

In 2005 I had the pleasure of spending 22 days with two fine gentlemen. Not only were these two gentlemen fine sportsmen but good shots and passionate bird hunters. After a successful hunt and many birds, Dick Riemenschneider and Bill Fannon booked again for 2006. Due to late rains, I told them to come a little later as cover would be down. Well, lo and behold, corn was still not harvested and cover was thick on their arrival—not a normal season at all. But this did not deter us.

These two gentlemen, being the strapping two upland hunters they are, can keep up and walk just as far as any South African professional hunter. So what we

decided to do this year, after much discussion, was to take a safari, a journey in search of as many species of francolin and partridge as we possibly could find in a three-week time frame. One must understand that each species is endemic to specific areas—hence the necessity for a journey to new hunting grounds.

We began this epic journey in Johannesburg and headed for a small Free State town called Memel in search of grey-wing partridge. This is mountain country and cold. Dick did a fine double on his first point, and greywing was in the bag. After a couple of days we headed for Ladysmith, Kwazulu Natal. Ladysmith is below the escarpment and much warmer

Virginians

in Search of
Francolin and Partridge
in
South Africa

Story and photos by Darryl De Lange



A wonderful bag of yellow-billed ducks



Each gun picking his bird in true sporting fashion

than Memel. Here we proceeded to hunt the Swainsons. Many a fine shot was taken, and on our second to last evening, with good scenting and long grass, birds were popping up everywhere under the



dogs' noses. One must know that a Swainson's, in true pheasant form, can give a dog all the work it needs. A covey will rise in front and to either side of the gun. This does not only induce frustration and

sporting shooting, but also many a swear word from the gun. "Shells of ill repute" was mumbled on the odd missed bird. We came home, grilled the bag of the day, and with sundowners, we chatted about the

day's quarry.

I next took the guns up to the Northern Drakensburg foothills where the views are spectacular. This was in search of red wing partridge, but with howling



Hunting Natal francolins in the trees proves to be a challenge.



Fergus on point

An excellent find



winds, we just could not pin a bird. So in order to keep guns and dogs happy, we did a duck shoot that afternoon. Yellow-billed ducks flew in like teenagers to a rock concert, totally oblivious to the two “bouncers” with the 20-gauge shotguns. Ducks were here and there and everywhere—on your barrel, on top of you, behind you. This melee of birds led to a whole new dialect from the two guns, especially since most of the birds killed were by moonlight after sunset.

Our next quarry was the Orange River francolin, which is found predominately north of the Kwazulu Natal and in the Free State close to the Orange River. This partridge, like the greywing, is more honest and true to a dog. Most partridges get up as a whole covey, which leaves the gun wondering, “Damn, which one?” Our guns did more impeccably than in the duck shoot, bagging 20 in just over an hour of the main flight.

We had hunted, we had eaten, we had enjoyed, and now it was time to move on to our finest destination, a place called Dendron where the land is so thick and black with birds that it looks as though it has been spilt with ink.

On arrival and after having a few drinks around the campfire, we discussed our next modus operandi. The conversation went something like this: “Men, you have to reload fast, and when I mean fast I mean don’t take your head off the birds, don’t look down at your gun. Shoot fast and shoot straight.” “Yeah, yeah, yeah,” was the comment I got in return. I then said, “Well, we are in for four species here, and if it comes out from under my dog’s nose, ...shoot it.”

We got the “triple crown” each morning by both guns: the crested partridge, Natal francolin and Swainsons francolin. The triple crown was so named by Dick. Shots were taken from open fields to thick forest, under orange pink sunrises in African savannah to blood-red sunsets in the riparian woodlands. Both

guns adapted and adapted more than well. At sunrise, the two gentlemen poised over quivering dogs on point, holding the quarry and being faithful to the guns. Drinks around the bushveld fire consummated wonderful sunsets.

Darryl De Lange is a professional guide in South Africa and has been guiding for 14 years. Based in Kwazulu Natal, he offers wing shooting, game hunting and photographic tours of South Africa and 220,000 acres in Namibia, in the Kalahari desert where Namibia, Botswana and South Africa meet. Besides his home language of English, he speaks Zulu as well as Afrikaans and communicates fluently throughout the whole country (darryldl@intekom.co.za).

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