

Bird Hunting • Dogs & Dog Training • Shotgun Enthusiasts

# The Upland Almanac

Spring 2013

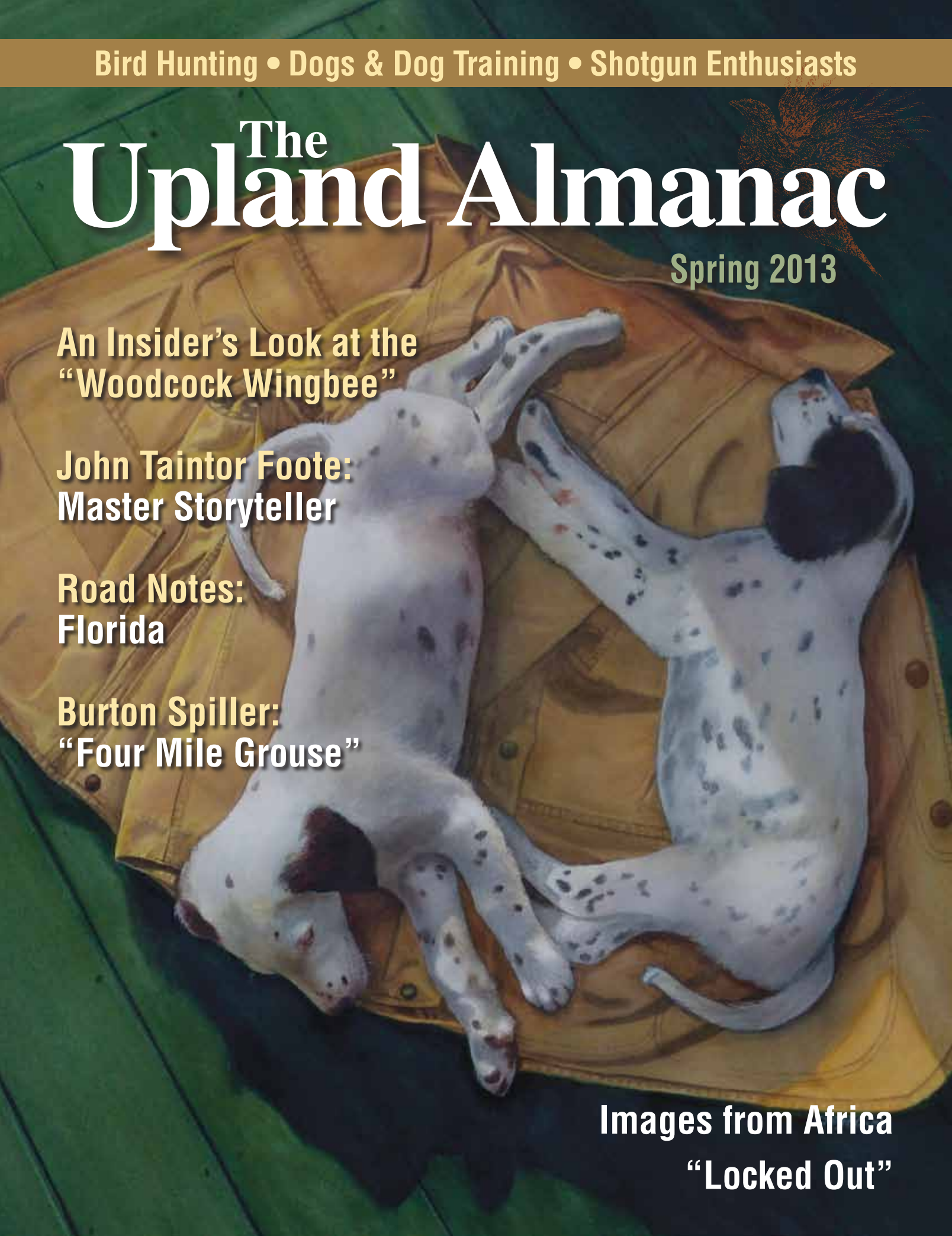
An Insider's Look at the  
"Woodcock Wingbee"

