



Howard, Sandy and Ian by the 'huttes' flight pond

rapidly retrieved by Apple.

As night closed in, we moved into the hutte for a delicious meal - with more courses than I can remember. Full to bursting, I was about to retire for the night, when Sandy said that the main hunt was about to start! In France, she explained, you sit up all night, taking it in turns to watch the pond through the hutte's gun slits. The approach of wildfowl is signalled by a cacophony of calling from the captive decoys.

Learning curve

As wild incomers land on the water, they are despatched using a semi-auto fitted with a telescopic sight. A 40-gram load going off in our small concrete room (measuring barely ten foot square) proved quite an experience. I had a squint through the scope, but with my dodgy eyesight, distinguishing the newcomer from Benoit's expensive decoys was impossible. They were all just fuzzy grey blobs in the darkness. I have to add that shooting sitters on the water is not really my idea of sport (even for pot-hunting), but hey, each to their own.

I snuck off to my bunk with a request for an alarm call for the morning flight. Sleep was punctuated by wall shaking booms as Benoit and Sandy got on the fowl. There were also numerous distant reports throughout the night from the hundreds of other huttes dotting the region.

The night's bag was a half dozen comprising wigeon, teal and mallard. These were carefully recorded in the Hutte's log book. Seasonal returns for each hutte have to be submitted to France's National Hunting Organisation.

Give it a go

Howard's Fieldsports Agency (Outside Days) offers several interesting overseas hunting opportunities. The purpose of our trip was to have a look at French duck hunting to see if it would be of interest to UK shooters. Chatting in the car on the way back to the ferry, we agreed that it was certainly different. If you were in the region it would be worth a look, but perhaps not the sole reason for a cross-channel trip. Sandy is planning to expand her package with some walked-up wild grey partridge and access to a larger area of marsh for snipe. Watch Howard's web site for developments next season. Hiring a hutte costs 400-500 Euro per night for up to four people, food included. The accommodation is basic but comfortable (asking for the WC, I was handed a spade, a loo roll and pointed out to the marsh). Still it was very interesting, and the hospitality from Sandy and Benoit truly splendid. 'Merci beaucoup' to both. **SG**

Night hunting tool:
Urika A391 Semi fitted with a 9x63 Scope. The rail mount prevents recoil taking your eye out. The function of the scope is to gather light when shooting in the dark.



Captive live decoys - a fair selection of fowl!



SPORTING GUN GUIDE

Sporting Agent:

Outside Days: <http://outsidedays.com>

The bureaucracy:

You will need a European Firearms Pass (EFP). (Surrey police were fantastic and issued mine within 48 hours). It's free.

Insurance:

BASC insurance is valid world-wide (except USA/Canada). BASC emailed details of my insurance cover printed in French within minutes of calling their office.

French hunting licence

The Permis de Chasser. This costs 59 Euro and is valid for the season. You also get a card to record any woodcock shot (bag limit of 30 per person per season in France).

Guns on Ferry

Pretty straightforward but allow an extra 40 minutes boarding time (especially in France) because of much confusion about actual procedure. Some ferries take the guns and return them at destination, some lock guns in the car and the ship's Purser holds your car keys.