

# untitled

by Jeff Bagato  
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2021



is made; otherwise, a well-placed pattern of pellets may leave little edible meat.

There is still more to be said about the atmosphere of a classic southern bobwhite hunt. You have an early plantation breakfast and then quickly get out the guns. The horses, dog trainer, handlers, and the wagon arrive before nine. You load shells into the pocket of your shooting jacket, slip the shotguns into the leather, mount the horses—and the group is off, the dogs in the wagon yelping in expectation. But who are these people, these hunters who hold such store by quail and the traditions of the hunt?

While it is true that in much of the South even a poor farm lad can bag his limit of quail by hunting afoot, the elegant horseback hunts are a diversion for more prosperous types: the plantation owners, their guests, and—in the case of the commercial preserves which imitate the plantation atmosphere—visiting tycoons who pay substantial daily or weekly fees.

The Thomasville-Tallahassee shooting

Only a fraction of the quail are shot, while seventy or eighty percent fall prey to various predators during their average two-year life span.

It is clear that in order to maintain a shooting plantation it is necessary to be very rich. To roll back the clock to 1910 is a very expensive undertaking.

In the shooting itself, men and women show a very personal style, and this is perhaps the subtle key to the fascination of the sport. It is the refinement of attitude rather than the skill of the gunner that marks the essence of quail shooting at its best. These sportsmen have tried to hold back the twentieth century, but even with their massive wealth they have not been completely successful. For it has been impossible to prevent certain changes, even in the habits of the quail themselves.

It is axiomatic that hunting pressure will cause succeeding generations of birds to become wilder and wilder, harder and harder to hunt. The old professional dog handlers,



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The Thomasville-Tallahassee shooting plantations are few, many of which have been in the same families since the turn of the century. Their sole purpose is hunting, as modern agriculture disrupts the delicate relationship between the quail's need for

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It is axiomatic that hunting pressure will cause succeeding generations of birds to become wilder and wilder, harder and harder to hunt. The old professional dog handlers, some of whom have been in the quail fields for the last forty years, all seem to tell the same story: "In the old days when you hunted a cornfield, a good dog would find covey after covey. The coveys would rise

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EKTACHROME (BELOW) AND KODACHROME © NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

without exhausting him. The dog must remain on a preselected course determined by his handler, and must not range out of control of whistle or hand signals or voice. The pointer's nose must quickly locate birds; the dog must not approach so close that the covey flushes prematurely. He must hold the point—remain stock still—at the report of the gun, until ordered to move again.

When a distant dog is spotted on point, the cry goes up: "Point!" Then the whole entourage takes on the semblance of a cavalry charge.

