

Hot Summer Flights

by
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Photos by Trischa Jones



Hot weather—hotter shooting

At my feet lay three boxes of #8 dove loads, 25 shots per box. With an average of four doves per box, I have optimistically calculated that I will be leaving this heat early with my 15-bird limit. The staccato sound of small-arms fire behind me alerts the dog, and thus the season has begun. We both look skyward and watch several grey darts fly by. I fire a two-shot salute and they keep going. The dog, as if remembering last year's meager success, lies down and heaves a sigh. It looks like another banner year for shotgun-shell manufacturers.

I am a Southerner, or as a close friend from north of the Mason-Dixon Line states, a *professional* Southerner, and like most Southerners, we hold fast to tradition as best we can. There is nothing more traditional to a Virginia hunter than the first day of dove season. For many of us, a dove hunt was where we were first introduced to the intricacies of wing shooting. It was a place where we could sit with an elder, learn lead, gun safety, and have enough targets so that a miss did not mean complete failure.

Today, all grown up, we still hold dove shooting dear in the Old Dominion. It is a sport that requires little equipment but a lot of shooting. All the hunting is done before the shoot starts. You find a place where doves have been congregating weeks before the shoot, and on the day of a shoot you take a chair out in the field, sit and wait for the game to come to you. You get to shoot a lot. It is a day you can meet with old friends, talk about the past summer and any upcoming fall events, and—you get to shoot a lot. At many a dove hunt, there is either a lunch before the shoot or a mid-day break for refreshment during the heat of the day when even doves know it is too hot to fly. After the shoot, all you need is a small grill, a dove breast wrapped in bacon, served with wine or cold beverage, and you have a great social event.

J. Kenneth Timmons of Powhatan has been hosting an annual dove shoot on

September is a summer month and it is a hot month. A 94-degree day with sauna-like humidity is not the day to be sitting out in the middle of a bean field. Sweat runs down my back in rivulets as I hold a shotgun while waiting for noon and the official start of the season. Sitting beside me is a black Labrador retriever

panting like a steam engine trying to keep himself cool. The blackness of the gun barrel and the dog seem to attract the sun's heat and add an uninvited unpleasantness. It was a day to be near a body of water, drinking an adult beverage, not a day to test my shooting skills against the erratic, acrobatic flight of a grey bullet, the mourning dove.



Sunflowers and dove shooting—a Southern tradition

Waiting in the heat—a part of Southern dove shooting



Luke running after a downed bird (Photo by Dwight Dyke)



his farm for approximately 25 years. Ages of those attending a Timmons dove shoot could range from young men in their early 20s to older gentlemen in their late 80s. And though many of his guests come each year to test their marksmanship against the elusive bird, most come to reconnect with longstanding friendships. It is “an

opportunity to invite some very nice people who have become very good friends, a chance for me to see them again after the shoot is over and to have a few hors d’oeuvres and visit,” Timmons says.

Dove hunting traditions go deep in the Richmond, Virginia, area. Nearly 50 years ago, the Dove Association Inc., better

known as the Richmond Dove Club, was founded by Dr. Taylor Rowe, Lamont Bryan and Walter Griggs, according to current president, Mac Wells. “We hunt three days a week throughout the season and have 50 active members. All members are required to scout the various farms at designated times during the year.” Wells

believes the strong popularity of dove hunting in our area is due to the social aspect of the sport. "Hunting-license sales and duck-stamps sales may be down, but dove hunting is really a social sporting event rather than hunting per se."

The spot I chose to shoot was hot, but only in temperature. A few empty shells and no doves are at my feet. Old-time dove shooters knew where doves were likely to fly during the day. As I watch the dove shooters closest to me pick up their gear after shooting their legal limit of doves, my retriever knocks over the last of the water I had brought. We both watch the hot earth soak it up like a sponge. I decide we should move to one of the spots vacated by the other shooters. Knowing that all I need is just a few more shots and I am sure to find my range, I turn to my Lab to tell him to sit. He is headed off with one of the departing shooters bound for the shade and comfort of the food tent. He doesn't even look back.

Clarke C. Jones is a freelance writer who spends his spare time hunting up stories with his black Lab, Luke. You can contact Clarke or Luke on their Website, www.clarkecjones.com.