

10 Top Southern Quail Preserves

By Jim Casada



Joshua Creek Ranch

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Quail hunting as it once was, when a polite request to a tenant farmer would likely give you ready access to his 40 acres, when posted signs were an incongruous oddity and when whopping coveys were a standard feature of the rural Southern landscape, belongs to a world we have likely lost forever. The golden era of the bobwhite vanished like a milkweed seed caught up in a dust devil dancing across serene September fields; so did those halcyon days when hunting most anywhere involved little more than a polite request and perhaps a gift ham or box of fruit at Christmas.

There are many reasons for this dramatic change — the great comeback story of white-tailed deer and wild turkeys and as a result no trespassing signs proliferating like kudzu, dramatically changed quail numbers and habitat, altered agricultural practices, major predation problems and more. Yet the purpose of this piece is not to examine monumental shifts in the quail hunter's world; rather, it is to look at the realities of today's alternatives for the individual who still thrills to the sight of a dog locked tight on a sunset covey, still feels an adrenaline rush when a bevy of birds takes wing and still rejoices in the quiet satisfaction of a nifty left-and-right double. Here are 10 such options in the Southern heartland which is quail hunting's homeland. ↓

BURNT PINE PLANTATION

An oft-quoted snippet from the writings of one of the great quail scribes of yesteryear, Nash Buckingham, says "supper was a delicious memory." It's been the better part of three decades since I had such a memory, in the form of a platter of perfectly fried quail piled so high there must have been some of the same architectural genius that went into the pyramids involved, and the cathead biscuits, boats of gravy and an impressive array of vegetables flanking this feast for the eyes and a blissfully tired hunt remain implanted in my mind's corridors. The fact that my memory remains that powerful and that Burnt Pine continues to thrive is indicative of its appeal and an operation that "does it right." Warm-up, gun check, etiquette reminders and safety instruction at a clay target range precede morning and afternoon hunting sessions of two men and a guide. That means there's no waiting or taking turns; plenty of frequently changed

canine companions and a willingness to work with customers to meet special needs are hallmarks of this destination. The closest major operation of its kind to the bustling Atlanta area — 11156 Blackwell Road, Newburn, GA 30056; tel. 706-557-0407; www.burntpine.com.

DAVIS QUAIL HUNTS

This operation differs quite dramatically from most of the other destinations listed here. Most are larger, capable of handling not only individual hunter or small groups, but also sizable corporate outings. Davis Quail Hunts, on the other hand, could almost be described as a mom-and-pop operation, but it has a distinguishing feature you won't find elsewhere. Owner Colin Davis is a renowned trainer and handler of bird dogs with more than a half century of experience, membership in the Field Trial Hall of Fame and the man who trained 1991 National Field Trail Champion Quicksilver Pink. His wife, Mazie,

