

A large flock of quail is captured in flight throughout a pine forest. The birds are scattered across the frame, some in the foreground and others further back, all appearing to be in motion. The forest consists of tall, thin pine trees with a dense canopy of green needles. The ground is covered in tall, dry grasses and some green plants. The lighting is warm and golden, suggesting late afternoon or early morning, with the sun low on the horizon, creating a soft glow and long shadows. The overall scene is dynamic and captures a moment of natural activity.

DYNAMIC HABITAT AND QUALITY QUAIL

Dorchester Shooting Preserve near the Georgia coast
delivers quail hunting that's the stuff of upland dreams.

STORY BY ROGER CATCHPOLE
PHOTOGRAPHY BY TERRY ALLEN



From start to finish, my time with Chuck Gaskin and his team at Dorchester Shooting Preserve was memorable for all the right reasons. When you combine quality habitat and a large quail population with knowledgeable guides and well-trained bird dogs, that only leaves one variable—the skill of the hunter. In our dreams, this is how the perfect hunt is meant to be. When Chuck Gaskin set up Dorchester in 1999, he had no idea his Georgia plantation would turn into arguably one of the most pleasant and challenging released-quail hunting operations in the Southeast. But that’s exactly what has happened.

During the mid-1990s, Gaskin’s lifelong love of bird dogs and upland hunting sparked an interest in owning land close to his home in Georgia. He had spent the preceding years leading groups of clients from his insurance business to hunt pheasant in Iowa. But that long-distance commute was getting old, fast. So he planned to develop his own quail-hunting property where he could entertain his business clients during the week and host his friends and family on weekends. It was to be an informal affair, covering just 350 acres of leased land with a single concrete-block building as a lodge.

Initially, Gaskin was one of six friends who agreed to go in on the deal. By the time contracts had been drawn up, that group had reorganized to three. On the day of signing the lease, the team shrank again. Thanks to a last-minute call to his father, Charlie, who agreed to join the group, Chuck closed the hunting lease. That first year brought a steep learning curve for

all involved. At the end of the season, the last partner *not* named Gaskin decided he shouldn’t have to work so hard to lose so much money. So then there were two—Chuck and Charlie.

More than anything, however, that inaugural season had given the Gaskins important perspective. They now better understood what was required to run a hunting operation and how much work would be involved if they wished to create a superior offering. While Chuck and his father were tired from their exertions during the initial season, they felt fulfilled by what they had accomplished. Moreover, they were excited by the possibilities that lay ahead.

The pair spent the following season enhancing every aspect of the experience at Dorchester—from the dogs and the guides to the lodge and the hospitality. Still, as time passed, a feeling pervaded that their efforts were in some way impermanent. In 2003, Chuck became aware that a large piece of riverfront land, only a stone’s throw from their current site, was becoming available. Following some tough negotiating by Chuck, and careful financial planning by his wife and CPA, Tina, the Gaskins reached a deal to purchase the new property.

While this transaction marked a significant moment for the Gaskins, it did not signal an immediate change for Dorchester. Chuck now had access to a much larger hunting property,

MARKING GAME AT DORCHESTER

Improvements have led to superior quail hunting.



Meet Chuck Gaskin in person and you begin to realize he is one of the sporting world's most personable individuals... who lives for the hunt.

but the habitat was not in any state to support quail, let alone to hunt over. Over the next five years, Chuck, his father, and their team worked to transform their purchase from a dense stand of commercial timber to a pristine environment for the management of wild and released quail.

Finally, in 2008, Dorchester officially moved to its current location, and quail hunting began in earnest. Those who have visited since will surely attest that the fruits of the Gaskins' labor proved worth the wait.