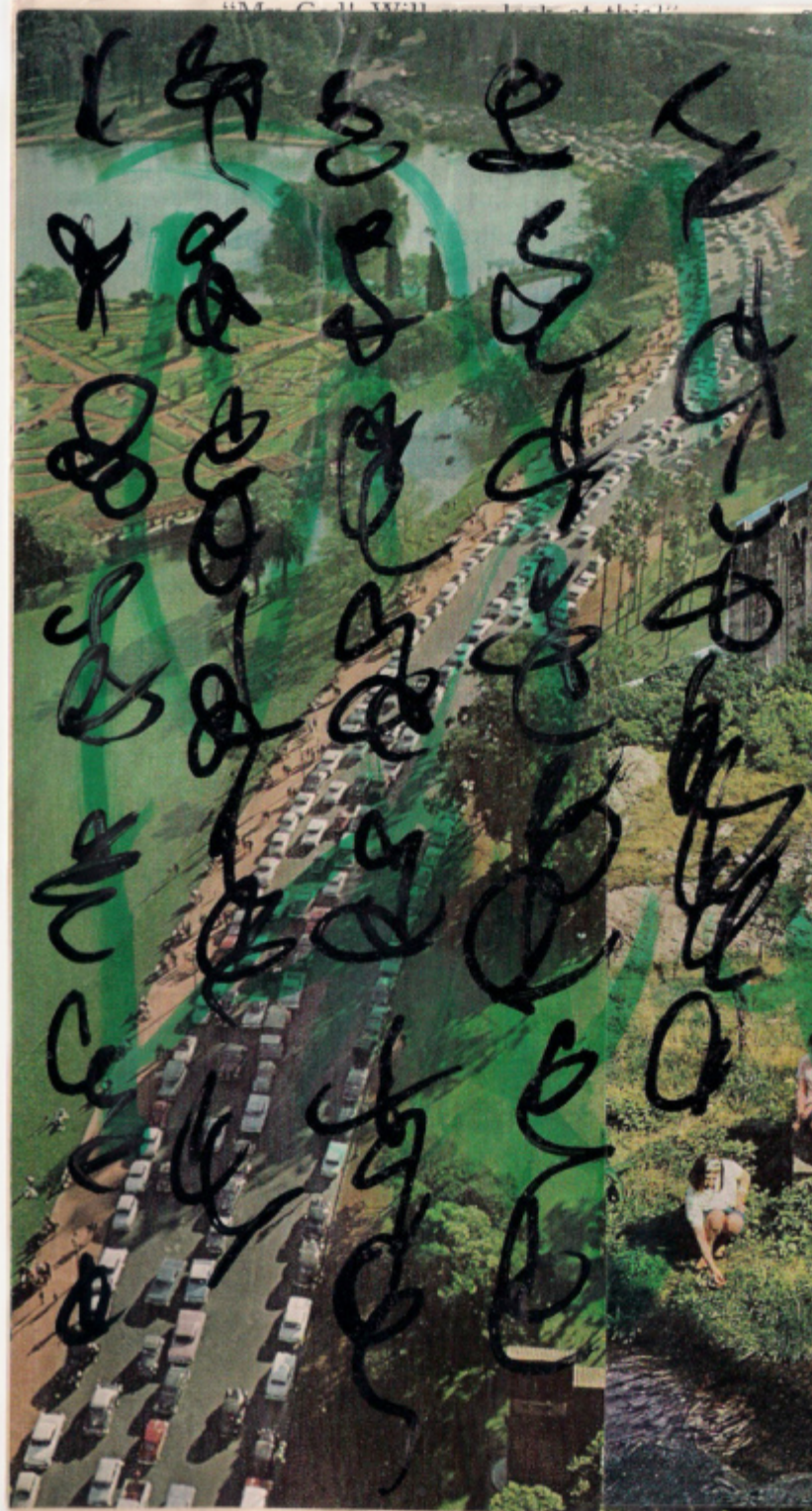
After the confusion and dust have settled, two hunters dismount with the white-coated dog handler and proceed to the dog on point. Here, presumably, lies a covey of perhaps a dozen birds. They suddenly rise and then, if the two gunners are good shots, down go two quail, maybe three. The retrievers are called from the wagon and they sniff around until they recover the downed birds, which are returned to the wagon.

It is sometimes tempting simply to shoot quail, rather than savor the esthetics of dog handling, and this has its effect on a dog. A bird dog is a highly charged animal whose instincts are at constant war with his training. Every instinct tells him to get his

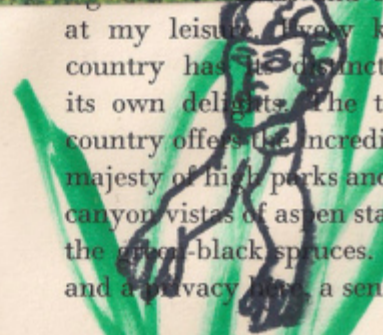
12, 20, and 28. Since quail shooting is done at relatively close range and the problem is to hit a fast, small target, occasionally through a screen of foliage, the preferred chokes are improved cylinder for the right barrel, modified for the left. As for shells, field loads of #9 will do nicely.

If conversation during the hunt does not turn on dogs or guns, it may dwell on bobwhite habits. Coveys like to roost in brier patches, tangled grass, or brush. At dawn, they move into the fields to feed on grain, soybeans, peas, weed seeds, and berries. In these fields, the birds fan out, covering an area of sixty feet or more. Feeding continues through most of the morning, and is followed by a resting period; in midafternoon, the birds take up feeding again until the evening calls them back to roost. A single covey's range rarely extends more than about half a mile.