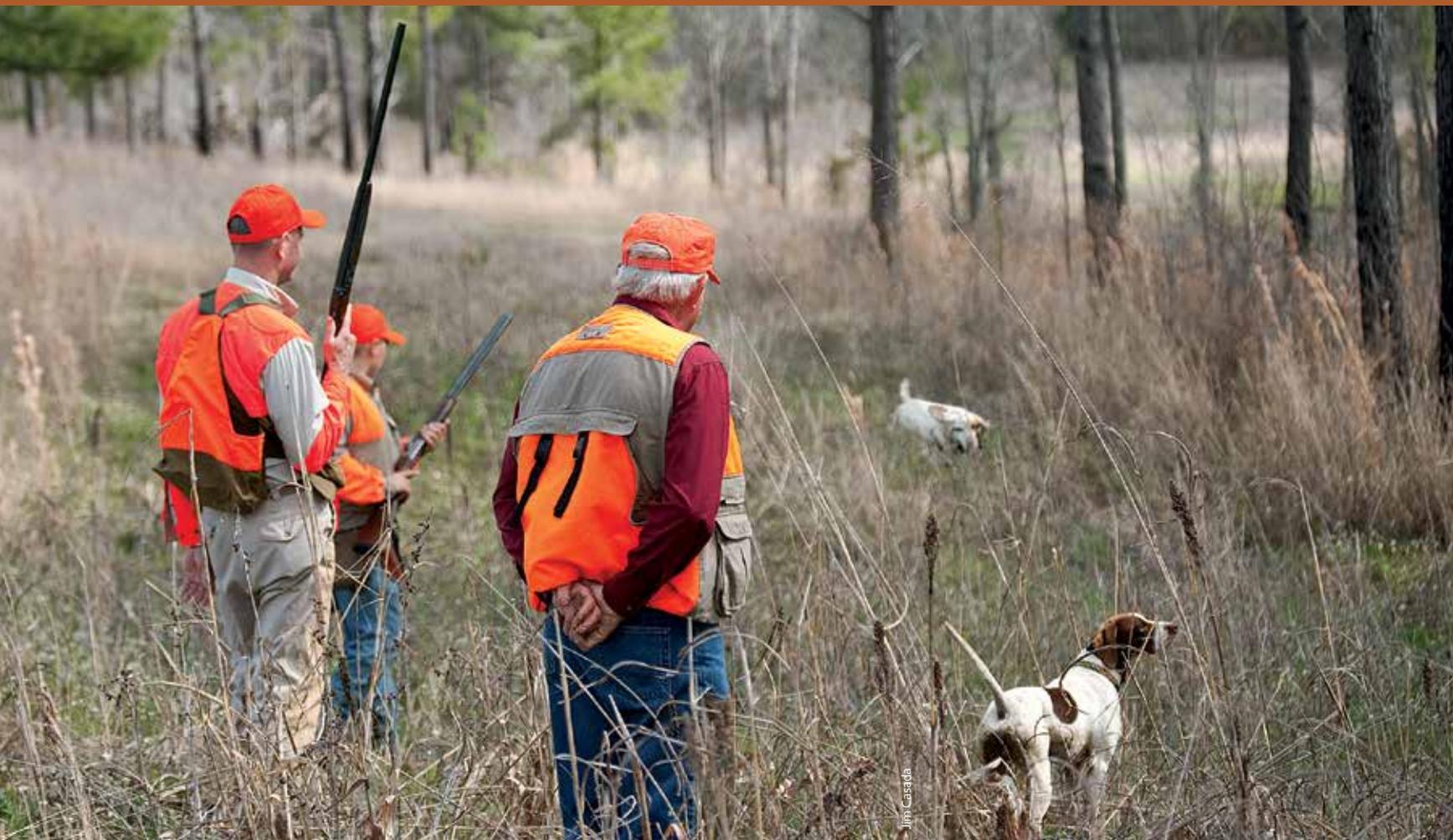
who has almost four decades of experience in the world of the bobwhite, makes an ideal partner. If you are looking for a down home style hunt, insight from an icon of the field trial world and just some scrumptious Southern cooking in a lovely rural setting near Montgomery (2496 Farmersville Road, Minter, AL 36761; tel. 334-227-4521; www.davisquailhunts.com), the Davis duo are your ticket to pure pleasure.

HIGH LOG CREEK FARM & HUNTING PRESERVE

For anyone anxious to go back to the field pleasures of yesteryear in all their glory — mule-drawn wagons carrying hunters in almost regal comfort; "dog men" on horseback covering as much ground as necessary to keep sight of lean, rangy pointers; and broom sedge and pine habitat that looks as if it could have come out of a Roland Clark etching, High Log Creek is a magical step back in time. Throw in belt-stretching country cooking, a lovely four-bedroom lodge with a large central area and the genteel graciousness of owners Rex and Jacque Clark, and for a day or two it is possible to throw away the world's cares while experiencing the ambience of a time of simpler days and simpler ways. Convenient to Columbus, GA and Montgomery AL (57 Upshaw Road, Hurtsboro, AL 36860; tel. 334-667-0024; www.highlogcreek.com).

JOSHUA CREEK RANCH

Established in 1990, Joshua Creek Ranch soon became an acclaimed upland game hunting destination, and today it is an Orvis-endorsed wingshooting destination (and there are only a couple dozen of them world wild) and a Beretta Trident lodge. Located in the rolling, scenic hill country of Texas, the operation combines first-class facilities with a wide variety of venues for bird hunters. These range from half-day guided outings to overnight stays, and there's a sporting clays course if you want to work on your scattergunning before (or after) being afield.



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Joshua Creek is less than an hour's drive north of San Antonio — 132 Cravey Road, Boerne, TX 78006; tel. 830-537-5090; www.joshuacreek.com.

THE LODGE AT CABIN BLUFF

During the grand era of bobwhite hunting it was commonplace for Northern “sports” to visit the South during quail season to enjoy incomparable sport, a relaxed atmosphere, less harsh weather and a welcome escape from the hurly-burly of fast-paced urban life. Although the Lodge at Cabin Bluff as it exists today traces back a mere eight-plus decades (to 1928), the site has been a cherished hunting destination for almost two full centuries. That sort of longevity, combined with a lovely setting, truly memorable hospitality, cuisine and continued emphasis on hunting of the old-fashioned, easygoing sort, explains in no small measure

why this is a Beretta-endorsed destination. You'll hunt over 1800 acres of soaring pines, scattered palmettos and a sedge understory in this quiet, unhurried coastal paradise in the Cumberland River area of south Georgia (Jacksonville, FL and Savannah, GA are the nearest airports — 3852 Carbide Road, Woodbine, GA 31569; tel. 912-729-5960; www.cabinbluff.com).

