

Oh, What a Beautiful Morning! By Tim Macmanus

“Can I break the record on this hunt?” That was the first question Dr. Todd White asked me about a dove hunt at Sierra Brava Lodge in Argentina. I smiled and said, “Are you talking about the lodge record or the Cordoba world record?” Todd answered, “I’m talking about the world record and I’m serious.” I smiled again and replied, “Yes, you can if all the conditions are right and you shoot well enough.” The owners of Sierra Brava Lodge, Juan Jose Sala and David Perez, had donated a three day dove hunt for two hunters through Detail Com-pany Adventures to the August 2009 Frisco Ducks Unlimited Chapter for the third consecutive year. At the end of the night, Todd was the high bidder for the auction item, and from then on, the quest to break the world record for number of doves shot in one day was officially ON! For many years, Argentina and especially Cordoba has been known as the dove shooting capital of the world. Many wing shooting enthusiasts head south from the US to experience incredible number of doves flying by them in one day. You can shoot so much, you could fry an egg on the gun it is so hot. The most popular area for high volume dove shooting is Cordoba, Argentina in the Cordoba Province. The estimated Golden Eared dove population is 50-60 MILLION doves here. The most significant difference between our Mourning dove and the Argentina Golden Eared dove is the Golden Eared dove does not migrate. Due to a temperate climate, exceptional and abundant habitat of thick brush, and the abundant food sources provided by the agricultural production in the Cordoba area, migration is not necessary. Some say the abundant food source and mild climate has caused the doves’ natural migration instinct to be bred out of them as they rarely travel more than a few miles from where they hatch.

Another huge difference between a Mourning dove and a Golden Eared dove is the number of times the Golden Eared doves reproduce annually. In the US, our Mourning dove typically reproduce once per year, having 1-2 eggs per nest. The Golden Eared dove reproduce 4-6 times per year laying 3-5 eggs per nest. With the population where it is in Cordoba and with the current reproduction rate, estimates have been made that over 20 million dove must be shot in the Cordoba area each year just to keep the population level. This incredible reproduction accompanied with no migration causes BIG problems for the farmers in the Cordoba area. It is estimated that each year farmers lose 30-40% of their crops because of the doves, so farmers welcome any hunters to try and reduce the numbers. Cordoba has no season and no daily limits. It is not uncommon for a hunter to shoot 1000 or more birds each day. Many lodges have records of hunters shooting over 5000 birds in one day!



I am often asked “Are the doves picked up? Do they eat all the doves?” Logical question if you are approaching it from the US perspective of dove hunting where the daily limit is usually 15. To most Argentines, a dove is not a game bird or table fare. It is a varmint that needs to be eliminated to increase the yield of their crops. Yes, many of the doves are picked up. Yes, some of the doves are eaten. They are given away to working families in the area who ask for them. The primary focus of the hunting though is to reduce the number of doves to help the farmers try to increase their yield. If you’ve never been to Argentina, it’s difficult to grasp this concept. Hunters that travel to Argentina and shoot doves there almost always come away with a different picture and understanding of the shooting in Cordoba. With all these facts in mind, Todd White pre-pared himself to break the world record of dove shooting at Sierra Brava Lodge in Argentina.

After consulting with Juan Jo and me about the best dates for the world record run, Todd and his good friend Rob Neal - aka The Coach - chose January 29 through February 1, 2010 for their trip. Todd and Rob also rounded up seven other hunting enthusiasts to share their experience in Argentina. After several discussions between Todd and me via phone about the shooting set up, guns, shotgun shells, bird boys, travel, food, weather and costs for the trip, Todd and his band of hunting brothers were ready to head south for his assault on the world record of dove shooting at Sierra Brava Lodge.

Finally, the big day arrived. At 11:30am on January 29th. Todd, Rob and their fellow hunters made their way through Ar-gentina Customs at Cordoba International Airport. They were greeted by Juan Jose Sala (Juan Jo) owner of Sierra Brava Lodge, Zeke - hunting manager of Sierra Brava and Topo - general manager of Sierra Brava as well as by me. I was a sur-prise for the group as it was a last minute change of plans that allowed me to be at Sierra Brava Lodge for the world record attempt. Rob Neal had the video camera rolling from the beginning with a constant commentary of what was happening. The phrase of the day at that point was “It is officially on,” meaning, the world record attempt was in play.

