

## 2006-07 Louisiana Hunting Season Highlights

- White-winged doves may be included in a hunter's 12-bird aggregate daily bag limit and possession limit of 24 birds. As in the past, Eurasian-collared doves and ringed turtle doves may be taken only during the open mourning dove season with no bag limit, provided they remain identifiable. In cases where no distinguishing features (fully feathered wing or head) are present, birds will be included in the daily bag limit for mourning doves.
- Louisiana will keep two waterfowl hunting zones through the 2010 season. Fifty-three percent of hunters surveyed preferred the current season structure. A 60-day season will be adopted with dates as follows; unless the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) should mandate unanticipated changes.
 

West Zone:  
Nov. 11 - Dec. 3. and  
Dec. 16 – Jan. 21

East Zone:  
Nov. 18 - Dec. 3 and  
Dec. 16 – Jan. 28
- Proposed statewide opening date for the spring 2007 turkey season is March 24. The season in Area A would extend to April 22, Area B to April 15 and Area C to April 8. Daily bag limit is one gobbler and 2 gobblers per season.

## Stay Legal When Managing Dove Fields

Dove hunters in Louisiana will be given 70 days this season to pursue their sport. The season is divided into three splits: Sep. 2 – Sept. 10; Oct. 14 – Nov. 19; and Dec. 16 – Jan. 8. Fields managed for doves can be manipulated in a number of ways to make them more attractive feeding areas. Brush-chopping, wind-rowing, burning and herbicides are most often used. The key to remember is that doves will not scratch through ground cover to reach their food. The wide variety of seeds from both native and planted sources that doves will consume should be exposed on bare ground. Although manipulation of any standing crop to provide this setting is legal, seed or grain cannot be reintroduced to the field. Crops planted in spring and summer are often the key to success in the fall. Problems occur when individuals have not prepared but rather have attempted to “plant” a wheat field in mid-August under the guise of a winter food plot for white-tailed deer.

To stay legal, the Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service has established recommended planting dates and seedbed preparation methods that the USFWS constitute as a normal and, therefore, legal agricultural practice. In planting wheat, September 1 is the earliest recommended date for establishment. Seedbed preparation involves disking, planting and covering seed to 1-inch maximum depth. In rare cases, top-sowing wheat is legal, but only when sufficient rainfall to cause germination occurs within 12 hours of planting. Wildlife management plantings can be successful without the high grain yields associated with many commercial grain operations. Planting dates are therefore in some cases outside dates in which crop establishment is intended to produce high grain yields. When done in a legitimate manner, crops can be grown solely for the purpose of attracting wildlife and those engaged in these activities need not be classified as “farmers.”

## September Dates of Importance to Hunters and Fishermen

The weekend of September 23 and 24 are important dates for anyone involved with hunting and fishing in our state. Louisiana will celebrate National Hunting and Fishing Day on Saturday September 23 with a host of activities scheduled at the Wad-dill Refuge in Baton Rouge. The event offers hands-on activities including canoeing, skeet shooting and a fishing contest. The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries is hosting the event and will have a catfish pool where young anglers can catch their first fish. Admission and all activities are free. This event annually highlights the importance of our hunting and fishing heritage. For more information, contact Thomas Gresham with LDWF at 225-765-2496.

On Sunday September 24, “Hunters for the Hungry” will have their annual “Clean Out the Freezer Day” in which individuals can drop off frozen fish and game at several locations in Baton Rouge and the surrounding parishes. The event is also scheduled in other areas of the state throughout the fall months. Any person who partakes in hunting and fishing knows the bountiful harvest that we are often rewarded with for our efforts. In many cases much of the game we accumulate through one hunting season is still around when the following season opens. This was the situation that prompted a group of local hunters in the Baton Rouge area to start working on a program to donate their surplus game to the needy in the surrounding parishes. The year was 1994, and the program they started became known as “Hunters for the Hungry.” Since that time the amount of game donated each year has reached a level whereby local food banks have been used as storage and distribution facilities. In addition to “Clean Out the Freezer Day,” hunters throughout Louisiana now can share freshly harvested game with the needy in our state by bringing their field-dressed carcass to a number of processing facilities located within and near most of our major cities. Donated deer are processed at no expense to the donor, and the soup kitchens and shelters are given fresh meat, a commodity that is greatly needed. For more information on these programs, please contact Don Reed at 225-683-5848.

