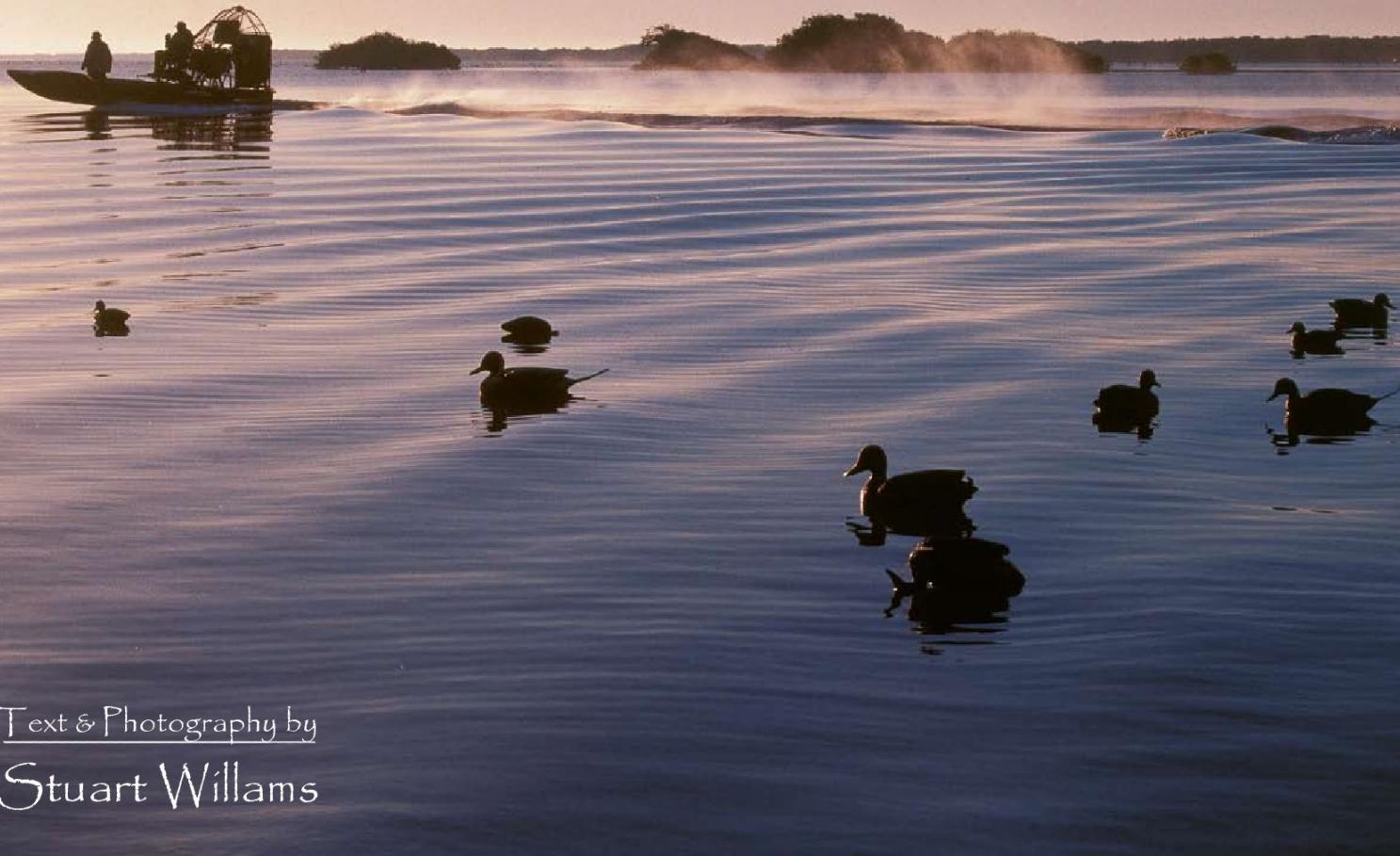


# Wingshooting MEXICO



Text & Photography by  
Stuart Williams

## Credits

### Text & Photography

Stuart Williams

### Production & Edition

John John Reynal  
Juan Pablo Reynal

### Graphic Design & Maps

Mariano E. Rojas  
Mariano R. Alvarez

### Original Paintings

Steve Butler

### Pre-Press:

Patagonia Publishing Company S.A.

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# Dunkin of Tamaulipas



### *Red Heads*

High overhead eight little ivory-white Ross geese circled about suspiciously. Dial Dunkin and I were crouched side-by-side in a sorghum field in pit blinds that had been perfectly concealed by stalks of sorghum driven into the ground all around the blinds. Surrounding us was a veritable sea of white decoys—shells and windsocks and stuffers and Sillosocks. Two white kites hovered in the wind 20 feet off the ground. Dial flipped the switch on his electronic caller, and it immediately began to put forth the most seductive cajolery. The geese responded immediately, and began a series of gradually descending circles. At the instant when he thought they were in perfect range Dial gave the order: “Let’s get ‘em!” We rose as one, our guns reared eight

former editor of WILDFOWL magazine, are in an adjacent blind. Our mission is twofold: to do what Dial calls a “mid-morning waterhole collision hunt,” namely, an early-morning pintail shoot, and then, when the snow geese start coming in



to drink, to enjoy a late-morning goose hunt. We are surrounded by a veritable flotilla of duck and goose decoys, perhaps 800 or more. Pintails are coming in high overhead, then circling and circling and circling, coming ever lower and lower, until at last The Grand Master Waterfowler gives the order, and we rise and lay the lead on them, and plummeting duck bodies splash down all around us. This scenario repeats itself over and over and over, until Dial gives the order to shoot no more ducks because soon the geese will be arriving.



