



Credit: Jim Stuart

Dove Hunting for Beginners Lesson Plan / Instructor Guide

COURSE TITLE: Dove Hunting for Beginners

INSTRUCTIONAL GOAL: Students will learn the basics of how to hunt dove, some of the gear and equipment needed, as well as some of the pertinent rules and regulations.

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES: Upon completion of this block of instruction the participant(s) will be able to:

1. Name the three species of doves that can be hunted in New Mexico.
2. Name the three hunting techniques used to hunt doves.
3. Name the daily bag limit for mourning and white-winged dove.
4. Name one of the four types of sporting arms that can be used to hunt mourning and white-winged doves.
5. Name another name for a female dove.
6. Name the species of dove that can be hunted year-round.
7. Name the bag limit for Eurasian collared-dove.

INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS: PowerPoint lecture.

HANDOUTS: New Mexico Small Game Hunting Rules & Information Booklet
<http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us/home/publications/>

COURSE DURATION: Approximately 30 minutes.

CURRICULUM REFERENCES:

New Mexico Department of Game and Fish website, Hunting tab, Information by Species, Upland Game, Dove. <http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us/hunting/information-by-animal/upland-game/>

Biota Information System of New Mexico (BISON-M), <https://bison-m.org/>.

The Cornell Lab website, "All About Birds," <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/>

"Mourning Dove Facts," <https://animalstime.com/mourning-dove-facts/>

Mysticurious website, "What a mourning dove symbolizes," <https://mysticurious.com/what-does-mourning-dove-symbolize>

Partners in Flight, "Population Estimates Database,"
<http://pif.birdconservancy.org/PopEstimates/Database.aspx>

ADDITIONAL READING MATERIAL: NA

SAFETY CONSIDERATION: Don't use loaded firearms in and around the home.

EQUIPMENT, PERSONNEL, AND SUPPLIES NEEDED: Laptop (with presentation uploaded), projector or screen, jump drive with presentation or uploaded to computer, power cords (if needed), extension cords (if needed) and New Mexico Small Game Hunting Rules & Information Booklet. <http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us/home/publications/>

NOTE: Please check out additional reading material and check out references for more material to look over.

TARGET AUDIENCE: Beginning and novice level dove hunters.

COURSE PREREQUISITES: None.

EVALUATION STRATEGY: Written Final Test.

AUTHOR & ORIGINATION DATE: John Martsh, June 28, 2020.

REVISION / REVIEW DATE(S): N/A.

REVISED / REVIEWED BY: N/A.

CRITERION TEST:

1. Name the three species of doves that can be hunted in New Mexico.
2. Name the three hunting techniques used to hunt doves.
3. What is the daily bag limit for mourning and white-winged dove?
4. Name one of the four types of sporting arms that can be used to hunt mourning and white-winged doves.
5. What is another name for a female dove?
6. What species of dove can be hunted year-round?
7. What is the bag limit for Eurasian collared doves?

CRITERION TEST ANSWERS:

1. Mourning, white-winged and Eurasian collared.
2. Stationary hunting, pass shooting and flushing.

3. 15, singly or in aggregate.
4. Shotguns, muzzleloading shotguns, bows and crossbows. (any one)
5. Hen.
6. Eurasian collared-dove.
7. Unlimited.

COURSE OUTLINE:

- I. Introduction
 - A. Give name and Title
- II. Give Goals and Objectives
- III. Species of Doves
- IV. Definitions
- V. Preseason Scouting
- VI. Hunting Techniques
- VII. Clothing
- VIII. Essential Gear and Equipment
- IX. Rules and Regulations
 1. Know all the game laws regarding dove hunting.
 2. Remain ethical.
- X. Conclusion

COURSE CONTENT:

Course Introduction and Overview

Dove Hunting for Beginners. Why should someone become a dove hunter? Doves are super abundant in many parts of the country. They offer the shooter a challenging target with their small size and erratic flying. Dove can be hunted with a minimal investment in gear and equipment. Doves migrate and are hunted in the fall, when the weather is still nice. Doves are incredibly easy and fast to field dress. The season to hunt them is three months long compared to five days for big game. Lastly, dove meat is lean, hormone free, delicious dark meat.