It is often said that a covey rise is like an explosion, with birds whirring off in all directions. But the fact is that at least some of the quail will invariably head toward the nearest heavy cover when flushed. An experienced hunter can take advantage of this trait, placing himself in position for a good shot. However, the covey rise is so



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barrels measuring only 26 3/8  
top one is a .60-caliber rifle,  
it is a .62 smoothbore tube.  
Two independent triggers and  
trigger on the right fired the  
barrel, while that on the left  
a lower, left-hand lock to fire  
rifle. The weight of this hand-  
piece is eleven pounds, which  
heavy in comparison with most

d'être of such arms was the  
of too many kinds of game for  
small gun to cope with. A Euro-  
could not know whether, for  
next shot might be at a red  
rifle. The 1881 edition of  
er's classic work, *The Gun and*  
*ent*, mentions all of the follow-  
game species: red deer, roe  
bear, boar, chamois, rhein-  
bustards, capercaillie, black  
rouse), red grouse, red-legged  
partridge, ptarmigan, snipe, wood-  
cock.

however, Greener speaks of the  
gun only in connection with  
hunting rather than Euro-  
and he restricts his rather dis-  
marks to side-by-side models,  
over/unders and, even more  
drillings which by then were  
. He observes: "The combina-  
and shot-gun in one double-  
upon is much esteemed by South

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variety known to sportsmen as pass shooting—that is, taking the birds as they fly past overhead, always, it would seem, traveling faster than you think. This is difficult and a challenge to a good wing shot because the range is shortest when the bird is straight overhead. Also, since the geese fly high, if pass shooting is not done conservatively and with great care, it will soon degenerate into sky-busting. Only very occasionally and under special conditions will the geese pitch to the decoys set on the upstream end of the island and land in the gut, as they will on an upland pond that has not been over-shot—a rare thing these days.

"They're up!"

A vast cloud of black geese is in the air above the tree line on the refuge, a good mile and a half away. They are milling about, some flying clockwise, others counter-clockwise. Now and again a small flock splits off at a tangent. Then another flock follows it, and soon the flyways that the geese will follow are made clear. One is over the upland of the refuge. The other, at a right angle to this, is out across Gardner's Marsh. The destinations of these foraging flights are the cornfields of Kent County.

Now the flights are fairly well-launched, and they come streaming over the marsh in great V's, in long strings, or in ragged hay-hooks. Soon every quarter of the sky above the marsh has its quota of flying geese, and their full-throated calling makes a wild cacophonous chorus.

have doubled the span of their pass shooting.

The large flights, led by old and experienced ganders, give the blinds a wide berth, traveling high, wide, and out of gunshot. It is the small flights that present the most likely prospects—like the seven geese that are now crossing the rim of the marsh. They are flying quite low, but on a course that will take them west of the island blind.

The wildfowlers start calling. The line of flight bends slightly eastward. The flock is now headed toward the island blind. Now and again they veer back toward the west, whereupon a few "o'lips" from a goose call bring them back to the desired course. At length they are fairly committed. Then the calling by the wildfowlers ceases. On their present course, the birds will pass just to the west of the island blind and well within gunshot. Tension in the blinds increases.

Prospects suddenly look even better when, on reaching the far shore of the gut, the leader turns to the east. It is the decoys that have done this. As the flight is about to pass between the two blinds, there is a shot from the island blind. Number three goose on the right line of the V folds and falls into Quarter Gut with a prodigious splash. A split second later a shot from the other blind brings the trailing goose on the other line down on the marsh. Seven geese have come in, five go out.

The morning goose flight is soon over and Bob returns to his place in the island blind. There follows another space of quiet—a time

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Comercial

DADA INSIDE



*Sem valor comercial*

PROMO



Civilization's Lost  
another tongue  
down by rock  
and time

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