## Wildlife Species Profile: Mourning Dove (*Zenaida macroura*)

The mourning dove is the most sought after game bird in the United States with higher harvest numbers than any other game bird. Its popularity is no exception in Louisiana, where hunters from across the state wait in anticipation for opening day, which usually occurs during the first weekend in September. The sport is popular among hunters for several reasons. The swift and erratic flight of mourning doves offers a sporting challenge that equals or exceeds the wing shooting skills of most hunters. Although the target may be a difficult one to catch up with, dove hunting does not involve all the paraphernalia such as boats, nonlead shot, special boots, decoys, calls and blinds required with most duck hunts. Shotgun and shells, along with a seat that doubles as a carrier for shells and bagged birds are all that are needed. Dove season has also historically been the first open season in the fall, providing an opportunity for hunters eager to return to the field after six months of inactivity. The tradition of dove hunting in the South has become such a social affair that the hunt is almost secondary to the food and comradery associated with the event.

Mourning doves average about 12 inches in length and, although members of the pigeon family, they are smaller than the domestic pigeon. Their common name is derived from the mournful call made during the nesting season. Nesting has been observed during every month of the year, with the principal period from March through August. During this time, doves will make five or six nesting attempts, producing an average of three successful broods. An average pair of doves will produce five young each year. Multiple nesting provides a mechanism to offset the numerous failed breeding attempts and small clutch sizes (two eggs) that doves endure.

The major reason for failed nesting attempts is poor nest construction. A skimpy platform of sticks and grass is often all that is done in nest construction. These are nothing more than shallow platforms that often lose the eggs they hold at the least disturbance. Both males and females help in the building of nests, and incubation lasts about 14 days. The entire nesting operation from construction through care of the young lasts only a month.

The diet of mourning doves is almost entirely plant seeds. An exception to this immediately follows hatching when young are fed "pigeon milk" by both parents. Pigeon milk is a whitish liquid, secreted from glands in crop walls. The substance is very nourishing and provides an excellent food source during early stages of development. A wide variety of seeds from agricultural crops, grasses and weeds are consumed by adult birds. Grit is taken on a regular basis as a means to grind these seeds in the digestive process. Unlike many other birds that obtain water from their diet, mourning doves must have access to standing water. The wide variety of seeds consumed by mourning doves makes many agricultural operations easy areas to manipulate for the benefit of these birds. Traditional row crops of corn, soybeans and grain sorghum provide excellent feeding areas, along with fields of sunflowers and millets planted specifically for doves. Natural mortality in mourning doves is estimated to be as high as 70 percent during the first year. The ability of an early September dove season to offset some of this mortality into a hunters bag limit is a sound wildlife management practice.



## Critter Corner: Coyote (*Canis latrans*)



Coyotes are classified as outlaw quadrupeds in our state, making their take legal year-round during daylight hours by anyone possessing a valid Louisiana hunting license. Historically, coyotes were not found east of the Mississippi River, and their arrival in Louisiana occurred around 1950. Their presence was made possible by man-induced changes on the landscape that led to a breakdown of the isolating mechanisms between coyotes and red wolves. These changes led to the formation of hybrid populations that spread into ranges formerly occupied exclusively by red wolves. Coyotes would eventually win the genetic battle and, unlike red wolves, were able to adapt to the loss of wilderness areas within their new range. The demise of the red wolf provided suitable habitat that would eventually allow coyote populations to expand into the entire eastern United States. The extensive network of roads is also believed to have provided a corridor that coyotes readily used to travel over and eventually occupy the new areas. Preferred coyote habitat is fairly open, brushy country or idle farm lands bordered by timber. They den in gulleys, under roots or overhanging banks and in loose, sandy soil where they often dig a hole in the ground or usurp a hole formerly occupied by others. The breeding season is in late winter and early spring followed by a gestation period of approximately 60 days. Young pups usually number from five to seven and are weaned about eight weeks of age. Both parents participate in the feeding process and, when the pups are eight to 12 weeks of age, begin teaching the young to hunt for themselves.

Coyotes can mate with domestic dogs and produce fertile progeny

known as coy-dogs. These crosses are unlikely to ever develop sufficient numbers in the wild for several reasons. Breeding seasons for the male and female coyotes are synchronized with both sexes coming into heat in the late winter. Dogs as a group have no annual reproductive cycle with females coming into heat arbitrarily twice each year on average. Male dogs, however, are usually constantly in breeding condition. Coy-dogs born in the wild, therefore, usually have a dog as their male parent. These young are at a marked disadvantage since the male dog has no interest in his pups, unlike the coyote male parent that shares the work of feeding the young. Surviving male coy-dogs also share the male dog's disinterest in rearing the young, along with the male coyote's restricted season of rut.