Goals and Objectives

My goal for this presentation is to inform the novice and beginning dove hunter about the basic techniques needed to harvest their first dove. Additionally, students will learn about the gear and equipment needed and some of the rules and regulations.

The objectives are that at the conclusion of this presentation, the student will be able to:

1. Name the three species of doves that can be hunted in New Mexico.
2. Name the three hunting techniques used to hunt dove.
3. Name the daily bag limit for mourning and white-winged dove.
4. Name one of the four types of sporting arms that can be used to hunt doves.
5. Name another name for a female dove.
6. Name the species of dove can be hunted year-round.
7. Name the bag limit for Eurasian collared-doves.

Instructor Notes:

Show photographs of the different species of dove.

Species of Doves

All doves are strong, fast fliers, sometimes making sudden ascents, descents and dodges, with their tails stretching behind them. Doves are primarily seed and grain eaters, but may supplement their diet with insects and snails. They consume tiny pebbles and sand that aid in the digestion process. They forage on the ground in small groups, perch on bird feeders or nest in big shade trees. According to the Partners in Flight population database estimates, the total United States population of mourning dove is 130 million, Eurasian collared-dove is 8.6 million and white-winged dove is 5.2 million. That translates into a lot of hunting opportunities in New Mexico. Although most doves live an average of five years because of disease, predation and accidents, a banded 31-year-old mourning dove was recovered and a banded 21-year and 9-month-old white-winged dove was recovered in Mexico.

New Mexico has three species of doves that can be legally hunted. These are mourning, white-winged and Eurasian collared. Each of these species has unique physical attributes which make identifying them possible. In addition, each species has specific habitat requirements.

Mourning dove are also called rain dove, because some Native Americans believe the dove's cooing could cause rainfall. This distinct looking dove has a gray colored body, a pale, peach colored belly, a small black spot on its throat and large, black oblong spots on its wing coverts. The tail is long, thin and pointed when perching and walking but in flight it is long and fan shaped. The beak and eyes are black and the legs are pink. Males are roughly the same size as females, have a rose-colored chest and their heads are an iridescent blue-gray. This dove ranges from three to six-ounces in weight and a total length (from beak tip to tail tip) of nine to 12 inches. Mourning doves can fly fast, up to 55 miles per hour. They are migratory, often heading south in late August and early September, to warmer locations. The young of the year birds are the first to

migrate, followed by the females and finally the males. Some birds, especially males, don't migrate at all, to have a "jump" on prime spring breeding areas. Migration occurs during daylight hours in large flocks. In March and April, birds fly north to breed and nest. These doves can be found in every open or semi-open habitat in the United States, including deserts, prairies, farm and ranchland, urban and sub-urban neighborhoods and forest clearings.

White-winged dove are a larger bodied bird than the mourning dove. The body has a brown hue, the belly is a light gray, there is a black streak along its cheek and a white stripe runs along the lower edge of the resting wing. The tail is long and rounded with white tips. These birds have orange eyes, a blue eye ring and red legs. Weight varies from 4.5- to 7-ounces and the total length is between 10- and 13-inches. They are typically found in the desert southwest, Texas and the southeast coastal states in the United States. Some sub-populations are migratory but the majority are year-round residents. White-winged doves eat mostly spent grains and other agricultural crops like wheat, sunflower, milo, corn and safflower. They require water and will fly miles to get it when necessary. Their drinking is usually done in the early morning and late evening. Whenever drinking, they will land nearby so that they can survey the area for danger before approaching the water.

Eurasian collared dove are a non-native, invasive species in New Mexico. This dove is native to Asia and Europe, and escaped captivity in Nassau, Bahamas in 1974. From there it first entered the United States via Florida in the 1980s. It has since spread to a majority of the states. In New Mexico, it is considered upland game because it doesn't migrate like the other two species. The body is gray-brown, there is a black half circle shadowed by white around the back of the base of its neck. Its belly is pink and the tail is long and square. Large black pupils make the eyes appear black, though they are surrounded by thin red irises. It has short, red legs and the bill is black. It is the longest and heaviest of the three harvestable dove species. Their weight varies from 5 to 8.5 ounces with a total length of 12 to 14 inches. They usually are found in agricultural, sub-urban and urban areas and are not shy of people. In rural environments, they can be seen around grain silos, farmyards and livestock pens where spare grain is available. In urban settings, they favor bird seed feeders and bird baths.