After arrival and check in at Sierra Brava, we were treated to a lunch of medium rare filet mignon and all the trimmings. This lunch was as good or better than any five star restaurant in Dallas. With our appetites completely satisfied, we headed to the Macha fields for a three hour dove shoot to get warmed up for the next day. Todd used several shotguns the first after-noon. After a brief test trying a 20 gauge versus a 12 gauge, Todd decided that it would be all 20 gauge for the record setting attempt. We headed back to the lodge for a refreshing swim in the Sierra Brava pool, sundowners, appetizers and a dinner of beef tenderloin that would please any palette. Todd headed to bed early to rest up for his big day while the rest of us sat around the fire pit and told crazy hunting stories and shared life with a beautiful, clear Southern hemisphere sky filled with stars above us. One of the group even said he could go back home the next morning and would call his trip successful after an awesome day of filet mignon lunch, unbelievable dove shooting and a 5 star dinner experience.

The next morning, January 30, 2010, Todd, Rob and myself were up with Topo for a very early breakfast and were on the road and headed to the shooting field at 6:10am. It was a gorgeous morning with just a few clouds in the eastern sky and a temperature of about 70 degrees. We arrived at the field where Martin Fuentes, Todd’s primary bird boy, and other bird boys had already constructed a blind for Todd. As the sun rose behind a large group of clouds, sun beams were going in all direc-tions through clouds on the eastern horizon, the temperature was perfect with mostly clear skies, and Rob Neal serenaded us with his version of “Oh, What a Beautiful Morning” from the musical, Oklahoma. That song that Rob sang to us was the perfect song for it was a beautiful morning for Todd’s attempt at breaking the world record. The question in our minds was would it turn out to be as the song says “a great day”.

Zeke, the hunting manager for Sierra Brava, had provided Todd with 4 Beretta and Urika 391 20 guage autoloaders to start the day. Martin, Todd’s #1 bird boy, arranged the blind with shells readily available and two shotguns for constant use by Todd. Todd set up, and he fired the first shot of his record breaking attempt at 6:32am. It was still early, and the doves were a bit sporadic. As the morning progressed, the birds began to fly more consistently. The remainder of the group arrived in the field just after 9am and went to their respective shooting positions. The other shooters helped keep the birds moving on the fields and actually drove more birds toward Todd it seemed. As the day wore on, the number of doves grew significantly, and the wind began to pick up. By 12 noon, the wind was blowing 30-40mph. The doves flying downwind were extremely challenging to say the least but Todd kept shooting and shooting and shooting. Throughout the morning, Rob was encouraging Todd and making sure he stayed hydrated. Rob was chanting “Let’s Go Whitie, Let’s Go” as well as yelling “Woooooooooooooooooo” about every 5-10 minutes throughout the day. Rob was here for one thing - to coach and encourage Todd and help him make it through the day.

Six of seven shooters in the group shot over 1000 birds that day. Dave Bouschor II was the lead man with over 3000 birds to his credit at day's end. Johnathan Mendenhall ended up with 2010 birds for his January 2010 hunt. While the rest of the gang enjoyed an incredible asado/outdoor barbecue under the shade of the trees at midday, Todd continued shooting rapidly at all doves that came within range as he had no time for a relaxing lunch with his personally assigned task of breaking the record.

Just after noon, Juan Jo and Zeke decided it was time for Todd to change his shooting position to increase his odds of breaking the record. Todd and Rob moved to another blind that was near a small creek about 10 minutes away. During the brief drive to the new blind, Todd was able to eat and rehydrate well. Once they were set up in their new blind, the shooting started again. As the day grew longer, more and more birds began flying toward the water source. Todd was there to greet them with his 20 gauge over and over and over again.

Finally, at 8:31pm, Todd fired his last shell. With thousands of 20 gauge shell hulls scattered at the base of the brush blind, with Todd White and Martin Fuentes exhausted from the day's shooting, with Rob Neal's voice hoarse from yelling, singing and shouting for 14 hours, and with the sun setting on the western horizon, the world record of dove shooting now belonged to Dr. Todd White.

