

On Wisconsin Outdoors

With the Dick Ellis Experts

www.onwisconsinoutdoors.com

September 1, 2008

Longer Dove Season

Though heavily hunted, numbers increase

By Dick Ellis

Between 20,000 and 30,000 Wisconsin hunters harvest between 100,000 and 200,000 migrating or resident mourning doves annually. Apparently the delicate but prolific bird can withstand the heat. With a dove population increase estimated between 1 to 5 percent, the 2008 Wisconsin season that began this week will be 10 days longer, concluding November 9th.

The longer season was adopted so late that the change is not reflected in the Wisconsin 2008 Small Game Hunting Regulations pamphlet. According to a DNR media release, in June the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service offered states the option to adopt an additional 10 days of hunting. In August, the state Natural Resources Board approved the extension for Wisconsin.

Little wonder. According to state literature and website information, 500 to 600 million mourning doves migrate annually in the United States, and five to six million doves migrate through Wisconsin. With or without hunting, the birds suffer 60 to 70 percent annual mortality and have a life expectancy of less than one year. Predation, disease, hunting and accidents each take a toll. To compensate, the dove produces five to six broods of young annually. But, hunting is a biologically proven non-factor specific to survival of the species.

The mourning dove is the most popular game bird in North America, and probably the world. 39 other states, Mexico, and Central and South America hold mourning dove hunts. Wisconsin produces its share of the national fall flight and also draws journeying birds hatched north of the state destined for places south including Mexico, Florida and Texas.

A fierce debate led to Wisconsin adopting the inaugural season in 2003. Despite its popularity as a game bird, opposition to a season here kept the dove at the center of debate for years. Biological evidence showing that the dove has an extraordinarily short life expectancy even without hunting, suffers 40 percent mortality in the first year of life and employs a life strategy of producing multiple broods annually to compensate led the Natural Resources Board to follow a public mandate and recommend a season.

That hunt drew approximately 23,000 Wisconsin hunters, according to this column's file records, who harvested about 150,000 doves. Hunters may take 15 birds daily here,

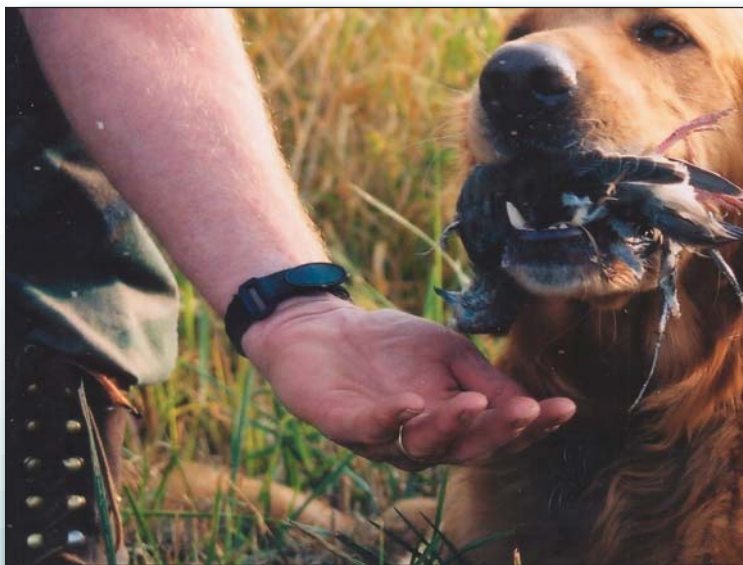


DNR wildlife habitat experts Brian Buenzow and Charlie Kilian wait in a corn field for mourning doves during Wisconsin's inaugural season in 2003. For the first time, a longer season beginning September 1 and ending November 9 has been adopted in Wisconsin.

with the season prior to the 2008 extension running about two months. Also new in 2008 is a requirement for nontoxic shot on National Wildlife Refuges and federally owned waterfowl production areas.

Unsure several years ago whether I would enjoy mourning dove hunting, I tried it. Today, although not an avid dove hunter, I

would highly recommend it, in particular for mentors introducing young hunters to the shooting sports. The early fall hunts usually combine mild weather, dog work, difficult but ample shooting opportunities with both flush and pass shooting on birds that can reach 45 miles per hour on the wing, and camaraderie; the perfect blend to introduce a young person to



In addition to providing excellent table fare and challenging wing shooting, the mourning dove season offers early dog flushing and retrieval work.



DNR Wildlife Biologist Charlie Kilian examines a mourning dove he flushed from a standing corn field in Rock County during the states inaugural season. Wisconsin has adopted a longer season for the first time in 2008.

hunting. Finally, the dove provides excellent table fare.

For my own mentors, I had sought out state wildlife experts Brian Buenzow and Charlie Kilian, who were not only charged with manipulating habitat to produce and benefit wildlife in Rock, Green, Lafayette, Jefferson, and Dodge counties, but both are dove hunters. Because

scientific data was extensively utilized to support a hunting season here, DNR wildlife managers are compelled to continue research on the mourning dove in Wisconsin and nationwide.

“With hunting,” Buenzow said, “comes responsibility. In recent seasons Wisconsin biologists were responsible for banding 750 doves statewide as part of a

picked grain or silage corn, the dove needs water, grit and roosting areas. Public hunting areas throughout Wisconsin often will have the food plots, water and roosting areas sought by the mourning dove. On Rock County public land, this observer for example also found sunflowers planted by the wildlife managers that serve as a draw all day long for single mourning doves to flocks of birds too large to count.

“If you find those four requirements or a combination of those, look for mourning doves,” Buenzow said. “The dove is very much a renewable resource. The whole principal of wildlife management is the same for controlling any surplus such as goose, pheasant, ducks, or deer. If the dove has 60 percent annually mortality, that percentage will be lost whether they are



Between 20,000 and 30,000 Wisconsin hunters harvest between 100,000 and 200,000 migrating mourning doves annually. But with a dove population increase between 1 to 5 percent, the Wisconsin season will be 10 days longer in 2008.

hunted or not. Disease, accidents, predation all subtract from the resource. The resource will not become instinct if it's hunted.”

Dick's Note: According to state literature, two birds found in mourning dove habitat, kestrels and killdeers, on the wing appear similar to the dove. It is the hunter's responsibility to properly identify a target or not shoot. In fact, federal law protects all non-hunted migratory birds and prohibits their killing due to misidentification. ^oW_o

national, three year project tracking where the birds migrate and where they're harvested.” Because Buenzow said the dove is “ubiquitous”, or everywhere, it can be hunted successfully in every county of Wisconsin. Drawn to agricultural areas, the further south the bird is hunted from the large northern forests, the higher the success rates. In addition to food sources like