Definitions

Male dove - cock

Female dove - hen

<p><u>Instructor Notes:</u></p>
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<p>Show photographs of pre-season scouting and two hunting techniques.</p>
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Pre-season Scouting

The best time to scout would be a week (or less) before dove season starts. Since doves are migratory, they could be in a location for a few days and then move on. It's not uncommon for a spot to be covered with birds and then be desolate the very next day. In general, look for water (stock tanks, ponds, rivers, creeks, farm ponds) and food (dairies and farms that grow corn, milo, sunflowers, safflowers and wheat). It is beneficial to scout as many areas as possible, so you

have backup locations if your “go to” spot is suddenly vacated. Look for dove footprints on the ground or doves perched in trees or nearby powerlines in these locations.

When you have located areas to hunt, determine the land status. This is important because whether public or private, the land status will determine what agency or landowner is in charge of the land. The field workers at these agencies could offer hunting tips if asked nicely. If the land status is private, talk with local landowners. Many landowners will be more than willing to let a polite hunter harvest depredating dove off of their land. Make sure you obtain written and signed permission to hunt on private land. The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish leases dove hunting access to some private lands through a program called Open Gate. Please click on this link: <http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us/hunting/maps/open-gate-program/>, for a list of these properties statewide.

Hunting Methods

There are three hunting methods used to hunt doves. The first method is known as stationary hunting. The hunter sits down, close to a food or water source the doves are actively utilizing. A comfortable, elevated sitting position is preferable and an upside down five-gallon bucket works great. This technique works best around dawn and dusk hours when doves are most active. The hunter should try to hide behind any natural concealment available. Dove decoys could be placed around the feeding or watering area to give live birds the confidence to fly low or land. When a dove comes within shooting range, the hunter stands, mounts the shotgun, leads the dove with the front sight and squeezes the trigger. If the action is fast and furious, the hunter must remember where each dove has fallen to retrieve later. When using this method in a group of two or more, safety dictates that each hunter stick to their specific location and practice safe shooting lanes throughout the hunt.

The second method is known as pass shooting. A hunter hides in a spot that offers natural concealment or in a blind created from natural vegetation or artificial materials. If trees, boulders, bushes, briars, corn or wheat is available, the hunter can hide behind them. When none of this concealment is available, the hunter can construct a blind out of fallen branches, twigs, logs, grasses or other vegetation or they can use burlap or canvas held up with two poles to hide behind. A hunter will sit on a downturned five gallon bucket within the blind. The blind is placed in an area where birds are known to fly over at a low elevation. The doves are either flying to, or from, a nearby inaccessible (to the hunter) watering or feeding location. There is little to no chance of the birds landing anywhere near the blind and the hunter shoots at birds that pass over at a low altitude. The hunter shoots at overhead or passing birds as they come into shotgun range. Depending on the situation, dove decoys could be used to lure the birds to fly lower over the hunter's location. If doves are consistently flying low (within range) fifty or more yards away, then change locations.

The third method is known as flushing. A hunter either tries to sneak up on a dove they have spotted or tries to scare an unseen bird from vegetation or other cover they are hiding behind or in. When the dove flies into the air, this is called flushing. In this method, the hunter is always moving, either to a spotted dove or through an agricultural crop or heavy vegetation the doves could be hiding within. Binoculars can make spotting resting or loafing birds easier. A hunting vest

allows the hunter to be mobile. This method is especially effective around mid-day, when the doves tend to be loafing or resting in the shade. When a bird flushes, mount the shotgun, follow it calmly with the front sight, lead it appropriately and then gently squeeze the trigger.

Clothing

Any weather appropriate clothing can be worn for dove hunting. Almost all of the walking will be a short distance, so a comfortable pair of sneakers or boots is recommended. A cap or hat would work to keep the sun out of your eyes. Doves have keen eyesight, so avoid bright clothing colors. Darker tones are best: dark blue, dark green, brown, gray and black.

Instructor Notes:

Show photographs of the different gear used to hunt dove. Also, show the equipment needed to clean and store the meat.

Essential Gear and Equipment

There is some essential gear that the dove hunter needs to take into the field. This includes a sporting arm, ammunition, binoculars with a harness, a hunting vest or five-gallon bucket, hearing protection and a hunting license and stamps. The equipment that can stay inside the vehicle includes: a fillet knife and game shears, a cooler and a gallon freezer bag.