Today, 15 years after its modest beginnings, Dorchester Shooting Preserve extends to nearly 5,000 acres of prime coastal Georgia property in Midway, Georgia. The plantation boasts a 12-stand, fully automated sporting-clays course set among a picturesque backdrop of live oaks and pine trees, rifle and pistol ranges, a 10,000-square-foot lodge with a well-

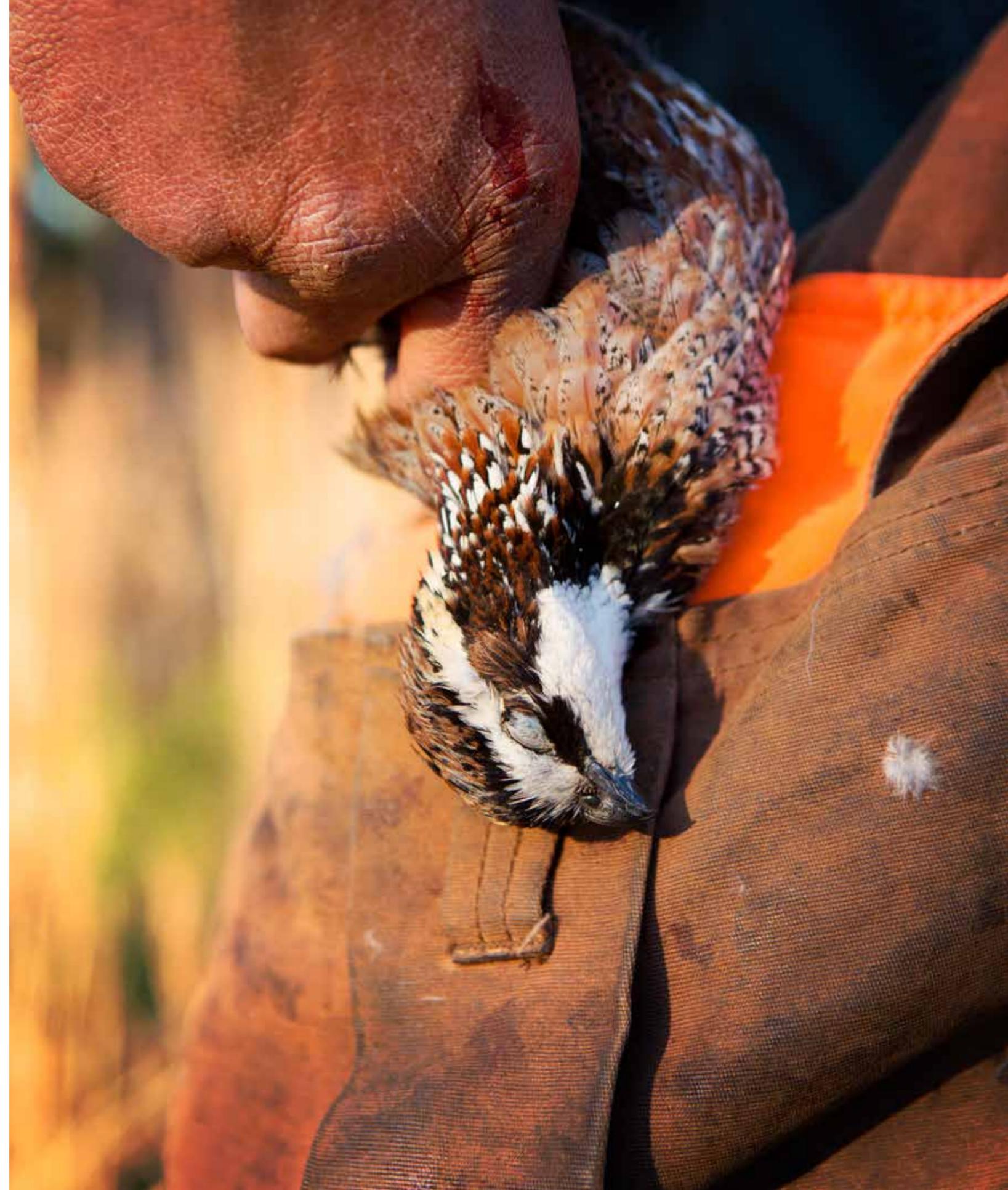
equipped pro shop, guest cottages and lakeside cabins, and hunting for quail, pheasant, waterfowl, hogs, and deer.

