

Safety is paramount at Cobaw Sporting Clays. Here, participants stand in a line and watch on behind the first shooter.



Cobaw Sporting Clays

- shooters going 'green'

by Kathy Mexted

It's a long and undulating drive that takes you from the front entrance of Cobaw Sporting Clays through picturesque green paddocks to the shooting lodge 2km along. As you weave your way into the property, there is a wonderful sense of isolation and a surprising number of ponds and bird boxes around.

Inside the lodge, SSAA member and proprietor of Cobaw Sporting Clays Jon Thomas gives a detailed pre-shoot safety briefing. The assembled group joins in the discussion about shotgun shooting for novices and the theory of shooting at moving targets. It is made very clear that

safety comes first and that the objective is to have fun while shooting in a safe environment.

Cobaw Sporting Clays was established in 2000 on an 800-acre sheep property, one hour north-east of Melbourne. It was experience from England that motivated Jon's father to establish the first Simulated Field shoot in Australia near Ballarat in Victoria during the 1960s. When they acquired Cobaw, Jon and his wife Cate quickly introduced a farm management plan with a particular emphasis on waterways and riparian lines. An exhausted quarry was converted into one of the wetlands that

creates an axis through the property. Within just five years, Cobaw had become a healthy ecosystem, teeming with wildlife.

As Cobaw was quite deforested, it took more than 130km of direct seeding to reintroduce the endemic vegetation that was once there. It was no mean feat collecting the local seeds, but the resulting mosaic of wildlife and habitat corridors is already showing benefits. Jon reports a marked increase in the number of birds and birds of prey.

"We've now got two nesting pair of wedge-tailed eagles and hawks on the property," Jon says. "We've also now got



Shooting takes place on highly revegetated land.



The entrance of Cobaw Sporting Clays.

five species of ducks resident and breeding, as well as owls and many other birds.”

A few of the difficult rises, some topped with enormous boulders, necessitated direct planting and Greening Australia, Tree Project, Land4Wildlife and the Department of Sustainability and Environment offered invaluable assistance. Of the 800 acres, it is estimated that 15 per cent was already native forest and another 35 per cent has been handed over to regeneration.

The property is still used for breeding fine wool merinos, as well as being the home of one of Australia’s most unique clay target shooting venues. As the sound of the gunfire echoes within the grassy gully where the four towers are set up, the alpacas and horses grazing nearby don’t even lift their heads. Across a ridge of bracken fern, bordered on one side by the state forest, the local wildlife are well attuned to the comings and goings

and show curiosity toward the visiting gunners. While Cobaw usually caters for small and neatly organised groups of guests, on this day there are three groups, with experience ranging from the novice being introduced to the joys of the sport, up to the more experienced gunner honing their skills for the approaching hunting season. Some of the guests are father and son combinations and the team of experienced instructors are beautifully managed to juggle these many levels of confidence and ability. Standing quietly behind each shooter, the coaches offer advice and assistance and this specialised tuition is part of the service.

The group behind me mingles quietly and as the morning excitement mounts, the conversation becomes more brisk in a relaxed air of friendly competition. AS this is a private facility with limited placings, this group booked four weeks in advance to secure a day to themselves,



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but it is not just large groups who come to shoot. On another day, a small family group hired a chauffeur to bring them out to celebrate the grandfather's 70th birthday. They left Melbourne at 10am, enjoyed their shooting, then relaxed by the fireside in the lodge before heading home again. They were back in Melbourne by 3pm.

Cobaw is believed to be the only facility currently equipped with targets thrown from up to 16 traps, some from the four 20m towers. This simulation of a flush shoot enables targets to be fired as high, low, incoming and crossers, sometimes all at once.

"Because of the number of traps in the air, we can throw targets quickly and at any angle," explains Jon. "Adjusting our many traps can vary the speed to increase the degree of difficulty. The beginners are catered for by intensive coaching and the experts have the targets that they find very challenging!"

It was the high overhead crossing targets that sorted the novices from the others and raised the tempo of competition.

One guest commented to me that he found Cobaw to be the best place to get practice for the forthcoming hunting season. Another guest, who regularly shoots overseas, claimed it to be unique in Australia and comparable to others he'd seen on a trip to the United Kingdom.

Cobaw Sporting Clays regularly hosts fully planned tours for its clients to shoot overseas. The most popular trip is to shoot pheasants in Yorkshire. Each year, they also provide days of partridge shooting in the nearby countryside during the season from May to September.

To take part in the shooting activities available at Cobaw Sporting Clays or to see their revegetation efforts, phone 03 5423 7146, email shoot@cobaw.com or visit their website at www.cobaw.com ●



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