Missouri's dove hunters urged to be safety-conscious during 2012 season
Sports
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Dove hunters will need to be extra conscientious about safety this year, according to the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC). The reasons include weather and the timing of opening day. MDC Hunter Education Coordinator Tony Legg is urging hunters to review hunting safety measures that are especially important when hunting on specially managed dove fields.
Legg says that opening day of dove season this year falls on a Saturday (September 1st). Most hunters will not have to take a day of vacation to enjoy the excitement of the dove opener.

The largest dove concentrations will occur around food sources. Doves feed mainly on seeds, including those of natural vegetation, such as ragweed and various grasses, and grain crops, especially sorghum, millet, corn, wheat and sunflowers.

Each year MDC plants hundreds of patches of land on conservation areas (CAs) with grain to create wildlife food plots. Some of these are mowed before the dove season opener each year to make the grain available to doves and other wildlife and to create superb dove hunting.

This year's unusually dry weather has hampered the growth of crops planted for doves on CAs. That means fewer high-quality dove fields in a year of peak participation. In addition, the drought has resulted in an early corn harvest, which will likely spread out the birds instead of concentrating them on a few fields.

Legg said a large number of hunters can use the same field safely if all are courteous and safety conscious. More important than inconveniencing other hunters is the issue of safety. Legg said taking up a shooting position less than 50 yards from the nearest hunter dramatically increases the possibility of a serious injury. If a field already has as many hunters as it can accommodate with this minimum spacing, he urges late arrivals to wait at the field edge until someone shoots his or her limit and leaves, making room for another hunter.

Or, you could go somewhere else. Legg suggests scouting to identify flight paths that doves use going into and leaving managed dove fields on CAs. Another alternative is getting permission to hunt harvested crop fields on private land adjacent to CAs and hunting doves on their way across public land to those dove magnets.

Legg said hunters often are so focused on managed dove fields that they neglect other good hunting spots on CAs.

For those who choose to hunt managed dove fields at CAs, Legg recommends the following precautions to help ensure safe hunts: Wear hunter orange, Protect your eyes, Keep shots to blue sky, Keep shots in your zone of fire, Keep track of other hunter's whereabouts, Don't shoot cripples, Bring a retriever, and remember that everybody needs to use common sense.

MDC lists the locations of managed dove fields at mdc.mo.gov/node/8905, or you can call the nearest MDC office and ask for information about dove fields in your area. The agency urges hunters to visit dove fields before the season to see if crops have matured.

Missouri's dove hunting season runs from Sept. 1 through Nov. 9. Mourning, collared and white-winged doves all are legal. The limit is 15 doves of all three species in the aggregate daily and 30 in possession.

Dove hunters ages 16 through 64 must buy a Small Game Hunting Permit to pursue doves. All dove

hunters 16 and older must have a Missouri Migratory Bird Hunting Permit for dove hunting.

Full details of dove hunting regulations are found in the 2012 Migratory Bird Hunting Digest, available wherever hunting permits are sold, at MDC offices or online at www.mdc.mo.gov/node/3641.

Spent shotgun shells are litter. Hunters who leave behind empty shells risk getting citations for littering.

Hunters must keep birds they kill separate and identifiable from those of other hunters. Having two or more hunters put their doves into one cooler or other container could violate this requirement unless they use individually identified bags or other means to keep the birds separate.