

Of The Outdoors | Gary Howey

Great Shooting & Great Eating

BY GARY HOWEY
Hartington, Neb.

The first of September hunters in South Dakota and Nebraska headed out to their favorite pond, harvested wheat-oat fields and shelterbelts to take a shot at dove hunting.

When I say, “take a shot”, I should have said take many shots as dove hunting can be a challenge! Doves are the aerial acrobats of the bird’s kingdom as they seldom fly in a straight line, darting from side to side and changing altitude in the blink of an eye as they zig zag their way across the sky.



Gary
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It does not take much of a load to down a dove, as long as you can catch up with and get a bead on the little buggers.

Do not feel bad if you miss several birds, since studies indicate that the average dove hunter will shoot as many as 10 shells for each bird that he drops.

I am sure ammunition manufacturers lick their chops as dove season nears because they know that ammunition sales are going to increase dramatically.

Any gauge shotgun will work for dove hunting. The group of hunters I hunt with use every gauge imaginable. As they use 12, 20, 28 and 410 gauge shotguns.

As far as what shells to use, we pretty much agree on Winchester AA 8 & 9 loads.

Our plan on opening day is to set up around a local farm dam or stock pond. Our most productive hunting occurs late afternoon until sun down, as this is when doves make their way to these areas for water.

You will want to look for ponds with open ground around the edge of the water and especially those with dead trees or dying trees nearby as they give doves a place to set and rest or observe the pond before flying down.

It does not seem that doves are in a hurry to do anything until you take a shot at them, as they will set in the trees or on a hill above a pond for long periods before coming in.

The reason open ground around



SUBMITTED PHOTO

When dove hunting around a farm or stock dam, it is a good idea to have a good dog to retrieve those birds that fall into the water.

a pond is important because that is where the birds land and then they will saunter down to the water.

Ponds with heavy vegetation along the edge just do not attract as many doves because the heavy cover makes it impossible for the birds to get to the water to drink.

If you are going hunting around ponds, a good hunting dog is necessary, as much of your shooting will be over water and a dog can retrieve those doves that fall into the water.

Most hunters enjoy hunting doves because of the challenge, it is also an excellent opportunity to get both you and your dog tuned up and out for some early season exercise and practice.

Doves feed heavily on weed seed, preferring hemp-marijuana and ragweed. If the pond you are hunting has a weed patch near by, chances are you will get plenty of dove activity in the area.

When hunting ponds, it is best to have several groups of hunters

on the surrounding ponds, which will keep the birds moving as they jump from pond to pond.

On large ponds, it is a good idea to have several hunters stationed around the water. Doves are such erratic flyers that you never know which direction they are coming in from and by having hunters stationed around the pond or on several different ponds in the area; you will have more shooting opportunities as well as keeping the birds in the air and on the move.

Other areas where hunters can locate good numbers of doves include areas adjacent to shelterbelts or heavily wooded areas where the birds roost and near hemp or other weed patches where the birds feed.

During the early season, it does not take much to draw doves into a pond, but as the season progresses, doves become more wary and can be tough to attract. In the late season, dove decoys will help to bring them in.

Like the waterfowl hunters, those after doves are finding that some sort of movement such as a wind driven or a motorized decoy near the area you are hunting will help to bring these educated migrating birds into range.

The movement of the decoy wings helps to draw attention to the area you want the doves to be.

Unlike other types of hunting, camouflage is not very important when you are dove hunting. We wear a natural or neutral color such as brown or light green to blend in. Around small ponds, it is easy to find a wash out, downed tree or a clump of weeds that you can hide yourself in.

Some states like Nebraska require a HIP number while hunting migratory birds, so be sure to check the state game laws of the state you are hunting in before heading out into the field.

If you want to sharpen your wing shooting skills and enjoy some fine eating, give dove hunting a try! It’s a great way to get some early season shooting and dog training in!

Gary Howey, originally from Watertown who now resides in Hartington, Neb. is a former tournament angler, fishing and hunting guide. He is the Producer/Host of the award winning Outdoorsmen Adventures television series, seen on KTTM/KTTW- Fox TV, Sioux Falls/Huron, S.D. 6:30 am Saturday and on the MIDCO Sports Network Thursday at 5:30 pm and Sunday at 10:00 am. The show airs in nine states in the upper Midwest. He and Simon Fuller are the hosts of the Outdoor Adventures radio program on Classic Hits 106.3, ESPN Sports Radio 1570 in Southeastern South Dakota and Northeast Nebraska and in Northwest Iowa on KCHE 92.1 FM. If you are looking for more outdoor information, check out www.outdoorsmenadventures.com.

