

Identification



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Mourning Dove

The mourning dove looks like a slender, streamlined pigeon, which is not surprising since it belongs to the same family of birds as the domestic feral (or rock dove). Mourning doves are about a foot long, ranging in size from 11 to 13 inches, with males being slightly larger. Key identification features are the small head, pointed wings and the long tail that gradually tapers to a point. These tail feathers show large white spots when the birds fly away. Look for the black spots on their upper wings, close to the body. Doves also have a large dark spot below the eye. Their bill is thin and black while their legs and feet are a dull red. The upper body feathers range in color from grayish blue to grayish brown. They have grayish-brown backs and buff-colored undersides. On bright days, doves in flight appear gray or gray-brown, but in poor light they look black.

Doves are extremely swift fliers averaging about 30-40 miles per hour, but when they are alarmed they can reach 60 miles per hour. They have a steady, rapid wingbeat in flight. You may notice that doves can make rapid changes of pace and altitude. Listen for the noticeable whistling sound produced by the beating of their wings.



If you are going to hunt doves, you must properly identify your target or not shoot. Federal law protects all non-hunted migratory birds and prohibits their killing due to misidentification. Two other birds found in mourning dove habitat you should be on the lookout for are the kestrel (sometimes called sparrow hawk) and the killdeer. Male and female kestrels have different plumages, but both have gray heads with reddish crowns on top. Kestrels have two black marks on their white cheeks that look a bit like a handle-bar mustache with long sideburns. Males have blue-gray wings and a rusty back and tail. Females lack the bluish wings. In flight, the undersides of the kestrel's wings appear pale. Kestrels soar on flat wings, often with their tail fanned. When hunting, kestrels frequently hover in one spot with rapidly beating wings. If they are in a strong headwind, kestrels may remain fairly stationary with their wings held steady, much like a kite on a string. They often chase the birds they pursue in a direct and rapid fashion. Kestrels can often be seen sitting on exposed lookout perches, telephone poles or on wires. Kestrels' voices are a high and excited "killy, killy, killy."



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Kestrel



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Killdeer

Killdeer are small, long-legged shorebirds found in open fields and pastures, often far from water. Look for their distinctive dark breast bands. Adults have two breast bands while juveniles have only one band. Killdeer also have a rusty orange patch on the upper tail and lower back. Killdeer are seldom seen in large flocks. Listen for them to whistle their name "kill-deer, kill-deer, kill-deer" or a shortened "dee-ee".



As a responsible hunter you must familiarize yourself with mourning doves and other similar species before you begin hunting. By scouting and being extra careful you will avoid misidentification of these similar birds.

Recipes



From: Ecology and management of the mourning dove

Easy Grilled Doves

Contributed by Steve Young of Columbia, Missouri
With toothpicks, pin about a third of a strip of bacon around dove breast. Cook over a cool to medium fire for 20 to 30 minutes, but don't overcook. Sauce is optional.

Doves in Mushroom Soup

Contributed by Dick Vaught of Columbia, Missouri
30 dove breasts (marinated in milk)

- 2 (10 3/4 oz.) cans of cream of mushroom soup
- 4 soup cans of milk (2-percent or skim)
- salt and pepper to taste

Flour for dredging

Marinate dove breasts for about 30 minutes in milk (save milk). Remove doves and, while they are still wet, roll in flour that has been seasoned with salt and pepper. After dredging in flour, set the breasts aside for 10 minutes or so to permit flour to adhere better to doves. Place dove breasts in a large skillet of hot grease (Crisco shortening seems to brown them better). Be sure each breast is fried to a golden brown. Remove the breasts and drain grease, leaving brown cracklings in skillet. Replace dove breasts and cover completely with mushroom soup and milk. Stirring frequently to prevent sticking, let simmer for at least an hour (or until meat slides from bone). When gravy is smooth, ladle over a bed of cooked rice or mashed potatoes.

For More Information:

Ecology and management of the mourning dove. Baskett, T.S., M. W. Sayre, R. E. Tomlinson, and R. E. Mirarchi, Editors. 1993. Stackpole Books. Harrisburg, PA.

Mourning dove. In The birds of North America, No. 117. A. Poole and F. Gill, Editors. Philadelphia: The Academy of Natural Sciences; Washington, D.C.: The American Ornithologist's Union.

