

Dateline: Uruguay

Hot Gunnin' in South America

Timetable: Year round for doves and pigeons, May through July for ducks and perdiz

Accommodations: Magnificent, restored old estancia

Food: Excellent with prime beef a specialty

Hunt: Easy

No matter where you want to shoot in South America, some serious driving is often required. Some hunts require drives of an hour or more to get to the shooting and the same amount of time to return to the lodges. **But at San Cirilo Lodge near Rio Negro, Uruguay, it is possible to do all the shooting right on the lodge property.**

A few of my drives took only five minutes. The longest I ever drove when we stayed on the estancia property was 15 minutes. That was the first morning of my hunt there, and we could almost see San Cirilo lodge from where we were shooting. It was simply that we had to take a roundabout route to get to that specific cornfield. We did, in fact, make one long drive, but that was to hunt a dove roost.

Guide Louis had everything set up at our harvested cornfield destination that first morning. There was a blind with camo netting around three sides. Attached to the top of the netting, socktype dove decoys were quivering in the wind. Further, there were two spinning-wing dove decoys to attract birds, plus a spinning carousel with two long arms, a dove decoy attached to the end of each long arm, the carousel turning via the power of a 12-volt car battery.

That cornfield was on higher ground just above the Rio Negro River. Guide Louis told me the birds would come up from their roosting trees along the river – flying into the cornfield to feast – from right in front of our position. But the river had bled off much of its moisture during the night, for our field was blanketed in dense

fog. So we listened to the whirr of the spinning wing decoys and the hum of the carousel and waited. By eight o' clock the fog began to lift, and the shooting began. Over the next few hours, I noted that small flocks of doves were definitely enticed by all those decoys Louis and I had working for us.

But there were many large dove flocks that came up from their river roosting trees, some with 30, 50, 75 even 100 birds. Those huge flocks were not usually fooled, but I did note that a few birds out of every such large flock would turn for our spread – big mistake. It was one fabulous morning of shooting, but I took plenty of time off to photograph the spectacle, for in maybe 50 shooting trips to South America this was the very first time I had ever been set up for doves with decoys. Now, I'm not saying that it's imperative to have dove decoys in order to enjoy a fabulous dove shoot down *there*, but the doves really decoyed so well, and what serious shotgunner does not get a thrill from having birds decoy? Checking my notes, I read, "I didn't shoot that long, and most of my shots were my favorite right to left crossers. After the fog burned off the sky was a beautiful blue – not a cloud – **what a day to be alive and well**".

That afternoon we drove to a dove roost off the property, so I got in my hour's worth of driving. If you have shot a dove roost in Argentina or Uruguay before as the birds come in for the night, you know what kind of experience that can produce. If you have not enjoyed that experience, be certain to put that on your life list of things to do.

The next morning, we did our duck shooting at a small, mostly round pond about 60 yards across. Louis had decoys in the ankle-deep water and pigeon decoys on land at the water's edge. Louis expected this would be a combination shoot, with the emphasis on the pigeons. But it was ducks more than pigeons that wanted to be in the pond that morning. That morning I was shooting 15-gram,

28-gauge loads, obviously very light. So I was careful with my shooting, making certain all the ducks were within close range. But I still managed a double on a pair of teal, and within two hours my total was a close to the lodge's duck limit, and I had even shot a few decoying pigeons.

I was only able to hunt two days at San Cirilo. I wish I could have stayed longer to enjoy a genuine decoying pigeon shoot, which I am certain this lodge offers.

That second afternoon I went with Louis and one of the lodge's English setters, Panquin. Our quarry was the spotted tinamou, more commonly known as the "perdiz". We were almost within walking distance of the lodge when Louis turned the dog loose. The grass pasture cover was short due to the long drought the area was experiencing, but I knew from past familiarity that these upland birds don't need much cover to hide in.

In two hours and 10 minutes we had 37 perdiz flushes, all almost within sight of the San Cirilo hacienda. The perdiz limit in this area is 12 birds, and the sun was still well above the horizon when we quit shooting, our bags full and our experiences very rich.

My notes made that evening end with, "When a perdiz (or any other bird) offers a quartering away or crossing shot, the shot is both easier and more efficient compared to a bird flying straight away from the shooter especially if any distance is involved with the latter type shot".

San Cirilo Lodge is operated by Black River Outfitters. For more info: **Jeri Booth, Detail Company Adventures, 3220 Audley, Houston, TX 77098; 800-292-2213; www.detailcompany.com**

-Nick Sisley