*The Grand Master Waterfowler, Dial Dunkin himself, is all set for action in one of his famous modular blinds, which provide "comfortable concealment," as he calls it. Notice the Robo Duck. All his spreads of duck decoys have at least one Robo Duck.*



*A swarm of pintails coming in to decoy at Rancho Mariposa, a sight seen by duck hunters many times every morning there.*

the electronic caller. It is equipped with a powerful amplifier and two directional speakers that broadcast its siren songs straight up at the geese. They break off into smaller flocks and gradually circle around and around and down on us, when the Grand Master Waterfowler gives the signal, and the three of us elevate our gun barrels toward the zenith and let fly and heavy goosebodies cascade and throw up high splashes all around us. This keeps up non-stop for two hours.

Then Big Jim Travis—Dial's right-hand man at

the time—arrives on shore 300 yards away and announces that he has brought lunch. We shoot a few more and reluctantly call it quits.

We gourmandized a fine luncheon of smoked Norwegian salmon on pumpernickel bread sandwiches and Stilton cheese and fresh mangos and washed it down with a cold Pouilly-Fuisse wine, sitting on the shore and watching geese pour in to the water, flying right over the blinds that we had just left.

After lunch we did a count: We had had one of

the best days of pintail shooting of our lives, and as for the snow geese, which are in a serious state of overpopulation, we had certainly done our part to reduce their numbers. It had been one of our greatest waterfowling days.

The scene changes again. This time we are out on San Bartolo Bay, site of Dial's former duck hunting camp, Moquetito. I am in the left blind, Dial and his grandson, Timothy O'Brien, are in the right blind. Again, we are surrounded by a vast array of decoys.

We are in the midst of a massive invasion of bluebills (lesser scaup), the first time that anybody has ever seen bluebills on San Bartolo Bay. They are there by the thousands and thousands.

They came sweeping by and around and over the blinds wave after wave after wave, hundreds of birds in each wave, without any hesitation or caution whatsoever, and with each wave we put up swarms of minute flak that brought down 10-12-15 ducks. This action was unlike anything we had ever seen before, so we were unprepared, and our supplies of shotshells were soon depleted. We sent a Mexican boy back to camp to fetch more. When it was all finished we reckoned that we had had a morning of

duck shooting such as few mortals have ever seen.

These are just three of the hundreds of great waterfowling days that I have enjoyed with The Grand Master Waterfowler, Dial Dunkin. Indeed, I could fill this whole book with accounts of the glory days of waterfowling that I have enjoyed with Dial Dunkin. I hope to do just such a book one day.

The first time that Dial invited me to come hunt with him he said over the phone: "I just want to let you know that I run a strictly law-abiding camp and adhere to limits scrupulously. Remember, I am in Mexico and I want to be a good neighbor!" I thought to myself: "Mister, you are obviously not aware that you are speaking to the Founding Father and the President in Perpetuity of Game Hawgs Galore!" (Since then he has been elected vice-president of that elite and august organization.) The very first morning I shot with him we virtually burned our gun barrels off! Every time I remind him of that conversation we laugh uproariously.

Dial Dunkin is, in my opinion, the most experienced, the most sophisticated, the best equipped, and the most successful waterfowler alive. He has made expeditions to the greatest waterfowling venues in the world: the prairies

of Alberta, the pampas of Argentina, the Andean valleys of southern Chile, the high Andes of Peru, the volcanic uplands of Iceland, and the fields of South Island, New Zealand. I have had the good fortune to accompany him on many of these excursions. He has been operating waterfowl hunts commercially in Mexico for about forty years and has become a living legend among discerning and demanding waterfowlers. In fact, his hunts at Moquetito Camp were in such demand that virtually the only way you could get in was if one of his regulars died.

His expertise is not limited to waterfowl. He used to own Alta Vista, a sumptuous lodge on Lake Guerrero that was, until he sold it, the largest hunting and fishing resort in the world and a place that was legendary for its great whitewing dove shooting and bass fishing.

He still operates outstanding whitewing dove shoots out of his current base of operations, Rancho Mariposa, from mid-August through mid-October. I shot whitewings there in September, 2007, when Dial enticed me to come down with promises of

*Dr. Sam Williams is all set for hot-barrelled dove-shooting action in the sorghum fields of Tamaulipas.*



more doves than he had seen since the glory days of Alta Vista thirty years ago. The shooting was everything he claimed it would be and more. We shot in the shade of mesquite trees, among fields of waist-high copper-headed sorghum, where huge cumulus clouds piled up on the horizon. Wave after wave of whitewings swept by high overhead, and as we hit them little puffs of white and gray feathers ballooned out against a deep turquoise sky and idled and drifted away down the breeze. We kept the air full of fine feathery confetti, sifting softly earthwards.

Dial also offers outstanding quail shooting during the period November—February. He maintains a full-time dog handler/trainer, Steve Hadle, in residence at Rancho Mariposa; a special quail-hunting rig with elevated seats and built-in kennels and gun racks; and a kennel of highly trained, elegant, and disciplined dogs. He has access to thousands of square miles of top-quality quail habitat with absolutely no competition.

He transports his dogs in air-conditioned comfort in the back of his Suburban, where they dine on Dunkin Donuts. What else? As he likes to say: "Donuts are the perfect food. They will make your

teeth gleam like polished ivory and are the perfect food for weight loss. Just remember to eat only the holes!" (This is just another reason why Dial Dunkin is commonly known as "The Donut King.") He likes to call his dogs "pampered pooches," and that's just what they are.

Nor does he have any competition for goose or dove fields or duck ponds. He operates far to the south of the other outfitters in Tamaulipas state. Aside from whitewing doves and bobwhite quail, the main species that Dial hunts are bluewing, greenwing, and cinnamon teal; fulvous and white-faced tree ducks; pintails; and snow, blue, and specklebelly geese.