John Taintor Foote:  
Master Storyteller

Road Notes:  
Florida

Burton Spiller:  
"Four Mile Grouse"

Images from Africa  
"Locked Out"





# Honey Lake Plantation Resort and Spa

Quail aficionados are well acquainted with the historic plantation life that rooted in the rolling hills, lakes, rivers, and red clay of the Red Hills region. For over a century, shooters have traveled to the area that encompasses 515 square miles of land in the surrounding Thomasville, Ga., through Tallahassee, Fla., area. A relative newcomer that adds to the region's already fine patina is North Florida's Honey Lake Plantation.

The hallowed plantation is noted on the prestigious Georgia-Florida Field Trial map. Honey Lake Plantation was originally owned by Pansy Poe who used it as a day-sporting property in the early 1900s. Serial business entrepreneur Bob Williamson purchased the plantation in 2008 and embarked on a three-year, \$35 million renovation to the 4,800-acre property. When he purchased the plantation, Williamson's ultimate goal was to preserve the property's stunning beauty and wildlife. He did that by creating a central campus to foster a relaxed atmosphere where guests could unwind from the hustle bustle of daily life. The main Gathering Hall and Pro Shop, the Whispering Pines restaurant, all accommodations, the Honey Lake Plantation Church, the Howling Dog Saloon, and the spa are situated within easy walking distances of each other.

Honey Lake Plantation offers a traditional plantation-style quail hunt. Five individual quail courses span 1,800 total acres of upland cover, woodlots, fields, and ponds. The courses are a tasteful blend of rolling hills and open fields. Food and cover crops vary and include millet, broomstraw, milo, wiregrass, and lovegrass. Oats, clover, soybeans, and peanuts round out the food plots. A variety of pines are indigenous to the region and range from slash, loblolly, spruce, shortleaf and longleaf varieties, and the fields are rimmed by cypress and the easily recognizable live oaks, sweetgum, hickory, black oak, and, dogwood trees.

The birds are a mixture of wild and early-release quail. Covey rises range between a half-dozen birds and 20, but there are the occasional covey rises of 50 or more birds. These are known colloquially as "hat blowers" and hunters can follow up singles. At Honey Lake, you'll find quail, quail, and more quail, and they all fly hard.

Hunters get around the plantation in one of three different wagons. The Bird Buggy 1 is a custom-designed hunting vehicle built on a Chevy Suburban frame with a 350-block engine and four-wheel drive transmission. It includes a bench seat and four elevated



Skeet, trap, and 5-stand warm-ups prepare quail hunters for a day in the field.

captain's chairs that will transport up to six hunters, and dog boxes that will hold up to 10 English pointers, setters, and cocker spaniels. Two covered gun racks built into the vehicle's frame safely and securely store up to six shotguns. Bird Buggy 2 is a custom-developed trailer that is pulled behind a Jeep and accommodates five hunters, six pointing dogs, and four flushing dogs. Bird Buggy 3, a Polaris six-wheeler, transports five hunters, six pointing dogs, and two flushing dogs. A final, traditional touch is that hunters may ride horseback instead of on one of the hunting wagons.

It goes without saying that bird dogs are an important part of plantation life, and so field trial aficionados will recognize the names Ed and Sheila Hart. These longtime competitors and judges joined Honey Lake Kennels in 2010. The Harts will oversee an entirely new 30-dog kennel that will include a full breeding facility and whelping room. Expect to see the current Honey Lake Plantation dogs to grow significantly from 32 English pointers, setters, and cockers to many more. Guests are welcome to bring and hunt their own dogs, and all are housed in outdoor kennels.

