting, with multiple species available—including the yellow-billed pintail (below)—liberal limits and plenty of birds.

▶ Depending on the season, seemingly endless flocks of doves offer high-volume shooting as they head to grainfields or to and from roosting areas.



destination that would not require a domestic flight once clients landed at the international airport. In 2010 he finally found the ideal spot in Entre Ríos Province, just north of BA.

The location is near Gualeguaychú, a town of 100,000 residents about 145 miles north of Buenos Aires. Most flights from the US arrive in BA in the morning. Clients are met at the airport and driven about three hours to the dove shooting area—allowing them to head to the field the same day they arrive.

Recently I traveled to Argentina for a combination dove-and-duck hunt. The day I flew in I was in the dove shooting area by noon and able to fire a dozen boxes of shells before sunset. After three days of shooting, I can report that the world-class action was on par with that found in the Córdoba region.

Clients stay in the Bolacué Resort, a full-service, 28-room establishment that has both inside and outside pools, a spa offering a full range of treatments, a gym, a steam room and horseback riding. Prices include drinks (as well as alcohol) and buffet-style meals, and although there are other guests at the resort, meals are served in a private dining area.

The shooting takes place within a 25-mile radius of the resort, with drives ranging from 15 to 45 minutes. The region is characterized by grainfields planted mostly with soybeans, sorghum, wheat and corn. The abundant food is the reason doves are drawn to the area. There are three roosts that support several million doves, with populations increasing annually. The number of birds bagged depends more on how many shells you want to shoot than the availability of birds.

Shooting is available year-round, and there are two distinct seasons. October through April are the warm months, and most shooting is near roosts or in flyways going to and from roosts. The days are long, and the action starts early, with shooters returning to the resort at midday for lunch and a siesta before heading out again in the afternoon. May through September are the cooler months, and the shooting is often in grainfields where the doves are feeding and occasionally near the roosts. During this period the days are shorter, and shooters stay in the field all day with a midday break. A typical *asado* is prepared where sausages, various cuts of beef and pork are grilled over an open fire. In addition to the meats, salads and freshly baked breads are served along with quality Argentine Malbecs.

The basic three-shooting-day package includes transportation from the international airport, meals, drinks, accommodations and hunting services. Shotguns can be rented, or clients can bring their own and Four Seasons will assist with the importation paperwork.

While Argentina is best known for dove shooting, its duck hunting is world-class as well. With more than a dozen species of ducks available, liberal bag limits and high bird populations, the country is a true waterfowlers' Mecca. Four Seasons offers a quality dove-and-duck combination

**A**s we approached the field, we could see the swarm of doves buzzing like bees above the harvested sorghum. When the van came to a stop, we pushed each other out of the vehicle like kids on a field trip. The group gathered around the van, and each of the six hunters was assigned a bird boy. My bird boy, Raul, hoisted a case of shells on his shoulder, said “*Vamonos*” (“Let’s go”) and led me along the edge of the field to a grove of trees, where he put down the shells in a shady spot between the trees and the field. A makeshift blind was already in place, and Raul set up a shooting stool before ripping open the case of shells and handing me a box. I dropped two rounds in my 20-gauge Beretta over/under and immediately began scanning the sky.

Seconds later a flock of doves appeared overhead at 35 yards. Shouldering the gun, I caught up with the streaking targets, swung past a gray blur and pulled the trigger once . . . twice. A single dove plummeted to the ground. Loading

two more shells, I fired at another flock of passing birds. Again two shots resulted in one bird down.

For the first half-hour the doves moved from a distant roost to the field to feed. But as the afternoon wore on they began trading back and forth between the roost and the field. All afternoon flocks of 10 to 100 doves were within range, and by the time we called it quits, the high Gun had tallied 205 doves. Not bad for our first afternoon in Argentina!

**M**any hunters associate Argentina with high-volume dove shooting, and the location most often mentioned is Córdoba. The Córdoba region, in the center of the country, consistently delivers excellent shooting and is home to several world-class lodges. However, to reach Córdoba hunters must first fly to the international airport in Buenos Aires (BA), then make the one-hour transfer to the domestic airport, and then take a 1½-hour flight to Córdoba and be driven to the destination lodge.