Dial's base of operations, Rancho Mariposa, is a kind of Shangri-La set out in the middle of nowhere. It is a complex consisting of just 18 very comfortable rooms; a large kitchen/dining structure with bar, satellite television that receives over 500 channels, and a margarita machine that makes the finest slushy margaritas you will taste in this world or the next; and a swimming pool with a thatch-roof *palapa* bar. All of this is set amid luxuriant tropical gardens with over 1000 varieties of palm

trees from all over the world. The palm trees keep the place cool even on the hottest days. Off to the side is a large nursery that sells palm plants, and in the distance is an agave plantation, where Dial grows agave to supply tequila makers.

Meals at Rancho Mariposa are very special occasions. They feature local game and fish and fresh local fruits and vegetables. Some specialties are grilled whitewing dove breasts stuffed with *jalapeno* peppers and Philadelphia cream cheese and wrapped with bacon strips; breasts of teal or fulvous tree ducks with an incision made for a clove of garlic, wrapped in bacon, judgmatically seasoned with salt and oregano, and grilled over an open fire—a food fit for the gods! grilled fillets of snook and pompano; deep-fried fillets of bass; *filete tampiquena*; *langostinos*, or small fresh-water lobsters; and homemade banana ice cream. Guaranteed you will put on weight at Rancho Mariposa!

What separates Dial from all the other outfitters in Tamaulipas—or in all of Mexico—is that he is not in the business for money. Dial is a wealthy man who certainly does not need the income from outfitting. He does it because, first of all, he loves to be afield and

to hunt, and second, he loves to entertain people. Other outfitters will book as many hunters as they can get, but Dial strictly limits duck or goose-hunting groups to four hunters and whitewing dove groups to ten, but he prefers six. Dial's wealth gives him the additional advantage that he can purchase the very finest equipment

without regard to profit or loss, equipment that is way beyond the means of other outfitters. At Moquetito Camp he had two custom-built high-clearance swamp buggies with enormous tires that would go absolutely anywhere. Each of these cost over \$50,000. He had an airboat and half-a-dozen 4-wheel ATV's and a veritable arsenal of guns and

ammunition. He had quite literally thousands of decoys of all kinds.

Dial is famous for his very large, artistically arranged spreads of decoys, extending for 2-3 acres or more, and consisting of a thousand decoys or more. He likes to say: "I put out my decoys for six days and rested on the seventh."



*A birdboy puts out decoys preparatory to a mid-morning waterhole goose hunt.*

*Snow goose shooting action over a cornfield in Tamaulipas.*

Well do I remember one day when I hunted with a competitor of his. We stood atop a levee and watched Dial in the distance, roaring around on a 4-wheel ATV in water and deep mud, putting out hundreds of decoys and barking orders to a small army of peones. The outfitter shook his head and commented: "I wouldn't work that hard for nobody!"

In his spreads of duck decoys, he always has at least two motorized spinning-wing decoys in front of AND behind the blind, and five vibrating duck-butt decoys in front of AND behind the blind. Such a spread is absolutely irresistible. No competitor has anything like it.

Dial is as famous for his blinds as he is for his decoys. The principle that governs the construction of all his blinds is what he calls "comfortable concealment." His duck blinds are modular wooden structures with a bench and a solid floor, big enough to accommodate two men comfortably. This structure is surrounded by local vegetation that is held in place by chicken wire and rebar. It conceals shooters from prying eyes to the side, and more important, from the keen eyes of pintails and snow geese overhead.

Sharp-pointed posts at the corners are driven into the mud to anchor the structure solidly. It may be pulled up and moved easily.

His goose blinds are all carefully dug pits that incorporate a shelf for sitting, and place the shooter's head just at ground level. These pits are surrounded by local vegetation for total concealment. There is none of that miserable nonsense of having shooters lie on their backs on bare ground or in a coffin blind.

Dial does not do any mouth calling. He uses the best solid-state electronic callers instead.

Dial keeps a supply of well-maintained Beretta semi-automatics and Mexican shotshells for his guests. That eliminates the costly and complicated business of bringing guns into Mexico.

Dial is not only an outstanding outfitter, he is a master raconteur and entertainer too. Well do I remember many delightful evenings on the verandah at Moquetito Camp, sitting around a roaring fire, enjoying the splendid view out over San Bartolo Bay, sipping the finest *margaritas* in all of Mexico, wolfing down platters of hot *nachos*, listening to Dial—The Bard of San Bartolo—recite his poetry:

*Down in Old Mexico  
Near the Rio Grande  
Spanish daggers, cactus, vaqueros,  
and the San Bartolo Ranch.*

*Snow geese float on silent winds  
across the misty coastal branch  
And when they call, their lonely call  
On scented breezes it drifts to all,  
The music that is the mystery of the hunt.*

*And if you are a hunter  
And if you are ever down in Old Mexico  
Near the Rio Grande  
And hear snow geese calling*

*across the misty coastal branch  
Your heart and soul will be forever  
locked on the San Bartolo Ranch.*

*And if you seek my counsel  
In years long gone by  
You will find my heart and soul  
where snow geese fly.*

*So listen to their lonely call  
For it will tell you all  
On the misty coastal branch  
Of the San Bartolo Ranch  
Down in Old Mexico  
Near the Rio Grande.*

Afterwards, he goes on to recount the many adventures he has had in doing business for over thirty-five years in Mexico. It is the stuff to make a powerful book, which I might write one day.

Ah, those were the days, my friend!

(The season for whitewing doves runs mid-August to mid-October; the season for quail, ducks, and geese runs November—February).

Shooters reach Rancho Mariposa by flying to Harlingen or McAllen, Texas, where they will be met and transported to the resort. Alternately they may fly via Houston to Tampico, Mexico, where they will be met.

