



The Beretta 391 autos provided by the lodge functioned flawlessly throughout our visit.

# Rancho Mescalero

# 2.0

For years, Marcela and Danny Putegnat ran Rancho Mescalero in the Mexican state of Tamaulipas. The lodge, situated between Lake Guerrero and the Gulf Coast, hosted a loyal clientele of dove, quail and waterfowl hunters. Unfortunately, like most hunting lodges in the area, Rancho Mescalero had to close its doors in 2011 due to drug violence.

Like many avid wing shooters, I had grown accustomed to Mexico white wing dove hunting every August and had been suffering from acute withdrawal for years. Consequently, I was excited to learn that Marcela and Danny were opening a new operation in the State of Nuevo Leon, about 100 miles Northwest of the original Rancho Mescalero. It was not difficult to assemble a group of fellow recovering white wing addicts and we booked the entire lodge for the 2016 season opener.

The anticipation was palpable when John and Gloria Rabon, my nephew Matt Young, and I met at Bush International for our non-stop to Monterey. The Interjet flight was on time, we breezed through

## White wing dove in the shadow of the Sierra Madre Oriental

BY HAROLD INMAN  
PHOTOS COURTESY  
OF GLORIA TOMBLIN  
PHOTOGRAPHY

immigration, and our luggage was waiting for us at baggage claim. Customs was a mere formality, and Danny was waiting for us with his Suburban and a full cooler.

After a 45-minute drive from the

airport, we arrived at Rancho Mescalero 2.0, changed clothes, hit the pool and enjoyed nachos and margaritas served by a courteous and attentive staff.

We were just getting relaxed when the second contingent of our group, Barry, David, Dean, and Dean Jr. (8 years old) Putegnat and another nephew of mine, Rusty Young, arrived. Dean is a pilot and he had flown them in from Brownsville on his plane. We had all hunted together in Mexico and had known each other for a long time, so we spent the balance of the afternoon catching up on each other's lives.

Dinner consisted of giant rib eye steaks grilled to perfection over ebony charcoal, salad, baked potatoes and grilled asparagus. After dinner, each of us had to perform the mental calculus of whether to turn in early and get a fresh start for opening day the next morning or continue to enjoy the camaraderie and cactus juice. The answers varied largely according to age.

The next morning, Friday, had us all up for a hearty breakfast and a half hour trip to an uncut sorghum field. The scouts had seen large concentrations of white wing

feeding on the standing grain the previous evening. We arrived shortly after day break and our bird boys (palomeros), shot-guns, coolers, and ammunition had all been prepositioned at our designated shooting locations. No sooner had we set up than the action started. Large numbers of birds began flying out of the impenetrable brush (monte) over the field. It quickly became apparent that the white wing dove was en route to another field, rather than feeding in the one we were in. This made for high pass shooting, but lots of it. High birds, uncut sorghum, and dense monte made it challenging to find downed birds, but the palomeros did a good job and surprisingly, few downed birds were lost.

When the shooting heated up, so did the temperature. Since we were not that far from the Tropic of Cancer this was expected. What we did not expect was the humidity. Uncharacteristically, it had rained shortly before our arrival and the field was a virtual sauna. However, after all the action, happy hunters piled into the vehicles and headed back to camp.

Upon arrival at the lodge, it was the usual routine, change clothes, nachos, and margaritas in the pool, and lunch. We feasted on enchiladas with the usual Mexican sides and sauces, after which it was time for a siesta. While we were sleeping, Danny and the scouts did a post mortem on the morning's hunt. The scouts insisted that the dove habitually fed in the field we had hunted that morning, so we uncharacteristically headed back to the same field that afternoon. Despite my skepticism the birds returned in droves and this time they were intent on feeding on the standing sorghum. This made for a great shoot.

When we returned to the lodge, margaritas, and palomitas (hors d'oeuvres made of filets of dove breast, jalapeño, and onion, wrapped in bacon and grilled) awaited us.

Concurrently, Danny drove up with my son, Charlie, who had just flown in on a United non-stop from Bush. He had to stay in Houston until the conclusion of his well control school that afternoon. However, he quickly picked up the pace, and we dined on dove and retired for the evening, again largely on the basis of age.