There are several different lodging options from which to choose. The Honey Lake Lodge is a tastefully designed home, perfect for a medium-sized group of hunters. There are five luxury king guest rooms, each with a private bath. The heartwood pine floors and cypress walls are gorgeous, and there are a full kitchen, breakfast counter, wet bar, leather couches, and fireplace. Adjacent to the lodge is an 800-square foot premier suite that features a private kitchen, bar, living room, and master bedroom.

Part of our group stayed in the Five Pines and Two Oaks Cottage complex. Each cottage provides a master suite on either end. Each suite has a private bath and queen beds. A common living room complete with a flat-screen TV and leather couches and chairs, and a kitchenette





The Bird Buggy transports a group of hunters, English pointers, English setters, and English cockers in total comfort.

The 3,600-square foot Honey Lake Lodge has five luxury king guest rooms, each with private baths. The heartwood pine floors and cypress walls are gorgeous and there are a full kitchen, breakfast counter, wet bar, leather couches, and fireplace.

separates the suites. It's a perfect way to catch the end of football game before turning in to your own private room and is great for groups who prefer their own space. There are other options like the Pansy Poe Cottage, one of the original buildings that overlooks the plantation's namesake body of water, Honey Lake. It has three-bedroom suites, a kitchen, an enormous living room with views of the lake, and an indoor/outdoor deck and patio complete with a fire pit.

Our dinners were prepared by Executive Chef William Mann. Chef has a phenomenally long résumé that is broken down into five-year stints from around the country. He has amassed a tremendous amount of experience in his three decades behind the fire, and at Honey Lake his pièce de la résistance, what he calls "Plantation Elegant," is a new twist to favorite Southern classics. Breakfasts range from eggs any style to omelets or French toast. At lunch, a pulled pork BBQ sandwich, southern fried chicken, or a gourmet elk burger are a few options. And for dinner, try a bone-in filet mignon, andouille-stuffed chicken, lamb chops with a pomegranate reduction and smashed turnips, or an herb-roasted pork loin with roasted apples. Chef Mann is a firm believer in the "from farm to table" concept, so guests will enjoy some of the freshest foods available. Quail, venison, and fish are harvested on the property, as are five types of lettuce, two varieties of greens, vegetables like squash, carrots, turnips, potatoes, and broccoli. A plethora of spices are homegrown as well, and eggs are gathered daily from the Honey Lake chicken coop.

There are a wide variety of other activities that can be added to a quail hunt. A morning waterfowl hunt for seasonal puddle and diver ducks, an afternoon of trophy bass and bream fishing, and seasonal field dove hunts are three popular options. Non-sporting guests enjoy horseback riding, kayaking, or the full service day spa.

A visit to Honey Lake Plantation should include a trip to

Thomasville, one of the hubs of the Red Hills sporting culture. The quaint shops in the downtown area include Kevin's of Thomasville, one of the Southeast's premier outfitters. In addition to fine new and used shotguns, apparel and gear suited to wing shooting, fishing, and hunting, Kevin's is a treasure trove of wildlife art from the rich legacy of the area's plantation culture from the past.

In a lot of ways, there are more reasons to visit Honey Lake Plantation and the Red Hills region than just for extending your hunting season. It's about slowing down time to reflect on the gentler part of life. It's about camaraderie, fine dog work, and a celebration of one of our favorite pastimes. For a bird hunter in the winter, it's a lot more about coming home. 🗡️

## For more info:

**Honey Lake Plantation**, 1290 Honey Lake Rd., Greenville, FL 32331, 850-948-9911, [www.honeylakeplantation.com](http://www.honeylakeplantation.com).

**Getting there:** Honey Lake Plantation is located just 10 minutes east of Monticello, about 45 minutes to either Thomasville or Tallahassee, and less than ten minutes to I-10. Commercial flights are available into Tallahassee Regional Airport, which also accommodates private aircraft. Nearby Thomasville and Quitman both host private airports that accommodate jets. Jacksonville International Airport is two hours away.