#### **Get further information**

**and bookings from:**

**Rancho Mariposa**

**Tel. +1 (800) 477-6420**

**dialapalm@yahoo.com**

**www.dialaduck.com**



*Dial Dunkin enjoys some red-hot shooting for whitewing doves.*



*The Grand Master himself, Dial Dunkin, is all set for action on whitewings amid the mature sorghum fields of Tamaulipas.*

*A party of quail hunters moves through an agave field in search of their quarry.*

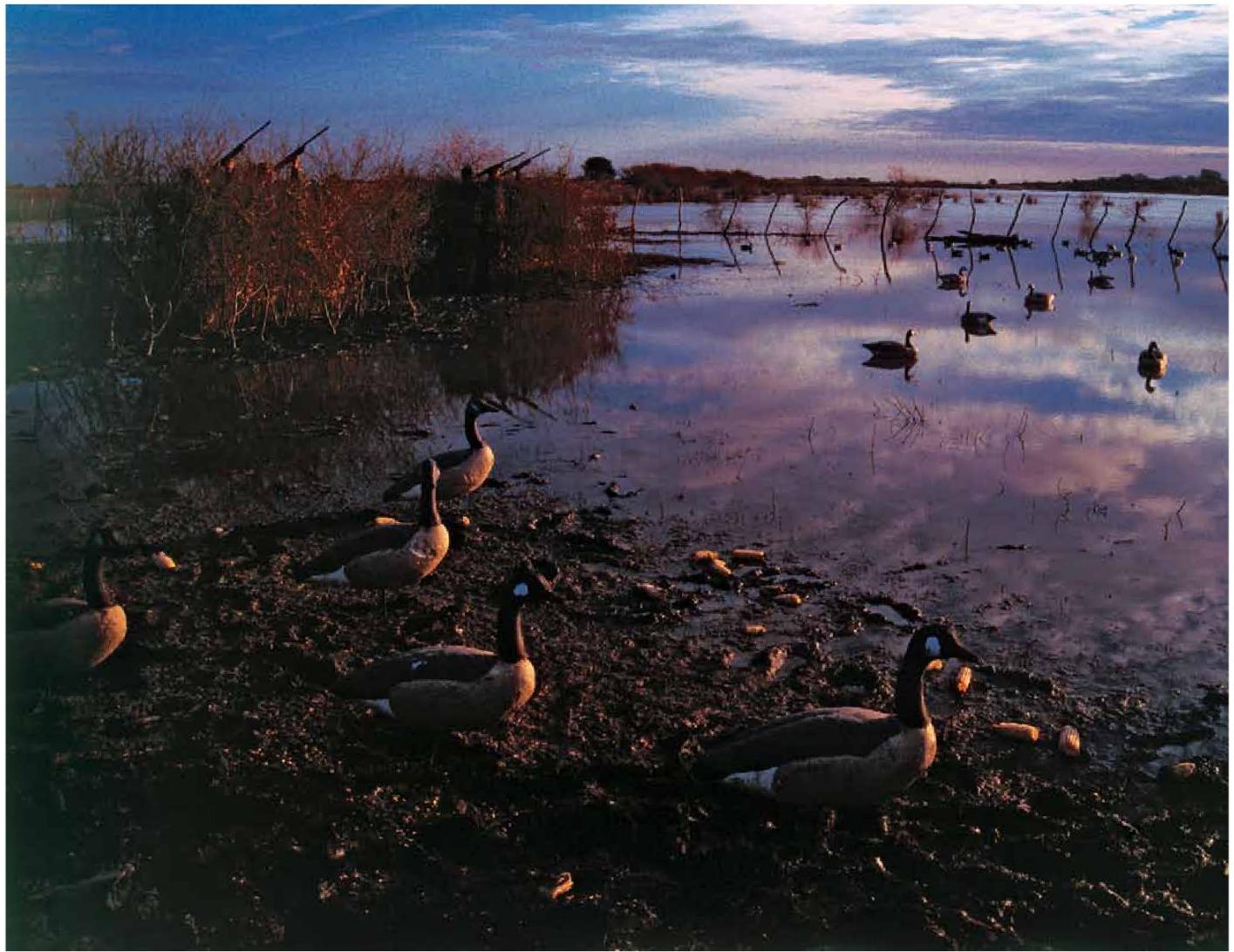


*These hunters are all set for explosive quail-shooting action behind their staunch pointers in the cactus covers of Tamaulipas.*



*A Browning B-80 and a nice bag of quail it accounted for.*





*Goose-shooting action on one of Dial Dunkin's famous mid-morning waterhole collision goose hunts.*



*Uncle Tom Callahan takes down a double on high specklebelly geese.*



A birdboy tows a camouflaged boat into position in preparation of a waterhole goose hunt.



Snow Geese

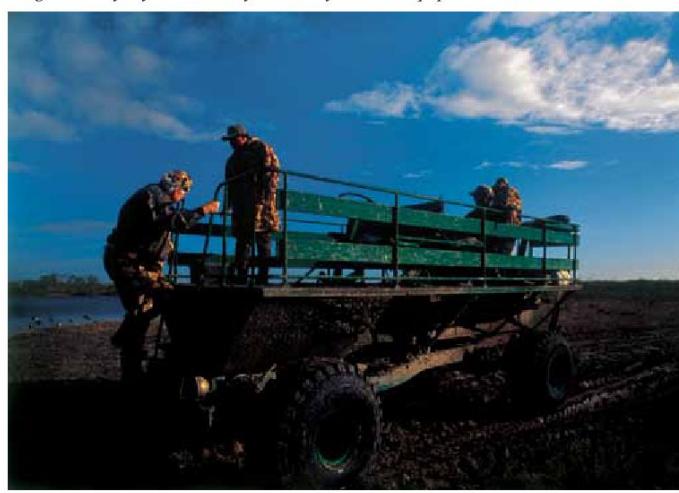


Dial Dunkin and Jim Cripe, the former manufacturer of Outlaw Decoys, are all smiles after a very successful waterhole goose hunt. Dial is justifiably proud of his vast spreads of decoys.



