

# Currawong Lakes



*Jeffrey, swinging through and connecting as usual.*

**This idyllic hunter's paradise in Australia's most southern State offers some of the best exotic bird shooting to be found anywhere. Text and photography by Tony Brown.**

**W**hat is it about the Apple Isle, that attracts more and more hunters and fisherman, from both the mainland and overseas to this field sports paradise each year. For the deer hunter, it is a well managed and monitored population of

Fallow deer, which with skill and a bit of luck, gives the hunter a fair chance of taking a trophy buck. Mainland duck hunters have also been heading south in increasing numbers for the Tassie duck season, as conditions in Victoria and South Australia have deteriorated in the last few years due to the drought. Trout fishing in the lakes of central Tasmania, draws many Australian and overseas, fly fishing aficionados. Tasmania is renown in fly fishing circles, for its world class rainbow and brown trout.



*(Above) Preparing for practise on clay targets in the Grouse Butt.*

*(Left) One of the many clay target stands.*



*(Above) Psyching up, for the day ahead.*

*(Right) Inside one of the shooting lodges.*

*(Below) The guns, receiving instructions, from Adam Churchill.*



My mission to Tasmania however, was to hunt exotic game birds. The possibility of hunting chukar partridge, ring neck pheasant and bobwhite quail, proved irresistible to my five mates and I. We have participated in english style driven pheasant shooting in southern Tasmania on several occasions and that experience will remain as a highlight in our memories forever.

In recent years, a new bird hunting and trout fishing mecca has evolved in Tasmania. Currawong Lakes Trout Fishery and Game Park, is situated roughly between Campbell Town and Swansea, on the eastern side of the island. Currawong Lakes, is 3000 acres of managed grasslands and game crops, with three huge trout filled lakes as the centrepiece, of this most magnificent scene. Surrounded by state forest and hills, Currawong is isolated from farms and the rat race, yet only about thirty minutes from the well known coastal towns of Swansea and Bicheno and less than an hour south of the Launceston airport. The owner, a well travelled hunter and fisherman, had the good fortune to discover this hidden jewel a few years back and could see the possibilities of developing it into a high class hunting and fishing game park.

Over the last five years, he has built shooting and fishing



*Guns and pickers up,  
head out.*



*Author in the foreground, Adrian at the rear, swing onto a covey of partridges.*

lodges as well as accommodation, which is set slightly back from the lakes to give the best possible views. The main shooting and fishing lodge, is something all we field sportsmen would love to own. Large open fire, stuffed game birds from the owner's adventures around the world and of course, the local king size trout. It is at this lodge, where we enjoy all of our meals. The

dinners are of restaurant quality. Naturally, a well stocked bar awaits the hunters at the day's end.

In Australia, there are more opportunities to hunt exotic birds than ever before, but I know of no other venue that offers, partridge, pheasant and bobwhite quail in the one hunt. In this case, the birds are bred at the property and as juveniles are released into the wild, well before the season, to insure they are wild and strong. They are supported by automatic feeders and consequently the birds don't stray too far. It is pleasing to hear that all three species are breeding successfully in the wild.

Fortunately, there aren't any foxes (although we do hear the odd report of a sighting) in Tassie and the feral cats don't seem to have found their way to Currawong, probably due to its remoteness and therefore there is minimal predation on the birds.

We arrived at Currawong on the friday afternoon and after checking in, went immediately to their five stand clay target range for a bit of an eye opener. They throw targets from about fourteen clay target traps offering, clays coming directly towards us from a high hill to rolling rabbit and crossing



*Head gamekeeper, Adam Churchill.*



*Lawrie is thinking, which one - too many choices!*

targets. We have the opportunity to shoot at about 100 clays each. After a break and afternoon tea, in the other shooting lodge, it's back to the range to shoot a few more targets that simulate the real thing, that awaits us on the weekend. That night we enjoyed a first class meal which became a standard for the weekend.

Eight am. For breakfast on Saturday morning and then a briefing from Adam Churchill, the head gamekeeper on the rules for the day, with emphasis on safety. We were now ready for "the off". We headed out by four wheel drive towards the back of the property for about two kilometres. Then we formed a line with the six guns about 30 metres apart. In the line, and making sure it stayed straight for safety reasons was Adam the gamekeeper, and

Fiona King also a gamekeeper and three dog handlers. The dogs were made up of two springer and two cocker spaniels.

The eager spaniels scurried into the tussocks and blackberries and in no time at all, partridges, in singles and sometimes flocks of half a dozen or so took off in a rush in front of us. In the initial excitement, it was hard to get a bead on a bird, particularly when they were in a mob, as we had too many choices. Eventually we settled down and some lovely shots were taken, along with several misses with the usual excuses given. Laurie was the first to take a left and right on partridge and great shooting it was, as the birds were well apart from each other.