MOREE'S SPORTSMAN'S PRESERVE

South Carolina has long been noted for fine “quail clubs,” some of them dating back several generations, but almost without exception they are exclusive stomping grounds for an affluent membership. However, at Moree's Sportsman's Preserve, located in the Carolina heartland, vestiges of the kind of sport that brought the likes of Bernard Baruch to the Palmetto State remain. A variety of hunts are offered, there

are corporate packages, memberships, a newly constructed lodge and a variety of lodging options. Prices are competitive and, unlike many preserves, guests can bring their own dogs for a modest extra fee. Florence and Columbia are the closest cities — 1217 Moree Road, Society Hill, SC 29593; tel. 843-378-4831; www.moreepreserve.com.

PINE HILL PLANTATION

South Georgia has long been recognized as a quail hunting hotspot, and the sprawling private estates in the Thomasville area, many of them with upland game traditions stretching back well over a century, attest to this. At Pine Hill Plantation, the 2013 Orvis Wingshooting Lodge of the Year and one of a handful of North American lodges in Beretta's Trident program, guests enjoy hunting over 6,000 acres of traditional quail habitat. Along with the habitat, the



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hunting is traditional — from horseback or mule-drawn wagon in a fashion that evokes plantation hunting in all its undoubted glory. Tallahassee and Atlanta are the closest commercial airports — 2537 GA Hwy. 253, Donalsonville, GA 39845; tel. 229-758-2464; www.pinehillplantation.com.

QUAIL CREEK PLANTATION

In addition to being home to the best-known of all quail research endeavors, Tall Timbers, Florida has long been a quail hunter's destination. Mild winters made it a great retreat for northern upland hunters in old long ago, and Quail Creek Plantation continues that tradition of hunting and hospitality with dog-friendly cottages, an executive chef on site, old-time fried quail dinners (that's the mid-day meal in the South) and more. Located in the heart of south central Florida near expansive Lake Okeechobee — 12399 Northeast 224th Street, Okeechobee, FL 34972; tel. 863-763-2529; www.quailcreekplantation.com.

SEDFIELDS LAKES PLANTATION

At present, there is arguably nowhere

in the South where the enduring and endearing nature of bird dog days and doin's with Mr. Bob enjoys greater prominence than in Alabama. Check out Alabama Black Belt Adventures Association (www.alabamablackbeltadventures.com) and you'll find an impressive array of lodges and day operations in the 23-county area known as the Black Belt, thanks to its dark, rich soil, offering quail hunting. There is also an Alabama Quail Trail with more than three dozen member lodges. One of the top notch operations in the Black Belt area is fairly new, Sedgefields Lakes Plantation, but it lies squarely in the Union Springs/Bullock County area, often called the "field trial capital of the world." There's even a life-size bronze statue by Bob Wehle in the heart of Union Springs paying tribute to the 11 county residents who have been inducted into the Field Trial Hall of Fame. Sedgefields Lakes Plantation is a modern incarnation of this rich, storied heritage and hunting here you walk in the footsteps of bird men from yesteryear such as Dwight Eisenhower. Birmingham, Montgomery and Atlanta airports all are within reasonable driving

distance — 673 County Road 130, Union Springs, AL 36089; tel. 334-738-8802; www.sedgefieldslakesplantation.com.

WESTERVELT LODGE

Lauded as Alabama's first commercial hunting lodge, Westervelt is perhaps best known for the seminars and hunts turkey icon Tom Kelly hosts there each spring, but with its mixture of stately pines and golden fields of sedge harkening back to a time of fence-row cover and unharvested field edges, it also offers upland game hunters a great experience in lovely lands near the Tombigbee River. What many quail hunters will find appealing is that guests have the option of a fully guided hunt or one using their own dogs. I also must candidly acknowledge, from personal experience and with momentary focus on the inner man, that if you spend a couple of days here and don't add pounds to your frame, never mind satisfying, but tiring days afield, you flunk in your aspirations as a trencherman. Located in the westernmost part of Alabama near Tuscaloosa — 69 Westervelt Circle, Aliceville, Al 35442; tel. 205-373-8212; www.westerveltlodge.com. 🐾



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