Dial drives a 4-wheel ATV through one of his best potholes and pulls a trailer with birdboys and a nice bag of ducks.

Uncle Tom Callahan climbs up on Big Bertha, a high-clearance custom-built swamp buggy that can go absolutely anywhere. Nobody but nobody has better equipment than Dial Dunkin.



The Grand Master Waterfowler has his eye on an incoming flock of pintails, and is all ready for action.



*An exhilarating moment before the hot-barreled shooting action begins.*

# Sinalopato Duck & Dove Club



*Pintails*

Airboats roared back and forth and up and down, putting great swarms of ducks to flight. A wave of about 100 redheads sailed by, then turned and banked against the wind, and settled on the water about 100 yards away. Gradually they swam into the decoys, whereupon the birdboy shouted and put them to flight, and I put down four birds with two shots. Then another wave sailed in well within range, and I put down four—*mirabile dictu*—with the first shot and one with the second. Soon another pass of 6-8 birds blew by from the left, and I killed three birds with two shots. Things kept up like this for an hour, and during that special time I could hardly miss. Some birds fell at long distance, but my hard-working birdboy retrieved them all. Some of them were in water so deep he had to swim.

I was shooting from a natural blind hacked out of dense mangroves on the edge of a large lagoon. I stood on a large wooden pallet, which provided a solid

floor. Out in front three dozen decoys moved back and forth in the wind. It was the perfect stratagem for shooting ducks.

A large flock of redheads came in and settled about 120 yards out. Then followed another flock, which settled beside the first flock. Then a third flock,

then a fourth, then a fifth and so on until there were at least 1000 redheads, perhaps 1500, on the water. Then someone in another blind fired a shot, and they got up as one with a great roar of wings and flew all over and around me, whereupon I put down two—and the gun jammed!! Even so, this event alone made the whole morning's effort worthwhile.

The scene changes. This time I am shooting with Col. D. L. Weener, a great devotee of firepower and the inventor of the immortal phrase: "While there's lead in the air there's hope." He has accompanied me on hunting and shooting trips worldwide and is a fellow member of Game Hogs Galore.





Bobby Balderrama, owner/operator of Sinalopato, proudly poses with a nice bag of ducks on one of his airboats.

We were shooting on a brackish marsh that was home to many thousands of shovellers and teal, with a few *pichiguilas* (white-faced tree ducks). It was a delectably cool evening, with a vigorous breeze that kept all those vicious biting gnats far away.

Most of the shooting we had was high pass shooting. We routinely pulled down birds from 40-50 yards up. I became thoroughly convinced

of the powers of a load of 1 ¼ ozs. of #4 shot fired out of a full choke gun to kill ducks cleanly at 50 yards.

We finished with about 50 birds.

The highlight of the evening happened thus: a flock of seven *pichiguilas* came straight towards us, up about 25 yards. As they came within good range they flew tightly compacted together, and at that very instant we unleashed the lead at them. Five fell and

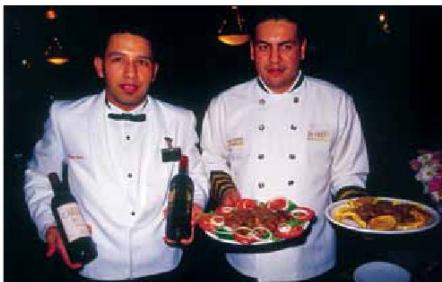
one flew off to the left, where I quickly dispatched it. The other flew behind the blind. I whirled to shoot it but lost it in the sun. Col. Weener shouted: "Score six more for Game Hogs Galore!"

Back at Sinalopato headquarters in Los Mochis, namely, the Plaza Inn Hotel—we feasted on a fine dinner at Mr. Owens' Restaurant. We started with an excellent *sopa de tres colores* (mushroom, cheese, and carrot), then moved on to the *piece de resistance*, namely, shrimp Hawaiian style, prepared with shredded coconut and mango sauce, all washed down with copious iced tea spiked with lime juice. We finished up with a delightful Neapolitan ice cream. It was Col. Weener's last supper of this hunt, so Bobby Balderrama—owner of Plaza Inn and Sinalopato—made it a very special occasion. Plaza Inn is a very comfortable modern hotel, with all the amenities of a first-class hostelry. It has impeccably clean air-conditioned rooms, three restaurants, a nightclub, a fitness center, a business center, a travel agency, and a large swimming pool shaded by towering palm trees. The hotel is located about 30—45 minutes drive from the shooting areas.



Seen here is a typical bedroom at the Plaza Inn Hotel in Los Mochis, Sin., where guests of Sinalopato are accommodated.

The next morning I did a whitewing dove shoot



Waiters at Mr. Owens' Restaurant in the Plaza Inn are consummate professionals.

with Bobby Balderrama and Old Joe (alias "Howlin' Jose") Moreno, a legendary birdshooting guide with over fifty years experience. We shot near a beautiful small lake, to which birds were coming in to drink. The lake was surrounded by a dense stand of 15-foot high *nopal* and *pitahaya* cactus mingled with scrub trees on one side, and big trees with parrot-green bark on the other. It was a brilliant, pristine morning, a great time to be alive.