<http://www.dnr.state.wi.us>

Code of Conduct

1. Treat every firearm as if it is loaded
2. Always point the muzzle in a safe direction
3. Be sure of your target and beyond
4. Know the locations of your hunting partners
5. Positively identify your target and wait for a good shot
6. Obey all wildlife laws and report violations



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Mourning Dove Hunting In Wisconsin



This publication will help you better understand some of the details about this new hunting opportunity including dove biology, management and proper identification.

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Where Doves Live

The mourning dove is highly adaptable and can be found in many different habitats from urban settings to rural settings. Since doves love weed seeds and waste grain, you'll often find them feeding in harvested grain fields, old grassy fields, along rural roadsides or on other open disturbed ground that offers plenty of seeds. You can also find doves in open woodlots and near the edges of larger tracts of forests. For nesting habitat, doves prefer single trees or shrubs surrounded by open land. Doves prefer to roost and rest on exposed dead tree limbs, utility wires or poles.

Mourning doves are one of the most abundant, widely distributed migratory birds of our state. They are particularly numerous south of a line running from Green Bay to Eau Claire. Biologists have estimated that between 4 and 5 million doves migrate through Wisconsin each fall. They breed from central Canada to southern Mexico and in all of the 48 states in between. One segment of the mourning dove population breeds in Wisconsin. These doves leave our state each fall and follow their natural migration route to the southern United States and Mexico. Another segment of the dove population migrates into and through Wisconsin from Canada and other states. Some of these doves winter here while the remainder migrate through to southern wintering areas.



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Hunting

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources does not expect that the dove harvest in Wisconsin will be at the levels seen in some states to the south due to the doves' early migration from Wisconsin. The best hunting opportunities for doves will be early in the season. However, there are things you can do to enjoy and take advantage of the dove hunt.

To be a successful mourning dove hunter, begin scouting for potential areas in late August. Look for areas that have an abundance of small seeds or grain scattered on the surface of relatively bare ground, such as a recently harvested grain field. Doves will use these areas quite heavily. If roosting cover, water, and a good source of grit (such as a gravel road) are nearby to a food source your chances of finding doves will be very good. Keep in mind the daily routines of mourning doves. Doves fly from their roost to their feeding and watering holes early in the morning. Then the doves spend a good part of the day resting. Later in the afternoon, they return to the fields to eat and drink before retiring for the day. So early morning and late afternoon are the best times of day to scout. Find where the doves are and observe their patterns.

When gearing up for dove hunting, camouflage can be important. Anything out of the ordinary may spook doves, especially in heavily hunted areas. Wear camouflage that will match the area you are hunting in. Conceal yourself by hiding behind hay bales, in clumps of brush, or staying as close to the ground as possible. Consider using a dog for dove hunting. Downed doves blend in well with the grass and grain and a good hunting dog can be very useful.

Dove hunting will be the first hunting season open in the fall. This will allow you to enjoy the seasonable weather of September. Consider taking a novice hunter along and help that person learn hunting safety as well as such techniques as how and where to sit, how to lead a passing bird, and how to mark a downed bird.

Season, Bag Limit, and Regulations

Since the mourning dove is a migratory bird it is protected under the Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act. The act allows states to conduct managed hunts for mourning doves and other species.

Here are some important regulations to keep in mind while planning your hunt:

- A small game, sportsman's or patron's license is needed to hunt mourning doves.
- You do **not** need to purchase the state or the federal migratory bird stamp (e.g., "duck stamp") to hunt doves.
- Shooting hours are from one-half hour before sunrise to sunset.
- You must plug your shotgun with a one-piece filler that cannot be removed without disassembling the gun. It can only accommodate 3 or fewer shells.
- The daily bag limit is 15 doves and the possession limit is 30 doves. You may take only one daily bag limit in any one day.
- You must make a reasonable effort to retrieve all doves that you kill or cripple.
- The birds must be in your actual custody while in the field and cannot be given to another person while you are in the field regardless of whether or not they are properly tagged.
- You may not put or leave migratory game birds at any place or in the custody of another person unless you tag the birds with your signature, address, number of birds identified by species, and the date you killed them.
- Shooting doves or any other game from power lines is unethical. It may result in damage to private property which is punishable by fines or possible license revocation.
- Finally, you are required to enroll in the HIP (Harvest Information Program) and carry proof of such enrollment.