For years Alejandro (“Cano”) St. Antonin of Four Seasons Adventures, a company that offers bird shooting, big-game hunting and fishing throughout Argentina, searched for a quality dove shooting location closer to BA. He wanted a





◀ In several days of hunting, the author saw more than 13 species of ducks, including white-faced whistling ducks.

▶ During the cooler months, dove shooters are treated to midday *asados*, where various meats are cooked over open fires.

▼ Duck hunters often take up positions in natural cover and enjoy both pass-shooting and gunning for decoying birds.

## *A trip to Argentina is on the bucket list of many wingshooters.*



The first afternoon the drive was 20 minutes, and we met our bird boy, Roberto, near a marsh where two dozen decoys were already set. We used natural cover for a blind, and although a short wade in knee-deep water was required, the bottom was relatively firm and the walking easy.

The first birds in were rosy-billed pochards, and my gunning partner and I dispatched the pair as they hovered 30 yards above the decoys. Roberto was out of the blind in a flash and quickly returned with the birds. Rosy-bills are about the size as mallards and are technically diving ducks; however, they behave more like puddle ducks, frequenting ricefields and shallow marshes. Drakes are handsome birds, sporting unmistakable bright-red bills with swollen knobs at the bases. They are considered the finest eating of the South American ducks, and that evening we found out just how good *pato picasso* was, marinated and grilled.

As the sun dropped toward the horizon, the birds began flying in earnest. Some, like the yellow-billed pintails, circled before coming to the decoys. Others, including silver and speckled teal, arrived in small flocks and pairs and came straight in. Fulvous and white-faced whistling ducks never really decoyed but often passed within shooting range. By sunset we had 10 ducks each and were more than satisfied with the first afternoon's action.

During the next several days we hunted ducks both morning and evening, firing about two boxes each in the morning and one in the afternoon. We saw 13 different species—the most common being rosy-billed pochards, yellow-billed and white-faced pintails, southern wigeon, silver and yellow-billed teal, white-faced whistling ducks and red shovelers.

I've had the privilege of hunting at hundreds of lodges and interacting with many guides, and I can say that the duck guides at Four Seasons are first rate. All of them have at least 25 years' guiding experience. Cano organizes the shoots, and guides Roberto and Julio set the decoys, do the calling and retrieve the birds.

A trip to Argentina is on the bucket list of many wingshooters. Of those who go, many opt for high-volume dove shooting, while others enjoy duck hunting. The combination hunts offered by Four Seasons Adventures cover all the bases in style. 🦆

For more information on dove and/or duck trips in Argentina, contact Four Seasons Adventures, [4seasons.com.ar](http://4seasons.com.ar).

Gary Kramer is an Editor at Large for *Shooting Sportsman*. His most recent book, *Waterfowl of the World*, includes stunning images of and biological information about all 167 species of ducks, geese and swans on Earth and is available from [garykramer.net](http://garykramer.net).

that includes three days of duck hunting and three days of dove shooting. These combination trips take place in May, June and July.

On my trip, following a morning dove shoot we traveled about four hours southwest to Buenos Aires Province and a classic *estancia* built in the early 1900s on a 6,000-acre operating cattle ranch. The lodge has all the modern conveniences but still maintains the "feel" of a historic Argentine *estancia*. There are seven double rooms and six baths, with a capacity of eight clients.

Four Seasons conducts duck hunts from as many as five *estancias* west of Buenos Aires. The selection of a particular property is based on water conditions and duck populations. This flexibility allows hunters to be placed in the best possible location. Depending on the property, blinds are 15-to-45-minute drives from the lodge. The hunting area encompasses more than 100,000 acres, with 40 to 50 percent of that being wetlands. The balance is used for cattle grazing and the cultivation of corn, soybeans, sorghum and wheat. This combination of marsh and agriculture provides excellent habitat for a wide variety of ducks and other water birds.

On the first day of our hunt we arrived in time for lunch—a sumptuous meal of grilled beef, freshly baked breads, vegetables, fried potatoes and red wine. The final course was my favorite dessert: flan with *dulce de leche*. The food throughout the stay was excellent, and our cook, Matilde, prepared some of the best duck I've tasted.

