

# Migratory Game Birds



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## **5 Important things to know:**

- North duck zone will open one week later than in previous years, resulting in a single statewide opener for the North, South and Mississippi zones on Sept. 29
- Elimination of the Horicon Canada goose Management Zone (resulting in a single statewide regular goose zone)
- Increase in the daily Canada goose bag limit to three birds per day and there is a second split in the Southern Canada goose zone resulting in a goose season that is open during the Christmas and New Year's holidays
- Registration of Canada geese and in-field validation of the Canada goose hunting permit is no longer required
- Check out [The Basics of Waterfowl Hunting in Wisconsin](#) document on the **Waterfowl Hunting** webpage along with other useful tools in our Hunter resources tab for a few tips and tricks!

PHOTO: Lee Karney/USFWS



# Ducks

The four most abundant ducks in Wisconsin's fall hunting harvest make up close to 70 percent of the total harvest, and include mallards, wood ducks, green-winged teal and blue-winged teal. Taylor Finger migratory game bird ecologist notes that many of the mallards and wood ducks harvested in Wisconsin come from birds that breed in Wisconsin, while about two-thirds of the blue-winged teal harvested in Wisconsin are raised in other prairie regions.

The US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has adopted a new timeline for the regulatory process of migratory game birds and this change has altered when the spring breeding waterfowl numbers are generated. These numbers were provided in mid-August and showed the 2018 continental breeding duck population estimate from USFWS was 41.2 million which is down 13% compared to 2017.

In Wisconsin, the 2018 spring waterfowl survey provided mixed results, with a total breeding population estimate of roughly 439,400 ducks. This estimate shows a slight decrease from 2017 and is right at the long-term average.



The trend in the total breeding duck population in Wisconsin has been relatively consistent the last ten years within the range of 450,000 total ducks. Mallards are the number one duck in the fall bag, and represent over 32 percent of total duck harvest in Wisconsin. The Wisconsin mallard population estimate of 216,652 was a 20% increase from 2017. The wood duck represents around 22 percent of the total fall harvest, and the 2018 breeding population estimate of 100,000 is slightly down from 2017 and is above the long-term average. The 2018 Wisconsin blue-winged teal breeding population estimate of

45,130 is down from the 2017 estimate. The best approach when evaluating the blue-winged teal survey data is to look at long-term trends and continental context. Wisconsin blue-winged teal breeding numbers have remained low compared to historic levels while continental numbers have shown dramatic increases during the late 1990s and in the last 10 years reaching record numbers in 3 of the last 5 surveys with estimates of 6-8 million breeding blue-winged teal. Roughly two-thirds of the blue-winged teal harvest during Wisconsin's regular duck season is supported by teal that nest outside Wisconsin.

# 2018 Canada Geese Forecast

The 2018 Wisconsin breeding Canada goose population estimate of 157,950 is similar to 2017 and just slightly above the average over the last decade. Wisconsin's resident breeding Canada goose population may be stabilizing at 140,000 after a long-term increase.

Two populations of Canada geese represent most Wisconsin's goose harvest during the fall. Locally breeding Canada geese represent over 90 percent of the goose harvest for the early season and roughly 60 percent of harvest during the late regular goose season.

Canada goose breeding survey methods in Ontario were revised in 2016 so a population estimate is not available. The new survey will provide an index of change in the future but at least 1 more year of additional surveys will be needed before we can determine if the population status is changing. Based on weather conditions and field biologist observations in 2018; the advent of spring conditions and nest initiation in northern Ontario were later than average, production was low at many sites in Manitoba and Ontario and gosling survival and young/adult ratios during banding operations were below average. Overall, we expect a fall flight of Canada geese from Ontario to be slightly lower than in recent years.



CANADA  
GEESE





Photo: Herbert Lange

Based on recent estimates, the continental mourning dove population is roughly 300 million, making it one of the most abundant birds in North America. The 10-year population trend for the eastern management unit (states east of the Mississippi) has been stable, showing a 0.6 percent increase. Hunters should expect to see doves in numbers similar to past years.

Department staff are tasked with managing dove fields every year throughout the state. The largest concentration of these fields is in the southern tier of counties. Typically dove fields are planted in either sunflowers, wheat, or other small grains. In 2018, staff is managing roughly 34 sunflower fields totaling 213 acres, 3 wheat field totaling 24 acres and 1 millet field of 3 acres. This equates to 38 dove fields totaling 240 acres planted specifically for dove hunting in the fall. All field locations can be viewed using [\*FFLIGHT\*](#) (The Fields & Forest Lands Interactive Gamebird Hunting Tool) or the new DNR hunting app ([link](#))



# WOODCOCK

During the past 35 years, the woodcock population across its range in the Midwest and northeast U.S. has shown a slight decline, which biologists believe is primarily related to changes in young forest habitat. However, in Wisconsin there is no significant increase or decrease in the 10 year trend. Interest in pursuing the “timberdoodle” throughout Wisconsin’s forests remains high with close to 15,000 hunters entering the woods in search of woodcock each year. Wisconsin has ranked second or third in the nation for woodcock harvest in recent years, with around 39,000 woodcock harvested each year. Overall, surveys in Wisconsin indicate a stable population. Hunters should expect to see woodcock numbers similar to the past few years and enjoy a quality fall hunt.