We would only walk for a few minutes before coming



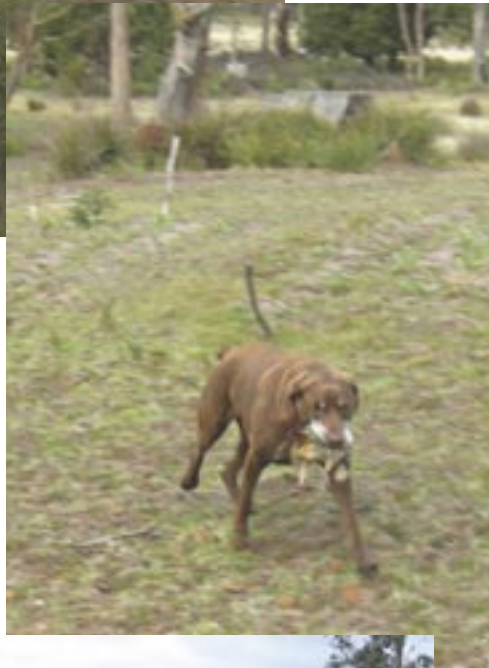
*Jeffrey, approaching a dog on point.*



*Adam the gamekeeper and author, taking a breather. (Right) The dogs worked tirelessly.*

across more birds. There are a lot out there. Often birds, particularly the partridges and quail were in flocks and coveys and you really had to concentrate hard on picking out one bird. The pheasants, more often than not, flew as singles, but being as wild as they are, are still challenging. The first bobwhite quail to be seen, was in fact a fast crossing single, neatly taken by Adrian. To be honest, we wish he had missed it, as months later he still lets anybody within hearing distance hear about his famous shot!

Bobwhite quail are a little larger than our native stubble and brown quail and generally harder to nail. They



shock of seeing so many birds take off at once, caught him totally wrong footed and he couldn't find his triggers. What goes around comes around!

We continued on until lunch, which in itself is another highlight. None of this sitting under a tree eating a sandwich or a Mars bar and a cold coffee. The terrain that we hunted over, varied from fairly flat to undulating and can be easily managed by shooters

with a modest level of fitness.

If any of the party are getting on a bit or perhaps a little out of shape, they can be put in a position, where the walking is a bit easier. With so many opportunities to shoot, everyone of us had their fair share of chances to take all three species, including chances at doubles.

We have all hunted these birds before, but without a doubt, the



*(Left) A happy team of guns. L to R: David Henderson, Adrian Conti, Lawrence Zoch, Tony Brown, Forte Stambanis, Jeffrey Ibbott.*

*(Right) Relaxing at the end of the day, settling in to bragging mode!*

Currawong experience is one we won't forget in a hurry. The presentation of the birds, along with total professionalism of Adam, Fiona and their team is first class. Dog work is excellent and the handlers enjoy working their dogs as much as we enjoy hunting over them. A great combination.

The hunting season begins in early May and runs through until September. A maximum of six guns are allowed. Our shoot was on the Saturday and Sunday morning. There is no limitation on the number of birds that can be taken. Our bag for the day and a half was 135. Made up of 94 partridges, 16 pheasant and 25 bobwhite quail. Not that numbers count, as it is the quality and presentation of the birds that is important. In saying that, with this experience under our belt, I would expect the bag to be a little higher on our next trip.

Most hunters choose to take the birds home as they make delicious eating.



They were dressed and vacuum packed for easy transportation back to the mainland by plane or ferry.

At the end of our shoot, we immediately booked in for next season, for the word is spreading and there is a limited number of shoots available during the season. We decided to stay in the well appointed cabins at Currawong, as the alternative is a motel at Campbell Town, Ross or Swansea, which are all fine, but a bit of a drive each day. The other advantage of staying at Currawong is, at the end of the day, after a lot of walking, there is nothing better than a refreshing beer or lemonade and you don't really feel like a drive to town. As mentioned earlier, the dinners are part of the weekend experience. The meals

are superb and are accompanied by appropriate wine - much better idea than a counter tea in town.

When leaving Currawong, I made a mental note to come back and have a crack at the fly fishing, of which, the season runs from October through until early May. I understand the fishing can be guided or by yourself and tuition is also available.

Sadly, Australia doesn't have the variety of game birds as some other countries. In the south particularly, recent bird hunting seasons have been so dry, duck and quail hunting has been greatly curtailed. Tassie gives us hope! I found out about Currawong through friends that had been there and got more information from their website, [Currawonglakes.com.au](http://Currawonglakes.com.au).



*(Left above) The plucking machine, makes light work of the final task of the day.*

*(Left) Adrian, Jeffrey, Tony and David, dressing the birds (Right) Adrian (L) and David (R), preparing the birds for the trip home.*