The next morning, Saturday, we hunted over an irrigated sorghum field which had been recently harvested. The shooting was steady and the temperature and humidity high, but everyone got to shoot all they wanted.

In many cases, the shooting stopped before the birds stopped flying, as recoil was



Relaxing by the pool became a twice-daily ritual.



Palomitas fresh off the grill.

Discada being prepared over an open fire.





Our last hunt was over a harvested cornfield overgrown with weeds.

starting to become an issue for some of us. I had a very good bird boy who found virtually every downed dove.

After a dove kabob lunch and siesta, we drove about 10 minutes for the afternoon hunt which featured lots of birds presenting a variety of shots. By the time we got back to the lodge, Chris Putegnat, the final member of our group, was waiting for us. After a delicious skirt steak dinner, I turned in to get a good night's sleep before our third, and final day of shooting.

Sunday dawned overcast and somewhat cooler as we departed for the morning hunt. We split up into smaller groups hunting various types of cover in the same area. Charlie, Matt and I were assigned to a tree line between a field of knee deep wild gourds in front of us, and green sorghum to our backs. This was clearly pass shooting, but the biggest problem was finding birds. If the dove fell in the green gourd vines, the bird boys had to have a perfect mark to have any chance of finding them. The tree line at our backs had grown up around a barbed wire fence which was a significant impediment to the pursuit. We

quickly realized that combining forces was the answer to the dilemma. We found a gap in the tree line and were able to concentrate our attention in both directions. We put one bird boy on the sorghum side of the fence and the other two on the side of the gourds. By shooting in the same location we could better triangulate on downed birds. Plenty of shooting ensued and our strategy enabled us to find an acceptable percentage of dead dove.

By the time we got back to Rancho Mescalero, it was raining. We feasted on a delicious lunch of discada (a stew of dove breast fillets, vegetables, and local seasonings).

The rain had become a steady downpour and we reconciled ourselves to the fact that we had probably had our last hunt of the trip. The afternoon was devoted to socializing and naps and fond reflection on the events of the last few days. However, my siesta was interrupted by a frantic knock on the door. The scout who was at the ranch we had been scheduled to hunt, had called in asking why we were not hunting. Apparently the rain and overcast had

forced the white wing into an early feeding frenzy. Even though the field was only 10 minutes from the lodge, it was not raining there, and upon our arrival, there were swarms of dove intent on feeding. The field had been planted in corn which had been harvested a good bit earlier and lain fallow for some time. Weeds from knee-deep to head-high had grown up in the field and the white wings were determined to feed in anticipation of an elongated period of bad weather. We quickly got in position and the fun began.

The amount of shooting varied only by your position in the field, and tolerance for recoil. Danny and his staff expertly moved hunters as necessary to assure that everyone was optimally placed. Low flying birds were everywhere, coming from all directions. You basically could shoot as fast as you could load. The major challenge was focusing on a single target as large groups were coming in from different directions simultaneously. The flight showed no signs of letting up as hunters began to succumb to exhaustion and recoil, here again, largely

depending on age. Eventually, the bloodlust of even the youngest hunters was satiated and we assembled for a group picture with our bag for the afternoon. What had appeared to be a non-event turned out to be the best hunt of the trip.

With muddy boots and high spirits, we cleaned up for a dinner of grilled chicken, new potatoes, and asparagus. The next morning we said our good-byes and went our separate ways. As we crossed the Pesqueria River and went through the village of San Isidoro for the last time (at least for a while), we were already making plans for coming back next year.

#### EPILOGUE

Rancho Mescalero offers 4 night/3 day and 3 night/2 day packages for serious dove hunters. Abundant birds, short drives to the hunting fields, good food, and excellent service all made for a great trip. Facilities



The harvest from our last hunt of the trip.

and accommodations are basic but comfortable. We were not immune to typical third world inconveniences, but it should be remembered that we were the first group of the first season. I am sure that Marcela and Danny will continue to upgrade the

operation. Suffice it to say that I have already booked my spot for next year.

To learn more, please go to [http://mexico-bird-hunts.com/hunting\\_lodge.htm](http://mexico-bird-hunts.com/hunting_lodge.htm), e-mail Danny at [dpu76547@aol.com](mailto:dpu76547@aol.com), or call him at (956) 371-6141. ★



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