After 14 hours of shooting, after 14,250 shells or a shotgun shell fired about every 4 seconds, after seven 20 gauge Beretta shotguns used and after approximately 5,000 shotgun exchanges between Todd and his bird boy Martin, Todd had shot 11,301 dove with Sierra Brava Lodge in Cordoba Argentina. WHAT AN INCREDIBLE EVENT! How many factors have to come together for an event of this magnitude to take place? The weather, the birds, the shooter, the coordination between the shooter and the bird boy, the length of the day, the scouting to find the right field where this can be done are all part of the many factors that go into this gargantuan attempt by any shooting enthusiast.

It was time for a few pictures and then back to the lodge to start the celebration with the group that had been waiting anxiously to hear the results of Todd's day. Once again, we were served another spectacular 5 star dinner as delicious and beautiful as any you'll eat anywhere in Dallas. Cigars were smoked, glasses were held high in toasts over and over again throughout dinner and through out the evening. Then, we were treated to Carlos and Willie, a pair of local musicians who played, sang and entertained us with great fan fare and fun. What an incredible experience to be a part of.

I was very blessed to have witnessed a significant portion of Todd capturing the world record. It is simply mind boggling to think how many different factors had to come together to accomplish Todd's goal. The number one factor in the whole equation was Todd White. Todd never gave up. He just kept shooting and shooting and shooting. His shooting percentage for the day over all those shells was right at 80%. That's great shooting for anyone when you're shooting at live targets. He is a true competitor, champion and now world record holder of the most doves shot in a day in Cordoba. It truly was a beautiful morning when we started as Rob sang. It turned out to be a great day.

Here are a few quotes from Todd and his friends on their visit to Sierra Brava Lodge and their experience there.

"Sierra Brava, and the whole of Argentina, blew away my expectations just like our buddy, Todd White, blew away the world record! From the minute we arrived until we said our goodbyes, the staff, food, lodging and hunting were out of this world. I highly recommend this hunt to anyone looking for the time of their life!"

- Duane Coker

"Well I'm ruined, and my friends are responsible. I used to think I was pretty hot stuff if I went out on September 1 and shot 15 dove in the first couple of hours. Well my "friends" take me on a trip to Sierra Brava Lodge in Cordoba, Argentina with Detail Company Adventures and not only did I witness a new world record in dove shooting accomplished by Todd White by downing 11,301 dove in one day, but I shot over 1,000 dove in a two hour period myself. Now don't get me wrong I can't wait until I can go back and get "ruined" some more, but what do I do on September 1st, go out and shoot 15 dove?"

- David S. Bouschor, II

“I could not have asked for a better trip. When the trip was planned, I figured the World Record would be a long shot. I knew I could take care of Todd White and I knew Todd would never quit. However, the logistics of a World Record dove shoot is mind blowing. Hats off to Sierra Brava Lodge! The day we went for the world Record everything was per-fect. From the blind and set-up, to the steady stream of shot gun shells and cold drinks, everything was world class for the World Record attempt. Throw in top notch food, accommodations, and the best bird boys in Argentina and you get the best lodge. I am so glad we picked Sierra Brava Lodge to host our attempt at the World Record. After the fact, I am even happier they are the lodge that has the NEW WORLD RECORD! Congratulations to Todd White and all the crew! It was the trip of a lifetime.”

- Rob Neal aka “The Coach”

Finally, from the man who broke the record...

“Sierra Brava Lodge exceeded every expectation I had about the whole experience. They knew going in that I was prepared to break the world record and Juan Jo and the entire staff of Sierra Brava Lodge were just as prepared as I was. The conditions were perfect, the weather held and the temperature was cooler than normal which was a major factor in going nonstop for 14 hours. The support for me was nonstop. Martin Fuentes, my main bird man, was on top of everything and never faltered. The many other helpers never skipped a beat. Rob Neal, my camera man and great friend, kept me fed, hydrated and focused. The birds were thick and numerous to the hilt. Juan Jo and Zeke knew exactly where to put me in their awesome flyway! Thanks to everyone involved, we shattered the record.”

Dr. Todd White aka “Whitie”

If you're interested in hunting at Sierra Brava Lodge in Cordoba, Argentina, contact Detail Company Adventures at 800-292-2213 or info@detailcompany.com. Whatever game you choose to hunt, may you have a great experience and come home with memories for your lifetime.

For more information on Dr. Todd White and his dental practice, call 817-416-2961 or visit www.cosmeticdentalarts.com.