Mourning and white-winged doves can be hunted with four different sporting arms. These include: shotguns, muzzleloading shotguns, crossbows and bows. Since Eurasian collared-dove are designated as an invasive species, they can be taken with a larger variety of sporting arms. These include: shotguns firing shot, muzzle-loading shotguns, rim-fire firearms, muzzle-loading firearms, bows, crossbows and pellet guns that are .177 caliber and larger.

The most common sporting arm used by dove hunters, by far, is the shotgun. The other sporting arm types are rarely used for doves and aren't recommended for beginners, so we will focus on the shotgun. A semi-automatic or pump action, would be perfect for the beginner to take multiple, fast shots. Doves are small targets and they fly fast and erratically. Bolt action and break action shotguns would not be recommended for the beginner because they either cycle shells slower or reduce the number of shotgun shells available for the hunter to shoot. Doves can be shot with a range of gauges, including: twelve, twenty, twenty-eight and .410. A majority of hunters use either twelve or twenty gauge.

Doves are soft bodied birds, and the wider chokes tend to work better. They allow less shotgun shot to penetrate the meat. Since doves are fast fliers, the wider chokes, such as improved cylinder and modified, allow the shotgun pellets to spread out faster for a higher probability of hitting a bird. Remember not to shoot a dove from too short a distance with a shotgun; this could ruin the meat since the shot pellets didn't have enough yardage to disperse. Whatever choke you use, make sure your shotgun magazine has a plug. The plug resembles a plastic dowel with a stopper at the end. To be legal, the shotgun has to be plugged to allow no more than two shotgun shells to fit inside the magazine.

With the shotgun being the most common sporting arm for dove hunting, a hunter can pick from a variety of shot sizes. Since doves don't require non-toxic shot, lead filled shotgun shells can be used (the only exception being when hunting on La Joya and W. S. Huey Wildlife Management Areas). These are less expensive than steel and other non-toxic metals and on average have a longer effective range. For dove, 2-3/4" shells are the perfect length in any of the shotgun gauge sizes. The most effective shot sizes tend to be a bit larger than imagined because they will allow the hunter a greater total range. For instance, shot sizes #5, #6 and #7 will allow the hunter a closer shot if the bird is close than #7.5, #8 or #9. This is because the larger shot will present a less dense pattern up close and won't ruin all the meat on a small bird. Conversely, the larger shot will travel a farther maximum range than the smaller sized shot. That means the total effective lethal range will be greater with the larger shot sizes and very little meat will go to waste. Probably the best all-around shot size will be #6.

Binoculars can help a hunter locate a dove in a tree, on a fence, resting on the ground, feeding or drinking. Doves are small, so whether scouting or hunting it is best to look for movement to spot them. When using the flushing method of hunting, binoculars will allow the hunter to spot the dove from a distance without being seen. This will allow the hunter to assess available cover and concealment to devise a successful plan of approach. A binoculars harness alleviates neck fatigue, frees your hands and makes binoculars instantly accessible.

A lightweight hunting vest with lots of pockets is perfect for the dove hunter using the flushing method of hunting. This vest allows the hunter to be mobile. The pockets allow the hunter to store ammunition, a hunting license, harvested doves and a plastic grocery bag to put doves inside of before depositing them into a vest pocket. If hunting using the stationary or pass-shooting method, a five-gallon bucket with a handle is recommended. The hunter could sit on an upside-down bucket, or one with a lid, waiting for doves to fly in. When finished hunting, doves and spent shotgun shells could be stowed inside the bucket on the walk back to the vehicle.

Hearing protection is crucial when shooting firearms in any situation. The two types of hearing protection are ear muffs (fit over the ear) and ear plugs (fit inside the ear canal). Ear plugs cancel out more noise, are cheaper, and more portable than ear muffs. On the other hand, ear muffs are easier and faster to put on than ear plugs. They also tend to last longer and are harder to lose than ear plugs. Choose the best hearing protection for you.

Always have a hunting license and the required stamps with you in the field. These include: a game hunting license, a harvest information program (HIP) number and a habitat management and access validation. A habitat stamp is required if hunting on BLM or Forest Service lands. Also, all youth under 18 need either a hunter education number or a New Mexico Mentored-Youth hunter number. Keeping these documents on your person will save you a long walk back to your vehicle if a Conservation Officer checks you while actively hunting.

