Identification

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.

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 coal 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

For More Information:
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 never shoot
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

This publication will help you better understand some of the details about this new hunting opportunity including dove biology, management and proper identification.
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 doves breed in Canada and fly through Wisconsin from Canada and other states. Some of these doves winter here while the remainder migrate through to southern wintering areas.

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 pursuing 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 bird feeding stations 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.
- You may not use or leave migratory game bird feeding stations 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 (Hunting 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.

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 migrating through Wisconsin 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 you 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 retreating 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 gazing 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 reasonable 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.

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 residue, light diskng or shredding of stalks and remaining ears of corn can be done to improve the field for mourning dove hunting.

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