**Control Measures:** Coyotes are opportunistic predators taking advantage of livestock, poultry, game birds, game mammals and occasionally pet dogs and cats. Their omnivorous eating habits also include a wide variety of carrion and plant material. Predation on white-tailed deer in Louisiana occurs predominately during the fawning season and hunting season. Predation on fawns occurs any time by chance when these predators and prey meet, while usage during hunting season is most often the result of crippling losses or offal. Trapping and shooting are the two most often used control measures, although in many instances one can be more effective in allocating resources other ways. Rather than spending time on trying to eradicate coyotes, managers should strive to manipulate land to provide for the maximum acres of prime fawning habitat scattered within a given area. When this is provided, fawning will occur over a wider range, lessening the chances for coyotes to find fawns concentrated in small areas. Fields of tall grass and forbs provide excellent cover for does to hide their fawns, and the vegetation serves to disrupt wind movements that carry what little scent these young deer emit. These areas also provide excellent habitat for rabbits, mice, snakes and other small animals whose population increase serves as an alternate food

source for coyotes. Research has also suggested that fruit-bearing plants such as persimmons and blackberries also tended to buffer the impact of coyotes preying on deer, rabbits and other animals.

Other management factors to consider involve achieving an appropriate harvest of antlerless deer to achieve a more balanced sex ratio. This in turn will push the breeding cycle into a narrower time frame, with the majority of does getting bred during their first estrus cycle. Fawns conceived under these conditions will drop within a much narrower time period. This increase in potential prey over a short period is known in ecology as the "satiation principle." Predators are overwhelmed with potential prey in such a manner that they cannot effectively consume all the fawns before the fawning season ends. If lethal control is still a management consideration, it should be noted that the battle is one that will most likely be lost. Coyotes exist in a social structure that, when hit with population reduction measures, tends to respond by producing more young. Females will give birth to as many as 10 to 12 pups in instead of the usual five or seven. Furthermore, the population shifts from older animals that regulate themselves, often by killing or displacing each other to maintain dominance and territory, to younger individuals in higher numbers, often having a greater impact on deer populations.

The prowess and cunning of the coyote is noted by one of the earliest written accounts of their existence when William Clark of the famed Lewis and Clark expedition made the following entry in his journal on August 12, 1804: "A prairie wolf come near the bank and barked at us this evening, we made an attempt but could not git him, the animale barks like a large ferce dog." Captain Clark mistakenly used the name "prairie wolf," since at that time coyotes were unknown east of the Mississippi River. The point, however, is that more than 200 years ago, this coyote managed to avoid becoming a scientific specimen, just as many others in the future avoided similar fates for different reasons.

## **Plant Species Profile:** **Nuttall Oak (*Quercus texana*)**

Nuttall oak is one of 13 species of oaks in the red oak group that occur naturally in Louisiana. Like all oaks in this group, it possesses bristle-tipped leaves, darkish gray-brown bark and acorns with higher levels of tannin than those species classified as white oaks. It is one of only a few commercially important species found on poorly drained soils of the Gulf Coastal Plain and north Mississippi and Red River valleys. Although naturally found on these wetter sites, Nuttall oak can easily be managed as an excellent ornamental tree in a wide variety of upland sites. This fact is evident from its occurrence on the main LSU campus in Baton Rouge as one of the most widely distributed ornamental species. Nuttall oak is most easily confused with Shumard oak (*Quercus shumardii*) where the species are both planted as ornamentals on upland sites. Where grown naturally, Shumard oak will always be found on upland sites far removed from wetter Nuttall oak sites. Although Nuttall acorns are not as much a preferred food source as white oaks acorns, they have a unique characteristic that greatly enhances their benefit to wildlife. Other oak species found in Louisiana tend to drop nearly their entire yearly acorn crop over a short period while Nuttall oak tends to drop acorns over an extended period. This phenomenon allows wildlife to take advantage of Nuttall acorns throughout the winter and early spring, thus buffering against the "feast and famine" cycle experienced with other oak species. Nuttall oak acorns have a distinctive cap with scales extending up onto the projection holding the acorn to the twig. This characteristic makes it readily identifiable from all other southern acorns.



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