For a complete list of hunting regulations and shooting hours refer to the Wisconsin Small Game Hunting Regulations pamphlet.

Hunter-Landowner Relationships

Having good relationships with the landowners in your dove hunting areas are critical to a successful hunt. Always ask for permission to hunt on private land. Make sure you understand the landowner's agreement to allow you to hunt on his or her land: does the permission cover the entire farm, the entire season, does it include friends, and where should you park? Be courteous: Always close gates that you open, pick up your empty shot shells, do not litter and pick up the litter of others. Ask the landowner if he or she needs some help on the land. Spending a few hours or a day helping out can increase your chances of being allowed on their land for future hunts.

Management For Mourning Doves

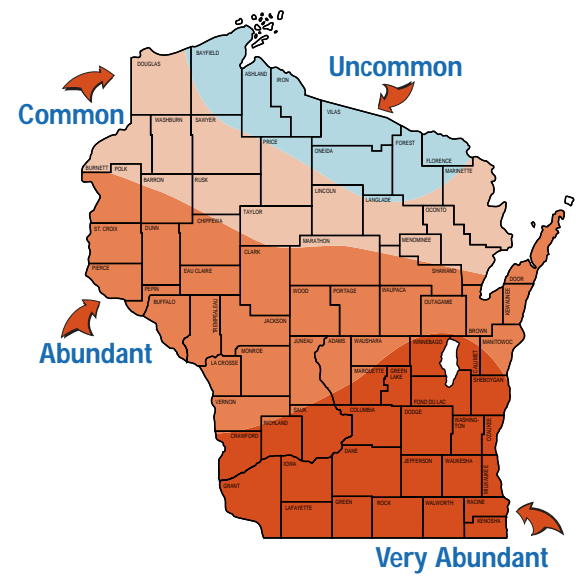
Mourning doves have four basic needs: food, cover, water and grit. Doves prefer to feed on open ground. Since they eat a wide variety of seeds and grains, the presence of open or bare ground may be as important as the availability of food. Shredding or discing of crop residue provides a good source of bare ground. The fields you manage should be at least 2 acres in size or larger. The key ingredient of feeding fields is their size and proximity to water, grit, and roosting sites.

Sunflowers are very beneficial plants for doves and many other species of birds. Sunflowers should be planted around corn planting time, but will die if ANY frost occurs once they are planted. In August these fields can be manipulated by cutting and shredding the plants. For fields with agricultural

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Relative Mourning Dove Density



Baiting

Mourning doves can not be hunted with the aid of bait. Doves are migratory birds and are subject to the federal baiting regulations that prohibit hunting any migratory game bird with the aid of baiting. Baiting is defined as the direct or indirect placing, exposing, depositing, distributing, or scattering of salt, grain, or other feed that could lure or attract migratory game birds to areas, or over areas, where hunters are attempting to take migratory birds. It is illegal to distribute or scatter grain, seed, or other feed after it has been already removed from or stored on the field it was grown. You can however hunt doves over manipulated agricultural crops (described later).

You may not hunt over any baited area where you know or reasonably should know that the area is or has been baited. If you have permission to hunt on someone else's land, check with the landowner to see if he or she knows of any baiting that may be occurring in the area. An example would be deer bowhunters on the land or neighboring land legally hunting deer with a bait pile.

Here is what the federal baiting regulation states: "nothing . . . prohibits . . . the taking of any migratory game birds, except waterfowl, coots and cranes, on or over lands or areas that are not otherwise baited areas, and where grain or other feed has been distributed or scattered solely as the result of manipulation of an agricultural crop or other feed on the land where grown, or solely as a result of normal agricultural operation".

For more information on the federal regulation on baiting, call or write your area U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service office:

Green Bay

1015 Challenger Court
Green Bay, WI 54311
(920) 465-7414
Fax: (920) 465-7410

Madison

4511 Helgesen Drive
Madison, WI 53718-6747
(608) 221-1206
Fax: (608) 221-1357

Onalaska/La Crosse

555 Lester Avenue
Onalaska, WI 54650
(608) 783-8420
Fax: (608) 783-8452

residue, light discing or shredding of stalks and remaining ears of corn and bean pods improves the field for mourning dove hunting.

More information regarding sunflower planting can be obtained from you local extension office or by calling (608) 266-8204 and asking for the Assistant Upland Wildlife Ecologist.