



After a brief hiatus to give his hunting partner a rest, Luke is glad to be back busting brush and sharing his hunting tips and wisdom with you.

Success has been defined as the achievement of an objective or goal. At most traditional southern dove shoots, success may mean being the first shooter to get your limit on doves or having that new retriever pup you worked with all summer stay steady to shot and then retrieve downed birds flawlessly.

The small, but exclusive *Lonesome Dove Hunt Club and Literary Society* has been doing a little fine-tuning on what it takes to have a successful dove hunt. Like their fellow southern brethren, members pride themselves on their bird-to-shot ratios and a good retriever. But as the members of our little club have matured (aged), the definition of a successful hunt has changed.

In the past, to be a successful dove shooter it was important to know a little bit about the field where you were hunting. Doves seemed to be attracted to power lines and dead trees, so if you got to the dove field early, you were able to secure a spot near one of these things. This strategy meant that you would have to arrive at the dove field perhaps an hour before shooting time with your dove stool, boxes of shells, plenty of water, and a well-trained dog like me, and sit in blazing, 90-degree heat—risking a bad sunburn to yourself and heat stroke to your pup. Eventually, when shooting time rolled around, you had consumed all your water and needed to excuse yourself to reduce some, ahem, internal pressure.

You returned, only to find some Johnny-come-lately had set himself up *almost on top* of your spot. If you were not hot enough by now, this impolite maneuver by your new neighbor increases your blood pressure to the boiling point, which adversely affects your shooting. To make matters worse, your new neighbor is an

excellent shot and has no problem (or conscience) poaching your birds and limiting out within an hour, while you continue to melt and your dog whines because you refuse to let it retrieve the downed birds.

You quickly learn when you are a dove hunter the only meat worth cooking is the dove breast, and you will need a number of them to make it worthwhile to fire up the grill. The average dove shooter may shoot 3 to 4 doves per box of shells, and while the fact that you get to shoot a lot is often one of the reasons people enjoy this sport, when you figure in the price of a box of ammunition these days versus the food you bring home from a hunt, you may be better off buying Omaha steaks for your entire clan.

Although long on tradition and somewhat longer in the tooth, it did not take too many dove shoots for my hunting partner, Ol' Jones, to figure out that some changes should be incorporated. In fact, it's why the *Lonesome Dove Hunt Club and Literary Society* was formed. Its small membership consists of only those experienced dove shooters who have learned that tampering with tradition can sometimes have its advantages.

One of the first things the members do upon arrival is find the most abundant shade. It is there they will park their cars and place their lounge chairs. They have learned that you cannot carry on a good conversation with your best friends by yelling across some field. Arrival time to the dove shoot also has become somewhat flexible. Where it was once important to arrive early to get a good spot, we know the *perfect* spot is close to where you park your car. Some may argue that stationing yourself next to your car will spook the doves. Nonsense. It is the constant yelling to some of our hard-of-hearing members that spooks doves. Besides, carrying a shotgun, shells, and a straining retriever at the end of a leash for 200 yards over uneven ground can be exhausting. We go dove hunting for the

shooting—not the aerobics! So setting up about 10 yards from your car means just about everything you need stays in the car until it is needed.

Realizing that you may not have the best shooting spot and your shooting may be limited, club members have found it is a good idea to bring a book to read and leave the dog at home. It is really too hot for a dog to be running around anyway! Some older members have discovered that after reading a good book, their eyes may be a little tired and they would enjoy a short nap. To show respect for these members, other members have decided to forgo loading their shotgun shells—so as to not be tempted to fire their shotguns and risk awakening dozing hunters. Other, more radical members have taken the step of leaving their shotgun and shells in the car. After all, why carry additional baggage unnecessarily?

Instead of going to the expense of planting sunflowers or other game mix to attract doves to the field, only to find that a summer storm may have diverted these migrating birds on their way south, the members merely bush hog a field. If the doves happen to show up—fine. But it is just as well if they don't. A gun that is shot will have to be cleaned, and for that matter, any dove that your so-called "trained" retriever has brought to you will have to be plucked and cleaned!

The best dove shoots have refreshments afterwards, and here is where the *Lonesome Dove Hunt Club and Literary Society* shines. At five o'clock, the chef—Mrs. Ol' Jones—arrives with a feast to satisfy the gods. There is smoked salmon, some type of bruschetta, three types of cheeses with an assortment of crackers, Italian peppers, homemade Italian meatballs and spicy sausages that have been slow-cooked for 6 to 8 hours, homemade rolls, and homemade coconut pie—and enough aged liquid to calm the nerves and assist the digestive system.

This type of dove shoot has been met with such great approval by its members that at the club's last meeting it was voted that shooting time for this year's event should be pushed back to 4:30 in the afternoon. It was also suggested that perhaps it would be best to leave the shotguns and shells at home. But cooler heads prevailed when Ol' Jones pointed out that it would be awfully tough to explain to each member's alpha female that they were going on a dove shoot with neither shotgun nor shells!

Keep a leg up,
Luke

You can contact Luke and hunting partner Clarke C. Jones at www.clarkejones.com.