OUTDOORS DIGEST

Hunters, Anglers & Trappers Can Carry Licenses On Smartphone Devices

PIERRE - Hunters, anglers and trappers in South Dakota will notice now when logging into their account through the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks’ (GFP) online licensing system that their small game, fishing or trapping license has a bar code in the upper right hand corner. This bar code allows GFP conservation officers to electronically scan the license on smartphone devices (Android, iPhone, etc.) while in the field in lieu of a paper copy.

Before heading into the field this fall, hunters, anglers and trappers can log into their GFP account from their device to view their small game, fishing or trapping license and take a picture or screenshot of it with their device (Android, iPhone, etc.).

This electronic version is an acceptable method of carrying a small game, fishing or trapping license. If hunter, anglers or trappers choose to print and carry a paper copy of their small game, fishing or trapping license, that continues to be an allowed practice.

This does not apply to federal waterfowl stamps, tags and licenses mailed from the GFP licensing office.

As technology evolves, GFP is committed to actively engaging with hunters, anglers and trappers across the state to provide them with the digital services that make it easier to do business with us.

Mentored Neb. Youth Hunt Opportunities Available This Fall

LINCOLN, Neb. – Two mentored youth hunting programs are available this fall for recent Hunter Education graduates.

These programs of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and partner organizations allow participants to take their new-found hunting and shooting skills into the field, paired up with adult mentors. These safe, educational programs help new hunters explore what it takes to become a successful hunter while learning about conservation, preparation and responsibility.

The programs are:
Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever Youth Mentored Hunt Program – This is open to firearm education graduates ages 11-15. Youth will participate in hands-on activities to learn shooting, hunting techniques, conservation and dog handling, in addition to the hunt itself. For dates and details, visit: <http://nebraskapf.com/youth-mentor-hunts/>.

Mentored Youth Archery Program – This is open to bowhunter education graduates ages 12-17 who have not graduated from high school. Hunters are paired with qualified bowhunter education instructors and qualified mentors for a full archery season. Mentors will teach youth how to scout, hang tree stands, interpret animal sign and care for the harvest. There are program locations near Omaha, Gretna, Lincoln, Ashland, Plattsmouth and Grand Island.

BY SAM COOK

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(Duluth, Minn.)

Grouse hunters in both Minnesota and Wisconsin should see seasons similar to last year’s, if not a bit better, according to grouse experts in both states.

The ruffed grouse season opens Saturday and continues through Jan. 31 in Wisconsin’s northern zone. Minnesota’s statewide ruffed grouse season opens Sept. 19 and continues through Jan. 3.

Annual spring grouse drumming surveys in both states put the grouse index at about the same levels as in 2014. But good weather during the nesting and brood-rearing season should bode well for the birds, biologists and others said.

“We had a good bump (in drumming counts) last year, and the counts were stable this year,” said Nick Larson of Duluth, Minnesota regional director for the Ruffed Grouse Society. “I think it’s going to be a better season than the drumming counts indicate.”

Ted Dick, upland game bird coordinator for the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, agrees.

“I’m going out on a limb and saying recruitment (of young grouse) was pretty good,” Dick said. “You want weather in June that’s warm and on the dry side, and it

was pretty warm and dry in June. That can make a difference in the fall even if the drumming counts held steady from last year.”

Greg Kessler, Wisconsin DNR wildlife biologist at Brule, is equally optimistic.

“The late June and July brood conditions were really good,” Kessler said. “I’ve heard lots of reports from foresters who are seeing young grouse. And on my own, not during work hours, I’ve seen a fair number of broods myself. My anticipation is a better fall than we’ve seen in the last four or five years, although nowhere near the peak of the cycle.”

Minnesota’s ruffed grouse drumming counts this past spring were statistically unchanged from 2014, according to the DNR, after being up 34 percent in 2014 compared to 2013. This year’s counts turned up 1.3 drums per stop in the northeast survey region, which is the heart of grouse range in Minnesota. That was the same as in 2014. Observers recorded 1.1 drums per stop statewide. Minnesota’s grouse counts vary between lows of about 0.6 drums per stop during bad years to about 2.0 during peak population years.

Population Cycle

The ruffed grouse population in northern states tends to rise and fall on about a 10-

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year cycle. Minnesota’s ruffed grouse numbers peaked most recently in the fall of 2010, and Wisconsin’s in 2011. Populations tend to peak near the beginning or end of each decade, with lows occurring mid-decade.

Population cycles are only part of what determines how many birds hunters will find

in the woods each fall. Spring nesting success also plays an important role in determining bird numbers.

“I’ve always thought a good spring and a good hatch will give hunters a better season than the drumming counts indicate,” said the Ruffed Grouse Society’s Larson. “You have so many

young birds out there, and they seem to be the ones people contact. They’re easier to hunt.

“I’m not a biologist, but overall, it’s felt like a beautiful summer. In June, we didn’t have those drizzly, foggy days we’re so accustomed to.”

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