

The great humblers

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It is a crapshoot. Who knew if we will even have enough to shoot last Saturday? They humble you in that way, too. Uncertainty. They come out of the sun, pretending to be Japanese Zeros. They twirl, dart, and hit the afterburners when the wind is right.

We are expected to hit them?

That is what makes it all so humbling. We stand in the sun or if lucky a dollop of shade and try to hit them. One afternoon on the Cane River, I could hear them laughing.

It was partly cloudy with a brisk breeze off the café au lait' colored river outside Natchitoches. I had a single shot 20-gauge and three boxes of shells-all I could afford at a nickel per shell. At the end of the afternoon, I had one bird. One bird for 75-shots. They laughed and laughed.

Doves are the great humblers. They also involve waiting at times. Usually, when dove hunting, there is a lot of waiting involved. You wait for the traditional pre-hunt meal to be served, you wait to go to the field and you wait for the birds fly over.

While you are waiting, you pick what birds happened to run into your shot pattern...and scan the skies.

The only birds I have shot that come close to being as humbling are wood ducks in the breaks and sea ducks down low, just off the water. For me, everything else I have tried to shoot has been much simpler.

One afternoon, in Mexico, I stood in the middle of a dirt road and shot a pile of pigeons (Palomas). They were alleged to have been trying targets. Fuhgedaboutit. Quail? Get the oil hot and start picking. Woodcock? I will pile them up but do not try feeding me any of them.

One afternoon, in Maine, I shot a bunch of them and that is just an estimate. I mean, heck, they stop and let you shoot them standing still. My host, the late and great outdoor writer from Bangor, Bud Leavitt, could not believe I declined to take any of them. I have eaten a Goodyear tire. Only they called it alligator. I did not to try to eat a woodcock.

Wade Bourne can hit doves well. He can usually limit out with his 15-birds in a box of shells plus five. That is normally how many I use to get half a limit...less three.

I was standing on the edge of a prepared field outside Natchez, Mississippi.

The field was prepared by the Mississippi Department of Wildlife just for a big group of outdoor writers.

They prepared it well. Wheat was ankle deep anywhere you stepped despite the fact there were no stalks in site and the ground was smooth as a baby's butt. That afternoon, there was no waiting. Also, no pre-hunt meal but that was okay.

I was in the shade of an ancient red oak. The humblers passed from left to right-my favorite shot.

I opened my first box of number 7/12 shot in 20-gauge for my Remington 870. When I closed the box and picked up my limit of 15-birds, nine unused shells rattled around in it.

Never before or since, have I repeated that performance.

However, you can bet I have tried. I did one time watch an elderly man sit on a Coleman cooler and shoot his limit with 14-shots. He did not stand up or spit his baccar juice until he killed the last bird. His grandson, I believe age eight, picked up all the birds, then borrowed Papaw's gun and killed three of his own.

In seven shots.

So, dove season opened at noon last Saturday and runs until Sept. 26. This column was supposed to run last week but we messed up. I have had to rewrite a bit of it but you can figure it all out.

After the first day, shooting starts at one-half hour before sunrise. The second and third segments are October 13-28 and November 14-28. The limit is 15-birds with two limits in possession after the first day.

Oh, how did I do? I did about as you would expect, considering I had not shot a shotgun in five years. My shoulder, the one that is partially repaired after I tried to dive through a rock wall, could only stand about 30-shots from the fine little 20-gauge. I did not quite limit out. But, I am not too humble, either.

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