

between the field and his/her primary means of land transportation. This is referred to as “field possession.” After field possession ends (at the primary means of land transportation), the hunter may give his birds to someone else provided they are tagged with the name and address of the hunter who killed the birds, the hunter’s signature, the total number of birds involved, and the date the birds were killed. Remember, on the opening day of the season, a daily bag limit is the possession limit and no hunter may possess more than the daily limit, tagged or not. After opening day, a possession limit is 2 daily limits although only one limit of 15 doves may be harvested per day. To receive free Migratory Game Bird Tags, send a size #10 self addressed stamped envelope to MDWFP, ATTN: Migratory Game Bird Tags, 1505 Eastover Dr., Jackson, MS 39211-6374.

The hunter must make a serious effort to retrieve any downed bird.

The hunter must have on his or her person a valid MS hunting license or proof of exemption and a MS HIP certificate, which is indicated by a “MB” on the sportsmen license or “HIP Certified” on a Point-of-Sale paper license.

Any auto-loading or repeating shotgun must be incapable of holding more than three shells while dove hunting.

Songbirds, hawks, owls, killdeer, nighthawks, chimney swifts, woodpeckers, and other species of birds are protected by State and Federal regulations and killing them or shooting at them is strictly prohibited.

Eurasian Collared Dove

The Eurasian collared dove is an exotic species that has made its way from the Bahamas to Florida and northward to Mississippi. This species can be found in most counties of the state, and it is more prevalent in residential areas and in close proximity to homes and farmsteads in rural areas. This dove is larger in size and lighter in color than the mourning dove and

has a thin black line on the back of its neck. Collared doves may be harvested and do not count towards a hunter’s daily bag limit on mourning doves.

QUESTIONS FREQUENTLY ASKED ABOUT BAITING

Can I legally hunt doves over top sown winter wheat?

Yes, as long as it is done in a manner consistent with a normal agricultural practice. For example, the planting of wheat for wildlife food plots, winter grazing for livestock, and a planting for agricultural erosion control are all considered normal agricultural practices.

Must wheat be sown on prepared ground? No. Wheat can be no-till drilled into unprepared ground. Also, overseeding of wheat or rye prior to harvesting soybeans, corn or cotton to establish a cover crop is recognized as a normal agricultural practice.

What is the planting rate for wheat? Wheat is to be planted at a rate not greater than 90 lbs (1 1/2 bushels) per acre that is **spread evenly across the area**. It may not be piled or clumped.

Can I sow a wheat field, say every three days, and hunt over it? No. It is not a normal agricultural practice to sow seed several times in quick succession. In the absence of drought or flood, a planting should be done only one time on a seed bed prepared sufficiently to reasonably ensure germination.

After a corn field is harvested, the entire field or strips are plowed up and planted in wheat, is this considered a legal field for dove hunting? Yes, if it is done in a normal agricultural fashion.

Can part of a field be bushhogged at different times, such as four rows now and four rows later, and so on? Yes. Manipulating a standing crop in this fashion is the most reliable way to attract doves over a longer period of time and to avoid any uncertainty regarding the legality of the practice to attract doves for hunting.

Can standing grains be bushhogged and additional grains be added to the field? No.

Can millet or sunflowers be top sown? No. Japanese millet is the only millet seed that is top sown, and it is normally done on mud flats for waterfowl. All other millets, corn, sunflowers, milo, and many other grains are covered with soil when planted and are planted in the spring and early summer.

Can I top sow wheat (broadcast) over an unprepared pasture? No. Winter wheat is not normally sown over pastures with adequate vegetative cover.

Can I plant a wildlife food plot in the fall and hunt doves that are attracted to it? Yes. As long as the proper planting rates and dates are followed, and it is done in a fashion considered to be a normal agricultural practice.

Can I harvest a corn, milo, or sunflower field and then redistribute the seed over the field? No. You can not distribute or scatter grain or other feed once it has been removed from or stored on the field where grown.

What can I do to have a legal field and a good dove shoot? The best way is to plant a grain crop preferred by doves that will ripen just prior to the time you want to hunt. After the grain is ripe and before the hunt, it may be knocked down or bushhogged. Preferred grains in Mississippi include both browntop millet and sunflowers. Maintaining bare ground areas by disking throughout the planted areas also will help attract doves.



Dove Field Preparation and Hunting Regulations in Mississippi

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DOVE HUNTING

Mourning doves are an abundant natural resource and are federally protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. The mourning dove is the most hunted migratory game bird in North America. Dove hunting is a popular hunting activity and social event in Mississippi .

This publication reviews and summarizes current rules on baiting, field preparation and other dove hunting regulations. As a hunter or land manager, it is your responsibility to know and obey all laws that pertain to the sport. Please remember that federal regulations are more restrictive for waterfowl hunting than for dove hunting. This guide is a reference for dove hunting only.

WHAT IS BAITING?

Primary dove hunting problems include baiting, hunting over bait, and a basic misunderstanding of what constitutes baiting. Federal law states that no person shall take migratory game birds on or over any baited area or by the aid of bait. Federal regulations further define baiting as the direct or indirect placing, exposing, depositing, distributing, or scattering of salt, grain, or other feed that could serve as a lure or attraction for migratory game birds to, on, or over any areas where hunters are attempting to take them.

