



# The Bird Hunting Report

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## Dateline: Illinois

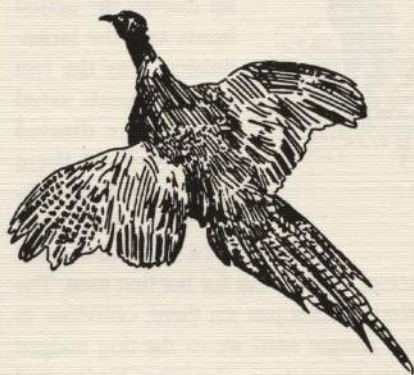
### As Close to Wild as Possible

- **Timetable:** October through mid-April
- **Accommodations:** Classic, refurbished Midwestern farmhouse
- **Food:** Lunch provided
- **Hunt:** Easy to moderate

One might think that a bird hunting destination within a three-hours' drive of the three most populous cities in Illinois would cater to the wealthy, the elite and those expected to be pampered. **Hilltop Meadows Hunt Club in Fulton, Illinois**, however, appeals to a different clientele: those who want to visit a place that is convenient to home and that serves up a hunting experience reminiscent of the good old days of wild birds in wild places.

That's not to say that Hilltop is an impassable jungle. Owners **Mike and Gail**

**Jacobson** maintain an intensive program to improve the habitat so as to have the best wildlife habitat possible. **Each year, they spend countless hours maintaining**



**and improving the property.** Improvements include controlled burns, invasive species removal, planting food plots,

trees, shrubs and native grasses. "Every hour spent pays dividends in improved habitat, benefiting all wildlife and makes for great hunting!" they say. With that in mind, therefore, there are ATV trails throughout the property so Mike can get to different places to attend to different chores. **So, in most instances, a person who doesn't like or want to walk through the food strips or acres of cover can opt for the open road.**

But those roads, like the food and the cover, transverse rolling country that doesn't look at all like the land for the first hour or so of the drive from Chicago.

Of course it wouldn't, Mike says. After all, in addition to being known as the "The Land of Lincoln," Illinois is called "The Prairie State." And that's the type of land hunters work at Hilltop: rolling prairie. The name "Hilltop" should give a de-

*(continued on page 2)*

## Dateline: Texas

### DIY – Rivers: Hot, Public Duck Action at Low Cost

- **Timetable:** September (teal) and early November through late January
- **Accommodations:** Hotels, campgrounds in nearby towns
- **Food:** Restaurants in surrounding communities
- **Hunt:** Moderate to extremely difficult

Although Texas sprawls across nearly 300,000 square miles, relatively little is opened to public hunting, particularly for ducks. Many Lone Star waterfowlers lease expensive hunting property, but a good duck lease could

run into the thousands of dollars. Not everyone in Texas owns a 100,000-acre ranch dotted with oil wells to be able to afford such a lease.

**However, abundant rivers can offer a cheaper alternative to sportsmen of even modest means. Rivers and other navigable waterways belong to the public**, so sportsmen can usually hunt almost anywhere in the main channels, oxbows, sloughs and backwaters. **However, adjacent lands may remain private so check to avoid trespassing.** In the right spot, though, hunting along rivers can often provide sportsmen incredible shooting for little more than the cost of fuel required to get there.

"Some Texas rivers have decent waterfowl hunting," advised Kevin Kraai, a Texas Parks and Wildlife Dept.

*(continued on page 3)*

### Inside:

South Dakota .....	p.4
Rhode Island .....	p.5
Maine .....	p.7
Buenos Aires .....	p.8
Briefly Noted .....	p.9
Missouri .....	p.9
Arkansas .....	p.10
Utah .....	p.10
Texas .....	p.11



**have on the dogs.** Those who hunt South Dakota often know that the weather can change quickly, and cold temperatures and snow can impact hunts as early as mid- to late-October. With hunting areas in such close proximity to the facilities at Hunters Pointe, however, hunts in extreme temperatures can be moderated by timely trips indoors to warm up. The extended hunting preserve season is perfect for the guest who wants extra time in the field for a young hunter, young dog or simply is not ready to put the shotgun and game vest away for the year.

A one-day guided hunt is \$200 and allows a guest to shoot three pheasants. Additional pheasants may be shot with a charge of \$25 per bird. All pheasants are cleaned and packaged on-site at no extra cost.