Meet Chuck Gaskin in person and you begin to realize he is one of the sporting world's most personable individuals—a larger-than-life personality who lives for the hunt. Although hunters at Dorchester visit to meet and spend time with Chuck, a gregarious and welcoming man, they also return time and again for the birds.

Dorchester truly is a family endeavor, and during a visit you will likely meet Chuck's wonderful wife, Tina, who handles the finances; his daughter, Lindsey, who manages food service and hospitality; and his son-in-law, Bubba Parker, who guides

A PATTERN FOR SUCCESS

The culmination of preparedness... and lots of planning





hunters on the plantation. What you cannot fail to appreciate about Dorchester is that the team really does care about each hunter's experience.

As Chuck says, "Dorchester was built by hunters for hunters." He continues: "I like to meet each customer personally when they visit Dorchester. I like to look them in the eye and thank them sincerely for their business."

From that first season onward, one constant in the Gaskin family mindset seems to be a willingness to learn. "I want to improve every element of the experience my team delivers," Chuck says. I believe him. Chuck gives me an example of this desire to innovate by explaining how members of his team sit down on a weekly basis and analyze their performance, both in the field and in the lodge.

This type of dedication to the experience stands out for Dorchester regulars, of whom there are many. Most people I met during my time at Dorchester had been there before. Membership benefits offered by Dorchester encourage these repeat visits, as do strong bonds that have formed over time between guides and hunters. Dorchester has more than a dozen dedicated quail courses on its property, each of which extends to around 100 acres. Such choice areas to hunt provide variety for visiting hunters, but more importantly ensure that any one course is not unduly pressured.

While with Chuck at the hunting grounds, I spoke to a number of Dorchester patrons. A common theme ran through their hunting tales—that of traveling the Southeast, experiencing myriad quail-hunting opportunities but remaining unfulfilled, before finding Dorchester and realizing that little could compare to their large coveys of fast-flushing and hard-flying bobwhite quail.

While the keys to the success of Dorchester are no secret to others in the business, it seems that success has come through superior execution and complete dedication—Chuck lives on-site and he and Tina oversee all operations. Where Chuck prospers, and others fall short, is in creating the correct environment and then managing the habitat with sensitivity, so that early released birds assimilate with their environment and wild birds thrive.

Chuck runs a kennel of almost 60 dogs of all shapes and sizes at Dorchester. English pointers, English setters, German shorthaired pointers, and Brittans are well represented, as are flushing Labrador retrievers and English cocker spaniels. Such variety gives everyone the opportunity to hunt over their favorite breed of dog, or to try something new.

Most of the dogs run at Dorchester are bred on-site from top field performers; others are brought in as puppies. Unlike many plantation operators, Chuck does not look to the field

APPEALING HABITAT

Dorchester has good land for hunters—and the gamebirds.



trial circuit for his dogs. Instead, he believes in knowing and developing his own line and in undertaking all basic training on-site. To finish his dogs, Chuck trusts only one trainer, with whom he has a long-standing relationship.

Individual guides and their dogs are highly sought after by hunters at this plantation, and those eager for a specific guide-and-dog combination often make bookings months in advance. I had the pleasure of hunting with two excellent guides: Harry, a retired banker; and Roberto, who worked every job at Dorchester before becoming one of its top guides. Both men ran pairs of top-performing Britnans and hard-running English pointers. I also experienced a moment of pure comic genius, and hunting panache, in the quail field when Chuck brought out his flushing dog, an English cocker spaniel named Elvis Presley, to accompany my English cocker, Austin Powers. I was thrilled to experience multiple covey rises on a morning and an afternoon hunt—not out of the norm, I learned. The coveys I witnessed were some of the largest I've seen and some of the fastest flying. I was even given the opportunity to hunt off the main quail courses when we saw big coveys flushing wild in the distance. In pursuing these wily birds, my guide, Harry, and I were rewarded for our hard walking by seeing some fabulous dog work and getting some fleeting opportunities at the most sporting of quail. 🐾

POST-HUNT RETREAT

Treehouse cabins overlook the 17-acre lake.

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