We took up stands among the cactus and whitewings flashed over us at terrific speed, not more than ten yards high. It was very challenging shooting, because we had just a fraction of a second to see the bird, mount, swing, and shoot. When we connected at such short range bright mother-of-pearl feathers exploded against a deep turquoise sky

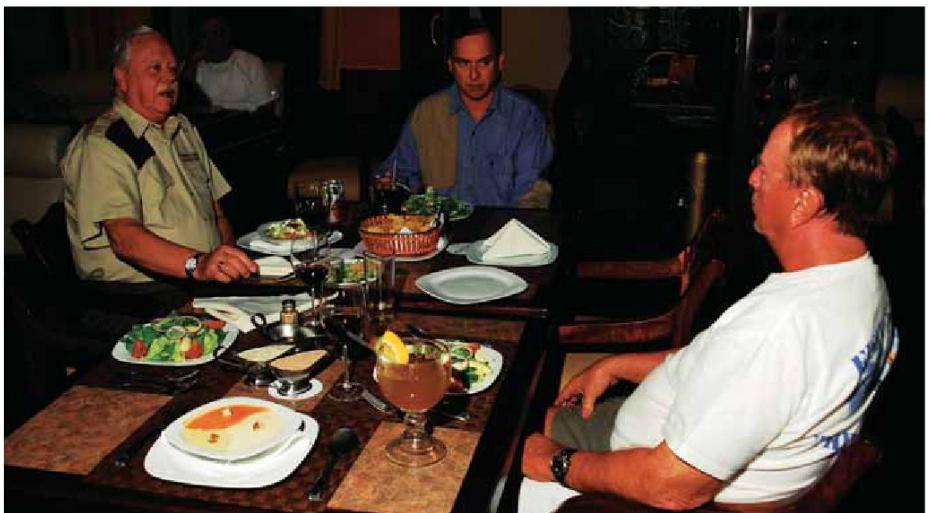
and ebbed and flowed capriciously on the breeze and sifted down through the cacti.

It was fast and furious, short but sweet. We each shot about 95 birds.

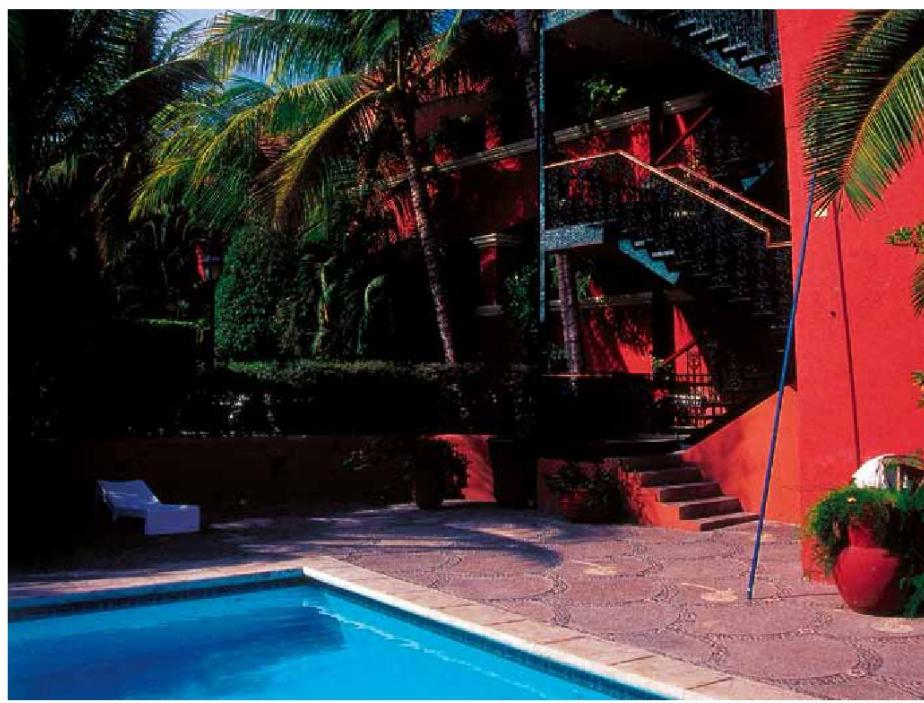
Afterwards, we walked back to the van through the cool green gloom of deep shade under big trees.

Next morning, after a big breakfast of *huevos rancheros*, *frijoles refritos*, freshly squeezed orange juice, and a platter of papaya, cantaloupe, and bananas, it was underway to the marsh and the boat ramp. The airboat roared off into the mist and

soon deposited my birdboy, Arturo, and me in our blind. Birds were trading back and forth thickly, and action began immediately. I shot ten teal in ten minutes without a miss. This kept Arturo really humping, because the area was a bog of malevolent muck. He labored mightily to get to some of those ducks, and labored mightily to get back, frequently falling, and rising only with the greatest effort, his pants sheathed with glistening black mud, but never complained. Sometimes he had to crawl, carrying the duck in his teeth like a dog.



Diners at Mr. Owens' Restaurant in the Plaza Inn are enjoying a meal that the restaurant is famous for. At the far left is the famous Chuck Puff, who has made many shooting excursions to Mexico, and in the center is his son.



View of the very inviting inner courtyard of the Plaza Inn with swimming pool.

Arturo had amazing eyesight, and was able to spot ducks long before I could. He enabled me to shoot perhaps half again as many as I would have without him.

A flock of four mottled ducks headed straight towards me about 35 yards high. I put down two with the first shot, missed the next, and killed a

third with my next shot. This was a very gratifying experience because mottled ducks with the "sprigg" pintail are considered one of the quality ducks on the marsh for sporting and eating qualities.

Hardly had Arturo fetched them, when a flock of teal whooshed by to the right, and I put down three with my only shot. They were going so fast

that they hit the water and bounced. Then four shovellers came over precisely like the four mottled ducks, and I took down two.

The ducks for the most part flew high and wild, presenting supremely challenging shots that, when executed, provided deep satisfaction. Remember, these are essentially driven ducks; the decoys are just for show.

I finished with about 45 ducks.

Back at Mr. Owens' with the other good ole boys, we feasted on *sopa de tortillas*; excellent *fajitas de pollo*; hot apple pie with vanilla sauce; and copious iced tea spiked with lime juice. The good ole boys patted their bellies and headed to their rooms for the indispensable siesta.

