



SPREAD OAKS RANCH

Go Deeper Into the Heart of Texas



Working Through the Dog Days

Even in the “dog days” of August, Spread Oaks Ranch retrievers hone their skills for the upcoming season

While you and I might still be lounging around in the air conditioning as day breaks during the “dog days” of August, the dogs of Spread Oaks Ranch—and their human teammates—are already hard at work.

“Summer is hard on both dogs and trainers compared to spring and fall training,” says Rob Sawyer, who leads the duck-dog training sessions at Spread Oaks Ranch.

“The guides often train for hours in cool weather, running both multiple marks and blinds to a distance of as much as 300 or 400 yards,” he continues. “But in summer, it’s a delicate balance between too little and too much exercise.”

When the temperatures soar, blind problems are typically kept to 100 yards or less, he says, and instead of training for several hours, each dog may be finished after four or five problems.

So that the guides and their dogs always have suitable habitat to keep their dogs in shape and tuned-up for the season, Spread Oaks Ranch designates at least one pond—and often more—as a “training pond,” holding water throughout the year.

Soon, rafts of blue-winged teal will ride the currents of the north wind to the lush habitat at Spread Oaks Ranch. Our guides and dogs are ready ... are you?



SUMMER CAMP SUPERSTARS: Spread Oaks Ranch’s retrievers—and their handlers—train throughout the off-season, intensifying efforts as the teal season opener approaches. Fully fit, well-conditioned, and well-trained dogs are a hallmark of Spread Oaks Ranch, and they obviously enjoy their work!



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Hattie, owned by guide Thomas Flowers, her son Colonel, owned by guide Paul Berner, and her daughter Pearl, also owned by Flowers; Rob Sawyer and Mattie; Tim Soderquist and Ceyanne; Thomas Flowers and Hattie. Images on the cover, previous page, and above © Shannon Tompkins.

Get Ready, Here They Come!

Blue-winged teal making their way to Texas ahead of the September 14 season opener



This past month, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service released its 2019 Waterfowl Population Status, which states that habitat conditions observed during its most recent Waterfowl Breeding Population and Habitat Survey were similar to or slightly poorer than in 2018, with a few exceptions.

Precipitation on the Canadian prairies was below average from fall 2018 through spring 2019, but on the U.S. prairies—the “duck factory” that produces most of Texas’ ducks—precipitation was average to above average. In fact, blue-winged teal populations were up 19 percent over 2018 in the Eastern Dakotas, which produce 50 percent of all blue-winged teal.

In the traditional survey area (which excludes the eastern survey area), USFWS pegs the blue-winged teal population at about 5.4 million; that’s a 16 percent drop from 2018, but still slightly above the long-term average of 5.1 million. Green-winged teal populations are estimated at 3.2 million; that’s slightly up from the 2018 estimate of 3.0 million and 47 percent above the long-term average.

Spread Oaks Sets the Table

“We’ve been working on our more than 40 ponds on nearly a daily basis, weather allowing,” says Ranch Manager Tim Soderquist. “This has involved draining and burning a number of the ponds during the hottest part of August, and then refilling them to allow new growth of the plants ducks love—such as sago pondweed and smartweed—and keeping the ponds shallow enough that dabbling ducks can still reach mollusks and other invertebrates.”

Soderquist and his crew have also been working to make Spread Oaks Ranch the “gold standard” of duck-blind access.

“At any of our ponds, you can step right out of a John Deere Gator and into a blind,” states Soderquist. “Here at Spread Oaks Ranch, we’re aiming to achieve the pinnacle of what I call ‘The Texas Gentleman’s Hunt.’”

A few choice dates still remain for regular duck season. Please contact Tim Soderquist at (281) 814-5442 or at tim@spreadoaksranch.com to book your dream hunt today!

Where There's Smoke, There's ... Chef Ric Rosser!

Smoking meats and live-fire cookery in full swing as preparations are made for season opener

Spread Oaks Ranch's guests in the upcoming season will experience an incomparable range of wild and domestic proteins—most all, with the exception of the Tamworth heritage hogs from Twisted Oak Farm, raised on this property.

Ranch-raised certified Angus beef, Katahdin lamb, chicken, and domestic duck will make their way to the table—along with feral hog, venison, duck, and the ranch's freshwater fish—

in Rosser's unique farm-and-field to table cuisine.

In addition to the hams he's curing, Chef Rosser is also preparing Canadian bacon, buckboard bacon, and regular "breakfast" bacon, along with a variety of cured and smoked sausages, including a lamb-and-garlic chive sausage.

Other charcuterie delicacies Chef Rosser has underway are lomo (a Spanish-style dry-cured pork loin), lonzino (the Italian version of lomo), and housemade salami.



