

**F**or the Virginia bird hunter, wild bird populations in most species have declined to the point that hunting them on a consistent basis is quite difficult. The population required to consistently hunt or train a good bird dog in Virginia can be found only at hunting preserves. To that end this author set out to visit three preserves that are within a drive of an hour or two of Charlottesville, Northern Virginia or Richmond. And while preserve quail, pheasant and chukar are not the same as wild birds, I am quite happy to report that all three of these preserves offer quality hunting in a natural setting. All three are also excellent places to put your bird dog on quality hard-flying birds on a consistent basis. As anyone who has a retriever or pointing dog knows, you must have birds to train and keep your dog trained.

My journey began one crisp fall morning as I loaded up my Spinone Italiano hunting partner, Enzo, and headed to Shady Grove in Remington. Located just off Route 29, Remington is about 10 miles north of Culpeper. The facility encompasses over 900 acres and contains many acres of well-planted game bird habitat for their stocked pheasants and chukar. Shady Grove has skeet, trap and sporting clays for a warm-up before your hunt. They offer both guided and unguided hunts for individual, small and corporate groups. They have overnight accommodations for up to a dozen hunters in a large, recently renovated farm house on the property. They also have a large kennel and dog-training facility. Neil Selby, the owner of Shady Grove, is a retriever trainer of national acclaim. In 2007 Shady Grove hosted the Master Nationals for retrievers. Pointing breeds are trained onsite by Sharon Townley, who has worked with Neil for a number of years and is also a hunting guide at the preserve. Sharon did all the initial training on my dog. She has a soft but firm hand and knows how to get the best from a pointing dog.

With Sharon as our guide, we



Enzo retrieving a fine Summerleas pheasant

## Close to Home Bird Hunting

Story and Photo  
by  
Douglas M. Dear



The manor house at Summerleas

headed out to a very private field of about 20 acres that had a nice rolling terrain. Enzo went to work as soon as I let him out of the truck. With my friend King Montgomery at my side, we headed out after him into the field. We had decided on a chukar hunt. Chukar are a hard-flying bird, smaller than a pheasant but larger than a quail. They are originally from Asia but are now native to much of the western United States. They hold well for the dog and are quite tasty on the table. Enzo soon found his prey and locked up into a strong point. Sharon flushed and King dropped the first of a dozen birds we took that day.

After a couple of hours of hunting we headed back to the Barn, with its loft clubroom where we relaxed while they dressed and iced our birds for our trip home. Overall, I would rate Shady Grove highly and would recommend it as a great place to take young or old hunters as it has easy terrain, great guides and quality birds. And while you may choose to hunt for a whole day, you can also have a very nice two-hour hunt, which is perfect for young hunters and dog training.

Next on my tour was Hunt Haven, a relatively new private preserve. The Haven has been hosting field trials for years as its owner, Jim Channon, is the president of the Spinone Club of America. He hosts three to five field trials a year for both the North American Versatile Hunting Dog Association and the American Kennel Club. He has hosted the Spinone Nationals several times as well. Two years ago he began offering unguided hunts when the preserve was not being used for field trial work. He offers chukar, pheasants and quail on his 400-acre farm located in Hustle, Virginia. Hustle is 30 minutes south of Fredericksburg right off Route 17. Jim has spent much of the last 20 years working on his land to create good bird habitat and quality hunting fields. He plants brown top millet, proso millet and various warm-season grasses for ideal cover. The day I toured his property he had about a dozen dog train-



A Spinone preparing for a field trial at Hunt Haven

The retriever training pond at Shady Grove ( Photo by King Montgomery)



ers practicing for an upcoming field trial. And even with all that commotion, we actually bumped a wild covey of quail with my truck as we drove around the edge of the property. Hunt Haven is by reservation only and is ideal for the experienced hunter who has his own dogs and wants a very

private day at a reasonable price. Twenty quail/half-day hunts go for under \$200. Although they do not provide bird cleaning, a clubhouse or dogs, for an experienced hunter they provide great hunting grounds, with a chance for wild birds in addition to the stocked birds, in a relaxed private setting.

I completed my preserve tour at Summerleas Farm Hunting Preserve. Located in Orange County, about 15 minutes south of Culpeper in the town of Rapidan, Summerleas is a 500-acre farm complete with a beautiful pre-Civil War manor home. The grounds are sweeping in their beauty and provide excellent cover for pheasants, chukar and quail. Paul Gardner, the owner of the preserve, is a native of McLean, Virginia who moved out to the Piedmont some 10 years ago to start his preserve and raise his young children on the family farm. From the spacious clubhouse with accommodations for up to four hunters, replete with a large stone fireplace to the well-manicured grounds, Summerleas is a treat from start to finish.

I decided to try the self-guided mixed-bag hunt on one of the four 50-acre hunting fields that are planted in millet, sorghum and warm-season grasses. The terrain is very rolling and picturesque and will give you a good workout as you hunt the elusive *Colinus Virginianus* (better known as the bobwhite quail), ringneck pheasant and chukar. Enzo and I worked the fields from edge to edge and managed to put seven birds in the bag over the course of two and a half hours of pleasant hunting.

Summerleas reminds me of the wild quail hunting I did as a young man on my family's farm in Gloucester County. And while the good old days of abundant wild birds are gone for the time being, this preserve makes you feel like you have been transported back to that era. For beautiful scenery, hard-flying birds and overall quality of hunting experience, Summerleas is hard to beat.

While preserve hunting is not the same as wild-bird hunting, it does have many benefits. Preserves offer a good chance to teach young hunters, work the dogs and work on your shooting. They also have the advantage of providing predictable results. And these three preserves located less than two hours from Charlottesville, Richmond or Washington offer a very

important attribute for today's busy lifestyle – convenience.

For additional information on the three hunting preserves, see:


- www.shady-grove.com
- www.spinone.com
- www.summerleas farm.com.

Douglas Dear is the owner of Rose River Farm ([www.rosriverfarm.com](http://www.rosriverfarm.com)), a popular trophy trout fly fishing destination located on the Rose River in Madison County. An avid bird hunter and fly fisherman, he also serves as chairman of the board of Project Healing Waters, a nonprofit organization dedicated to healing our wounded veterans through fly fishing.



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