**The professional sporting clays course on the grounds of Hunters Pointe was developed by one of England's top course designers, Mike Davies, and is open year-round.** A shooter will see 100 targets during a round of sporting clays (\$41 – does not include shells), and control of the fully automatic throwers is given to each individual group, allowing for shooters to walk through the course at their own pace. Each station presents targets in a realistic setting, and a shooter can expect to tackle a vari-

ety of scenarios including decoying mallards from a duck boat suspended on springs to choosing a target from a flurry of flushing quail. Chamness can modify the course to accommodate a wide range of shooting skills with advance notice, including targets presented in such a manner to challenge even the sharpest shooter in the group. The sporting clays course at Hunters Pointe is one of the finest in South Dakota if not the region and makes for a perfect pre-hunt addition to help clean out the cobwebs before pounding the grass for roosters.

Each day at Hunters Pointe begins and ends at the shop where Browning and Benelli shotguns are available for rent and shotgun shells in most gauges are available for sale.

**The facilities at Hunters Pointe are more than adequate to handle a business presentation, and a separate indoor pavilion is suitable for large gatherings.** The modest accommodations are very clean, and a full kitchen – including an indoor grill – is available for use if guests wish to cook their own meals. Catered meals are very popular with many groups, Chamness says, especially those visiting Hunters Pointe for a business retreat. **The Harford Steakhouse (709 North Mundt Ave., Hartford, SD, 57033; 605-528-6185)** comes highly recommended by lo-

cal for its good food and reasonable prices and is located just minutes from Hunters Pointe. **The western edge of South Dakota's largest city, Sioux Falls, is less than 20 minutes away,** where guests will find numerous options for eating and lodging as well as Joe Foss Field (FSD), which provides extensive commercial flight options. **Foley's Fish, Chop and Steakhouse (2507 South Shirley Ave., Sioux Falls, SD, 57109; 605-362-8125; foleysrestaurant.com)** is one of Sioux Falls' finer restaurants located on the west side and offers fine dining and an extensive wine list. Located just off Interstate 90, **Quality Inn and Suites (5410 North Granite Lane, Sioux Falls, SD, 57107; 605-336-1900)** would be an excellent choice for lodging, again, within minutes of Hunters Pointe.

A preserve hunting license is required to hunt at Hunters Pointe (annual, \$125; five-day, \$76; one-day, \$46) and a traditional nonresident small game license (\$125) would be needed if additional hunts were scheduled off the preserve on private ground. For further licensing information: [www.gfp.sd.gov](http://www.gfp.sd.gov); 605-223-7660.

**Hunters Pointe, 260th St., Humboldt, SD 57035; 605-366-8198; [www.hunterspointesd.com](http://www.hunterspointesd.com).**

—John Pollmann

## Dateline: Rhode Island

### Private Club Offers Mixture of Wild and Released Birds

- **Timetable:** Oct. 1-March 31
- **Accommodations:** Private cabins
- **Food:** Gourmet
- **Hunt:** Easy to moderate

In the towns of Richmond and Wyoming, Rhode Island, which are a chip shot from the Connecticut boarder, is a new club that celebrates the sporting life, the kind that has been integral in the state for over a century.

**The Preserve at Boulder Hills is the sum of serial entrepreneur and developer Paul Mihailides' life work.** Many wing shooters are already familiar with Mihailides, who recently took total ownership of the bespoke Italian firearm company FAMARS, and his vision for the preserve actually began a few decades

ago in the early 1990s. The lifelong sportsman fell in love with a several-hundred acre parcel of land that stood in stark



contrast with the terrain typical of southern New England. **In an area known for its flat, just-above-sea level elevations were rolling hills and sweeping fields.** There was also mixture of hardwoods

such as beech, hickory and oaks interspersed with softwoods like pitch pines. The normally sandy soil was pockmarked with rocks and boulders and was dotted with freshwater feeder streams and ponds. With elevations up to a few hundred feet, the exquisite land appealed to him as a perfect sporting sanctuary.

The property was earmarked for a standard subdivision of more than a hundred homes surrounding an 18-hole golf course but was never developed. After a few decades Mihailides bought the asset and his dream to create a unique sporting club became a reality.

Mihailides broke ground in 2013 and started by constructing The Preserve's 25,000 square-foot, shingled clubhouse on the western end of the property. **In here, members and their guests find all the requisite amenities they could ask for, from reception and dining areas, a ma-**



hogany bar stocked with just about all spirits known to mankind and a pro shop. Wrap-around verandas offer views of the stunning property. Construction on the cabins will begin in 2015.

While Rhode Island is known as the Ocean State, hunting is very popular due to the ideal temperatures. October brings a classic New England mix of Indian summer's warm days and cool nights, and with the preserve's proximity to the coast, great bird hunting weather remains through December. A fleece vest and a pair of shooting gloves will take off the morning chill very easily.