TOP ROW: Some of the Tamworth heritage hams Rosser has been curing and smoking; Lonzino, lomo, and salami dried sausages curing; MIDDLE ROW: Basting meat with a wet mop made of rosemary; whole-animal live-fire cooking on Rosser's custom grill; fresh vegetables cooking in the coals. BOTTOM ROW: Rotated custom grill; Rosser offering a bite. Images © Darren Lafferty of White Beard Photography, whitebeardphotography.com.

Spread Oaks Ranch Setting for Pastoral Summer Wedding

Panoramic setting and majestic live oaks make for an unmatched photogenic venue

Spread Oaks Ranch entered the high-end luxury wedding venue market this past Labor Day Weekend.

After the nuptials, guests enjoyed a splendid outdoors summer supper produced by Chef Ric Rosser and his staff in a romantic setting behind the lodge and overlooking the lake.

"Our business model for events such as this one is to work through established event planners," says Business Manager

Tim Soderquist. "As we operate primarily as a hunting lodge, in addition to our agricultural and ranching operations, this will be a very limited part of our business, but one that we can provide to our discerning clientele."

Consider, as well, booking Spread Oaks Ranch for bachelor or bachelorette parties, corporate retreats, and sales meetings. Serious inquiries only.



Congratulations to Mr. & Mrs. Britt Larson, married August 31, 2019 at Spread Oaks Ranch! Images © Shelby Tsika Photography, shelbytsikaphotography.com

Dove Differentiation

Hunters and birders alike enjoy identifying doves at Spread Oaks Ranch

This year's South Zone dove seasons are September 14-November 3, 2019 and December 20, 2019-January 23, 2020; and for the special white-winged dove season, September 1-2 and 7-8, 2019.

Texas has six dove species: Three are migratory game birds, two are protected species, and one is unprotected.

Can you identify each of the six types of doves shown here, along with either a (G), (P), or (U) to indicate if it's a game bird, a protected species, or an unprotected one?

Bonus question: How many of these six types of doves does Spread Oaks Ranch have?

Answers to these questions are on the following page.



Dove ID

How did you do?

A (U): Eurasian Collared-dove: This invasive species is unprotected, and can be legally hunted year-round. It gets its name from the black partial collar on the nape (back) of the neck, which is outlined in white. The plumage of the Eurasian Collared-dove is similar in both sexes and changes very little throughout the year. Juveniles generally resemble adults but their breast, wing, and back feathers have pale reddish margins, the irises of their eyes are brown, and their legs are brownish-red.

Non-native Eurasian collared doves began colonizing Texas in the 1990s. Today, as many as 5 million of these natives of the Indian subcontinent live in the state where wingshooters now annually take more than a half-million of the big, unprotected—and tasty—invasive species.

B (G): White-tipped dove: This species is a legal game bird during white-winged dove season, but is only found in deep South Texas.

A secretive bird of the Neotropics, it spends most of its time foraging inconspicuously on the ground, occasionally bursting into the air with noisy wingbeats and distinctive flashes of chestnut color under the wings.

Found in the U.S. only in and adjacent to the Rio Grande Valley, white-tipped doves are one of the often little-known or recognized game birds that give Texas hunters bragging rights to the most diverse wingshooting in the nation.

C (P): Inca dove: The protected, sparrow-sized Inca (or Mexican) dove has a worldwide population of 3 million, with about 33 percent in Texas and more than 60 percent in Mexico. Over the past 100 years, the Inca dove has extended its range both south and north.

Inca doves are year-round residents and often build their nests near human structures. Recently at Spread Oaks Ranch, the female Inca shown here raised two chicks in a nest in one of the retamas in front of the casitas.

D (G): Mourning dove: The most popular game bird in Texas, roughly 50 million of North America's 250 million mourning doves are in the Lone Star State each fall, with about 60 percent of that being year-round population and the remaining 40 percent migrating in. That natural bounty pulls about 300,000 wingshooters afield, generating \$400 million in economic impact and cementing Texas' claim to the No. 1 dove-hunting state in the nation.

E (P): Ground dove: Ground doves are a protected species, and common up through the southern half of Texas, which is the northernmost reach of its range. Partners in Flight estimates the global breeding population at 13 million, with 18 percent living in the U.S., and 21 percent in Mexico.

F (G): White-winged dove: This legal game bird was almost wholly restricted 40 years ago to a narrow band of habitat along the Rio Grande, and has since proliferated across Texas, with their population exploding to nearly 16 million birds—more than 80 percent of all whitewings in the United States.

Bonus Question: Only white-tipped doves have not been sighted at Spread Oaks Ranch.

RIGHT: Two Inca dove chicks huddle in a nest just outside the casitas at Spread Oaks Ranch.

COMING NEXT MONTH: Look for a report on teal hunting success, a habitat report, wild game cuisine and special events in October and beyond.

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*"Ninety minutes from Houston,
yet a world away."*

Visit Spread Oaks Ranch online at spreadoaksranch.com.

To arrange your adventure, contact Business Manager Tim Soderquist at tim@spreadoaksranch.com or (281) 814-5442.

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