The following equipment can be kept inside the vehicle. A sharp fillet knife and game shears can make fast work of field cleaning. Doves are easy to clean; the feathers and skin can be pulled off by hand.

Head, legs, wings can be snipped off with the game shears, if keeping the bird whole. Then the bird can be gutted with the fillet knife. If breasting out your doves, just use the fillet knife to cut out the breasts after pulling off the skin and feathers.

Be sure to keep a clean gallon freezer bag inside your vehicle. Once you are done cleaning your doves, they can be stored inside the freezer bag. This will go into the cooler with frozen ice packs to keep the meat cool.

Instructor Notes:

Show a slide with a Top Ten list of rules and regulations.

Rules and Regulations

All of the rules and regulations pertinent to dove hunting won't be listed here, because there are too many. It is each hunters' responsibility to know all of the laws and rules prior to hunting any game species. Studying the current small game proclamation and having a copy of it in the field will allow the hunter to know the rules and follow them. I will list a few of the major rules and regulations, but make sure you know all of them before going dove hunting.

1. Mourning and white-winged doves can be hunted half an hour before sunrise until sunset.
2. Eurasian collared dove may be taken half an hour before sunrise until half an hour after sunset.
3. Eurasian collared dove can be hunted year round and there is an unlimited bag and possession limit.***
4. The bag limit for mourning and white-winged dove is 15 singly, or in aggregate. The possession limit is 45.***
5. North Zone mourning and white-winged dove season is September 1 through November 29. South Zone season is September 1 through October 28 and December 1 through January 1.***

***Bag limits and season dates are subject to change, please consult the latest Small Game Hunting Rules & Information booklet for the most up-to-date information.

It is unlawful to:

6. Shoot at game on, from or across any paved, graded or maintained public road or within the fenced right-of-way of any paved, graded or maintained road.
7. Use live protected species as decoys to take or attempt to take game species.
8. Hunt protected species using licenses, permits, stamps or validations belonging to another individual or take or attempt to take a protected species for another person.
9. Shoot at protected species or artificial wildlife from a motor vehicle.
10. Take migratory birds by baiting (placing or directing placement of feed, for the purpose of causing, inducing or attempting to take any migratory game bird). An area is considered to be baited for 10 days after the removal of the bait.

It is encouraged to talk to fellow hunters if you see them attempting to violate any game laws. This includes asking them to pick up any litter they might have accumulated while hunting. Most hunters aren't intentionally trying to break game laws, but instead are unaware of specific ones.

Remember that just because something is legal, doesn't make it ethical. For instance, shooting 100 Eurasian collared-doves is legal, but if you won't consume all of them then it is unethical.

Conclusion

Even though it isn't mandatory for individuals eighteen and older, a hunter education class is strongly encouraged for everyone to take. This class will teach the beginner how to safely operate different types of firearms, how to hunt legally and ethically, how to cross fences and other barriers alone and with a friend and vital shot placement on different game animals. These are just a few of the many topics that will be covered in a hunter education class.

Remember to always have fun when you're dove hunting. A mentor is highly beneficial for a novice because they can go over all the rules and regulations, help with hunting locations and answer any questions a newbie might have. They can also let you use their gear while learning the ropes.

After you know how to hunt dove, please share this knowledge with someone else who has never attempted this fun activity. Dove hunting is not hard for an experienced hunter to teach an interested person. There is minimal amount of inexpensive gear necessary compared to other forms of hunting, they can be hunted during mild weather, populations are robust, they are easy and fast to clean and they provide healthy, delicious meat.

Since there are three species of doves found in New Mexico, competitive types can try for a "Dove Slam". This could mean competing against yourself to harvest all three species within one or two seasons, or competing against fellow hunters to see who can accomplish a slam first.

Post Test

1. Name the three species of dove that can be hunted in New Mexico.
2. Name the three hunting techniques used to hunt doves.
3. What is the daily bag limit for mourning and white-winged dove?
4. Name one of the four types of sporting arms that can be used to hunt mourning and white-winged doves.
5. What is another name for a female dove?
6. What species of dove can be hunted year-round?
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