The scene of all these grand high deeds is the coastal area of Sinaloa, western Mexico, specifically, in and around Los Mochis. The outfitter is Sinalopato, of which the owner is Bobby Balderrama. Bobby is the scion of a prominent family that owns a chain of hotels in western Mexico, and has many years experience in the hospitality business. Bobby got his secondary education at a military school in Chicago (hence

his nickname "Chicago Bobby"—he still owns a fine seafood restaurant in Chicago called Topolobampo) and did his university-level studies at Cornell, where he got a degree in hotel management. He is an extroverted, gregarious guy who likes people, and to whom people take an immediate liking. He has made several bird-shooting trips with me to Argentina to learn how duck shoots are conducted down there so as to improve his own shoots. One of his nicknames: The Lord of Topolobampo.

All of the Sinalopato shoots are conducted by means of airboats. They deposit the shooters in the blinds, and then they roar around the marshes to keep the birds in flight. Each blind is made of all-natural materials, which are refreshed regularly for maximum deception, and all blinds have solid wooden floors. There is absolutely no wading required, so shooters do not need hip boots. Nor do they need to bring guns. Bobby has a large inventory of well-maintained Beretta and Benelli semi-automatics.

Bobby controls the shooting rights on more than 200,000 acres of marsh, both inland tidal estuaries



Another view of the tropical ambience at Plaza Inn.

and deep-water marshes. He also controls the dove shooting rights on vast acreages of corn, sorghum, millet, sesame, rice, and barley in irrigated fields. These fields are maturing throughout the season due to controlled irrigation, resulting in large numbers of doves throughout the season.

The mix of ducks that one might encounter on any given shoot is determined by the degree of salinity of the water. On brackish water the most common species are teal and shovellers. If one wants "quality" ducks such as pintails and mottled

ducks and *pichiguilas* he has to shoot over fresh water. Sinalopato offers 17 species of waterfowl in their fresh water, brackish and open water marshes: Black-bellied Whistling ducks, Redheads, Cinnamon, Green winged and blue winged teal, Gadwalls, Canvasbacks, Fulvous whistling ducks, Ruddy duck, Mottled ducks, Widgeons, Pintails, Shovellers, Buffle heads, Pacific black brant, Mallards and Pichiguila (Mexican tree duck).

When the morning shoot is finished, shooters will retire to Huerta Carambola, a large walled

tropical fruit grove nearby with elaborate cooking facilities, which is the pet project of Bobby's father, Roberto Balderrama, Sr. Shooters can enjoy a big luncheon of *fajitas* and *flautas* and *frijoles* and *chimichangas*, with plenty of ice-cold Bohemia and XX beer to wash it down, and for dessert they can eat *guanabanas* and *maracuyas* and starfruit and breadfruit and tangerines and mangos right off the trees. Then they can take a siesta in hammocks pitched under big coconut palms, where shade and breeze keep them

comfortable even on the hottest days. I ask you: what could be finer?

In addition to ducks and doves, Bobby also offers shooting for Elegante quail, a species that few quail shooters have ever taken. He has an arrangement with Web Parton, a top-rated dog breeder and trainer from Arizona, to bring in his excellent dogs.

The country is rugged, with thorn scrub and thorn forest and dense cover, but the hunt is exciting and productive. This is a hunt primarily for the serious collector.

No visit to the Los Mochis area is complete

without a visit to El Fuerte and Copper Canyon. El Fuerte is a very charming colonial town over 400 years old, with much of its colonial character preserved intact. There Bobby Balderrama and his father have the resplendent Hotel Posada del Hidalgo. Roberto Balderrama Sr. purchased the original mansion in 1968 and undertook very extensive upgrading and enlargement, being careful to maintain all the charm of the original building. The hotel is a delightful place, and the goal of pilgrimage for tourists from far and near. It just exudes colonial charm.

After a wonderful dinner and overnight at the Hotel Posada, visitors can board the train for a trip to Copper Canyon. Copper Canyon is four times bigger than the Grand Canyon, and its deepest point is 6136 feet—almost 1500 feet deeper than the Grand Canyon.

The trip to Copper Canyon is one of the great train adventures of the world. It has 36 major bridges and 87 tunnels and follows a tortuous route over 300 miles from sea level to 8000 feet. The track is one of the major engineering feats of the world. It travels uphill, then crosses two curving



Very competent staff members clean and lubricate all guns every day.

bridges which reverse the direction of ascent, and then makes a long series of progressively higher switchbacks, then circles back over itself in a complete loop—one of only three examples of this type of construction in North America.

Along the way the Balderrama family has three charming hotels, which welcome guests with deluxe rooms, beautiful décor, fine foods, and roaring fireplaces to warm them on cold nights. Guests can enjoy singing and dancing performances by the legendary Tarahumara Indians, and take horseback tours to spectacular waterfalls.

It all adds up to a great travel adventure.