10 DAY RULE AND DISTANCE

Any baited area is considered to still be baited for 10 days after the complete removal of all grains, salt, or other feed that is not a result of a normal agricultural practice. This rule recognizes that removing the bait does not remove the lure created, and that doves will still be attracted to an area even after the bait is gone. Hunting over, around, or near a baited area at any time during the 10 day period after the removal of all bait is illegal.

How close to bait can you hunt without breaking the law? There is no set distance, and court rulings vary depending on the circumstances. The influence of

any bait, which can only be determined on a case by case basis, will increase or decrease depending on many factors, including topography, weather, and dove flight patterns. Remember, however, that the law prohibits hunting if bait is present and could lure or attract birds “to, on, or over areas where hunters are attempting to take them.” All such bait (salt, grain, or other feed) must be totally removed for a period of 10 days before the area may be legally hunted.

WHAT IS LEGAL?

Good dove hunting is frequently found where grain and other feed is distributed in the ordinary course of farming activities. Federal hunting regulations recognize this fact. Doves may be legally hunted where grain or other feed is standing or has been manipulated in the field where grown. Additionally, doves may be hunted where the crop is grown for them or other wildlife.

Bona Fide or Normal Agricultural Practices

There are many agricultural practices that normally occur in Mississippi during late summer or fall that may attract doves. The Latin term “bona fide” included in the hunting regulations mean in good faith or without fraud. Normal agricultural practices for planting or harvesting include many factors such as time of year, rates of application, methods, seed source, equipment efficiency, etc. Federal Court rulings define normal agricultural practices as having the primary goal of growing and harvesting a crop - not the enticement of migratory birds. Merely imitating agriculture as a ploy to circumvent the regulations is not acceptable. Questions about what constitutes a normal agricultural practice should be addressed to the Mississippi State Cooperative Extension Service (MCES). The MCES also has a publication titled “Dove Field Preparation and Hunting Regulations that can be found on the internet at www.msucare.com.

Harvesting

The harvest of grain crops such as corn, soybeans, milo, and others may attract doves. During the harvest, seeds may fall to the ground and become available for wildlife. Hunting over normally harvested fields is legal.

However, a field would be considered baited for doves if harvested grain is redistributed on the field after harvesting.

Livestock Management

Another practice that may attract wildlife by making grain available is allowing livestock to enter a field and feed on either harvested or standing crops. This practice is known as “hogging down” a field and may involve several different grain crops. Livestock also can feed on grain or salt provided in a feed lot, which is a small enclosed area where livestock are fed to increase their weight. Feed which has been scattered or wasted by the animals around the feeding receptacles may be attractive to doves. Dove hunting is legal on these areas as long as they are considered a normal agricultural practice. However, deliberately depositing grain, salt, or other feed to improve dove hunting is illegal.

Soil Erosion Control

Timber harvesting operations, haul road construction, and other normal agricultural practices which expose soil often occur during late summer or fall. Establishing a cover crop by seeding exposed areas as soon as possible following disturbance to prevent soil erosion is a practice recommended by the Mississippi State Cooperative Extension Service and the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks. To legally hunt doves over an area seeded for soil erosion, the planting must be done following normal, agricultural practices using acceptable planting materials and seeding rates. Soil erosion goals can be achieved by deviating outside of the seeding dates recommended for the purpose of establishing a grain crop. However, normal practices require that seeding for soil erosion control be done as soon as possible (typically within 10 days) following the final disturbance of the site.

Manipulation of Crops for Wildlife

Crops such as browntop millet, sunflowers, corn, milo, wheat, or other small grains can be grown for wildlife management purposes, which include hunting, and the mature plants can then be manipulated to improve dove

hunting. This manipulation does not have to be related to any type of agricultural practice and can include mowing, dragging down, bailing and disking. However, no distribution of additional grain or redistribution of grain may occur once removed from the field.

Responsibility of the Dove Hunter

The migratory bird hunting regulations are established under the authority of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Unfortunately, a number of hunters may find themselves shooting on a baited field without knowing it is baited. The hunter has the responsibility to determine if the field is baited.

What can hunters do to carry out this responsibility?

- 1.) Familiarize yourself with Federal and State migratory game bird regulations.
- 2.) Before beginning to hunt, make the host or owner aware that you are concerned about hunting in a baited situation. Ask the host or landowner how they prepared the field. Make sure that no additional grain, salt, or other feed has been added to the field to “sweeten” the hunting area.
- 3.) Look before you hunt. Prior to entering the field with a gun, look over the hunt area. Learn to identify situations which might indicate a baited field: presence of grain not normally sown in the fall (i.e., corn, sunflower, milo, or millet, which are not there as a result of a harvest operation); piles or long rows of grain; presence of rock salt; grain present in several different stages of growth (example: some sprouts 3" tall, some sprouts 1" tall, some freshly sown grain); an unusually large number of doves coming to a freshly plowed field (look closely under the soil for seed that is not a result of a normal agricultural practice).

Other Things to Remember About Dove Hunting

No more than the daily bag limit of 15 birds may be in the hunter's possession on the dove field. Each hunter must keep his/her birds separate from those of other hunters in the field. The hunter must maintain possession of his/her birds at all times in the field, and