The core of the wing shooting program at The Preserve at Boulder Hills is the walk-up hunts for pheasant, chucker and Hungarian partridge on the club's six different courses. Cover crops include Johnson grass, switchgrass, broomstraw, goldenrod and foxtail with clover, thyme and timothy mixed in as well. Hunts are guided, and members or guests are able to run their own dogs as well. A stable of guides uses a wide variety of dogs with breeds ranging from English pointers and setters, Brittanys and German shorthaired pointers to English springer and cocker spaniels and Labs. Hunts are pre-arranged and with advanced notice a particular guide/breed of dog can be requested. At this licensed shooting preserve, the season for hunting these birds runs from mid-September through mid-March. More fields and clearings are planned for the future.

A property as unique as The Preserve at Boulder Hills has wild birds, dove and woodcock being the top two. Rhode Island is one of the few states in the Northeast that allows for dove hunts that are held in September, and woodcock hunting occurs according to the federally regulated seasons. Because of the lowland areas with feeder streams and seeps, there is a good population of resident birds. Numbers of flight birds are seasonally dependent, but they are traditionally good.

There are other hunting opportunities as well. Rhode Island has a rich waterfowling tradition, and beginning in 2015, The Preserve at Boulder Hills will offer hunts for puddle, diver, and sea duck, the latter being possible because of the club's proximity to the ocean. A large population of Eastern wild turkey and white-tailed deer are on

the property, and it is a fair chase season for both. Turkeys are only hunted in the spring. Three seasons for whitetail deer (archery, muzzleloader and shotgun) mean that big game enthusiasts can be in the woods from September through early January. The club is in Zone 2, and all state rules/regulations apply.

Wing shooters expect shots in the 15-30 yard range, which makes cylinder and improved cylinder chokes an ideal choice for 20-gauge shotguns. Improved cylinder and modified are best



for a 28-gauge shotgun. Shot sizes between nos. 7 1/2 and 8 are ideal, and any gauge or bore is welcome. Selections of field loads as well as blaze orange hats are available for purchase at The Preserve. A selection of rental shotguns from FAMARS is available. There is a fully stocked pro shop located in the clubhouse that will cover any gear a member or guest leaves behind at home.

Since hunters ride in ATVs, lightweight brush pants, shooting shirts, comfortable boots and a shooting vest are all that is necessary.

Clay target shooters are pleased to know that there are two different courses developed by industry-leading experts. Chris Batha designed the Compact Sporting Course, a fun, five-stand that will be built in the spring of 2015. Jack O'Brian, who is also the general manager at nearby Addieville East Farm, developed an interesting seven station sporting clays course that offers 14 different target presentations. The high tower was recently completed and offers a 160-foot elevation that launches high, driven-style flights. Other target presentations include all classic upland bird patterns as well as a few technically challenging shots.

Initially, 20 cabins will be dispersed along the property. These cabins will have a main, four-bedroom epicenter with smaller two-bedroom cabins nearby.

The concept behind this configuration is for a family or a group of friends/business associates to be in the same area but to have their own privacy. The club offers gourmet dining in the clubhouse, and private chef services are available upon request. Cellular telephone coverage is good for all major carriers, and free Wi-Fi service is available in the lodge.

Additional activities for both hunters and nonhunters include fly fishing for trout, largemouth bass, smallmouth bass and panfish on one of the six ponds. Parts of the ponds are wadable while other sections are deep. Rock climbing and bouldering courses, mountain biking, running paths, tennis (on either clay or grass courts) and swimming are other summer activities. Favorite winter pursuits are cross country skiing and snowmobiling.

The Preserve at Boulder Hills is 2 1/2 hours from Manhattan or northern New Jersey, just over an hour from Boston and Hartford, and a half hour from Newport or Providence, Rhode Island, or Mystic, Connecticut. The club is 13 miles from the coast at Watch Hill.

Contact: Andrew Irby, 401-539-4653, [www.thepreserveri.com](http://www.thepreserveri.com), [Andrew@thepreserveri.com](mailto:Andrew@thepreserveri.com).

—Tom Keer

## BHR Field Staff

The *Bird Hunting Report* is always looking for people to join its Field Staff, subscribers who go above and beyond the call by filing extensive reports on great places to hunt (or to avoid). These subscribers who file the reports found in our "Field Notes" section remain "on staff" for a year and receive a special *BHR* cap.

Our current team members include J. Thalgott, M.D., Woods Weatherby, Gary Sanden and Curtis L. ("Curt") Frisbie, Jr.

Reports need to be honest and balanced, indicating the bad as well as the good. So instead of just filing the usual "Hunt Report Form," why not join our Field Staff by submitting a complete account for "Field Notes" at *The Bird Hunting Report*, PO Box 328, Boyds, MD 20841; 240-599-7679 (fax); [support@pnmsi.com](mailto:support@pnmsi.com).