*A pair of the rare Elegante quail, a bird much sought after by collectors.*



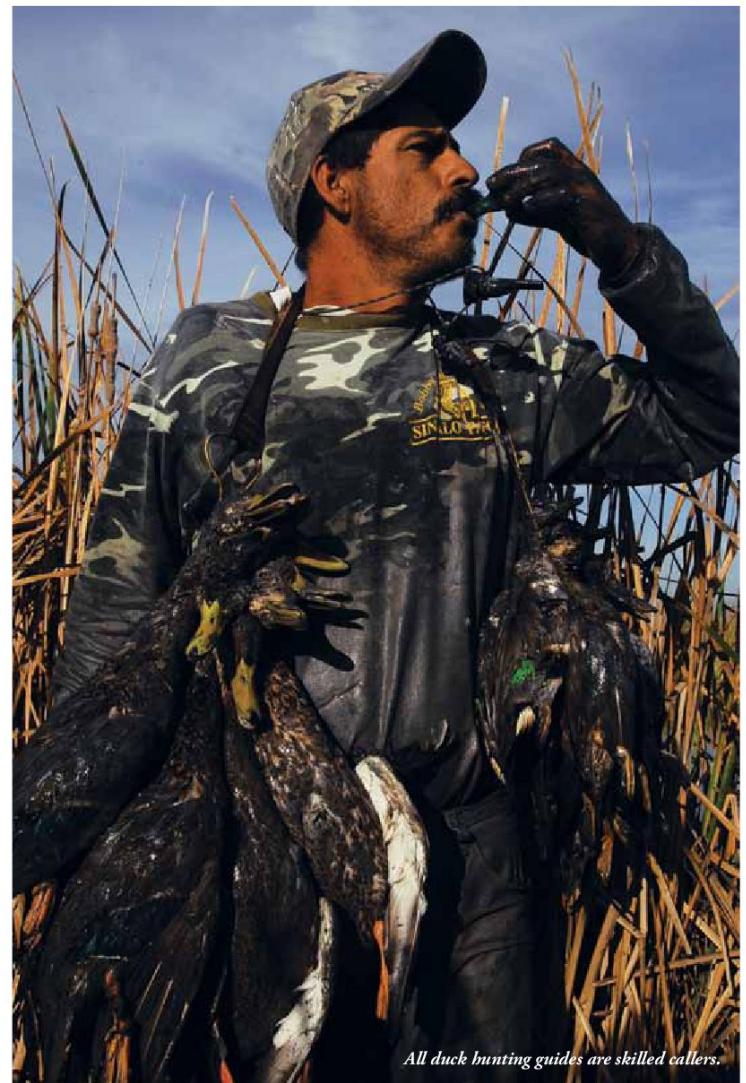
*Bobby Balderrama awaits the action doves in a grove of dense pitahaya cactus.*



*Whitewings sailing over the coastal flatlands of Sinaloa en route to the feeding fields.*



*Birdboys put out a spread of decoys—including at least one battery-powered, or Mojo, decoy—adjacent to each blind.*



*All duck hunting guides are skilled callers.*



*Seen here is the Supreme Shaman of the Shooters,  
Stuart Williams, with a modest bag of ducks he shot one morning.*



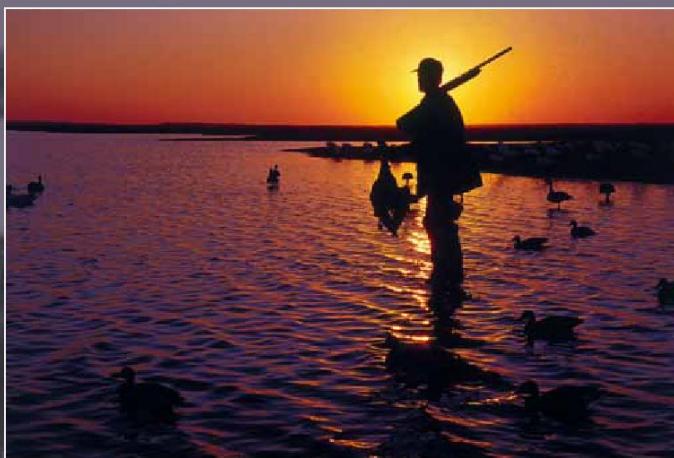
*Canvasback*



*A nice bag of redheads, which are one of the swiftest, most challenging species of ducks.*



*All duck shoots at Sinalopato are operated with well-maintained, powerful airboats.*

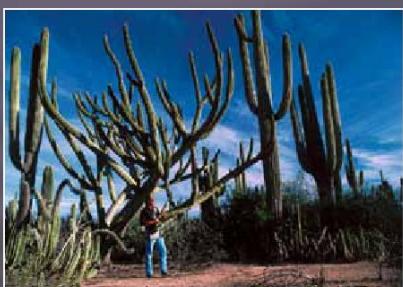


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# Dunkin of Tamaulipas

High overhead eight little ivory-white Ross geese circled about suspiciously. Dial Dunkin and I were crouched side-by-side in a sorghum field in pit blinds that had been perfectly concealed by stalks of sorghum driven into the ground all around the blinds. Surrounding us was a veritable sea of white decoys—shells and windsocks and stuffers and Sillosocks. Two white kites hovered in the wind 20 feet off the ground. Dial flipped the switch on his electronic caller, and it immediately began to put forth the most seductive cajolery. The geese responded immediately, and began a series of gradually descending circles. At the instant when he thought they were in perfect range Dial gave the order: “Let’s get ‘em!” We rose as one, our guns roared eight times, and all eight geese fell! A double quadruple! We whooped and hollered and Dial leaped up out of the blind and did a jig.

The scene changes. This time I am one blind and Dial and Roger Sparks, the

former editor of WILDFOWL magazine, are in an adjacent blind. Our mission is twofold: to do what Dial calls a “mid-morning waterhole collision hunt,” namely, an early-morning pintail shoot, and then, when the snow geese start coming in to drink, to enjoy a late-morning goose hunt. We are surrounded by a veritable flotilla of duck and goose decoys, perhaps 800 or more. Pintails are coming in high overhead, then circling and circling and circling, coming ever lower and lower, until at last The Grand Master Waterfowler gives the order, and we rise and lay the lead on them, and plummeting duck bodies splash down all around us. This scenario repeats itself over and over and over, until Dial gives the order to shoot no more ducks because soon the geese will be arriving.

Snow geese, being the veritable soul of sagacity, are even warier than pintails. They wheel about in the heavens high overhead, presenting a panoply of alabaster-breasted birds spread out against a deep turquoise sky. Once again Dial turns on

