

# Waterfowl Hunting for Beginners

## Lesson Plan / Instructor Guide

**COURSE TITLE:** Waterfowl Hunting for Beginners

**INSTRUCTIONAL GOAL:**

Students will learn the basics of how to hunt waterfowl and some of the essential and non-essential gear, 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 hunting techniques used to hunt waterfowl.
2. Name five pieces (from a total of 8) of equipment that are essential for hunting waterfowl.
3. Name three pieces of non-essential equipment (from a total of 8).
4. Name the most common gauge of shotgun for waterfowl hunting.
5. Name the legal booklet every waterfowl hunter should always have on their person.
6. Name the time of day a waterfowl hunter can start shooting.

**INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS:** PowerPoint lecture.

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

**COURSE DURATION:** Approximately 30-40 minutes.

**CURRICULUM REFERENCES:**

New Mexico Department of Game and Fish website, Conservation tab, State Game Commission Lands, Northwest. This will list Waterfowl Management Areas open to hunting.

<http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us/conservation/state-game-commission-lands/>

**ADDITIONAL READING MATERIAL:**

“Waterfowl Identification in the Central Flyway” booklet. Free at New Mexico Department of Game and Fish offices, published by the Central Flyway Waterfowl Council.

“Duck Hunting in New Mexico”, off of the Realtree website.

<https://www.realtree.com/waterfowl-hunting/duck-hunting-nation/2018/new-mexico-duck-hunting>

**Ducks Unlimited, free cell phone application.** This application allows the user to view identification information for most waterfowl species (including photos), view migration map updates, listen to duck sounds, see sunrise and sunset for your location and many more features.

**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 and 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 waterfowl hunters.

**COURSE PREREQUISITES:** None.

**EVALUATION STRATEGY:** Written Final Test.

**AUTHOR & ORIGINATION DATE:** John Martsh, March 28, 2020.

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

**REVISED / REVIEWED BY:** N/A.

**CRITERION TEST:**

1. What are the three hunting techniques used to hunt waterfowl?
2. Name five pieces (from eight total) of equipment that are essential for hunting waterfowl.
3. What are three pieces of non-essential equipment (from eight total)?
4. Name the most common gauge of shotgun for waterfowl hunting.
5. What legal booklet should a waterfowl hunter always have on their person?
6. What time of day can a waterfowl hunter start shooting?

**CRITERION TEST ANSWERS:**

1. Spot and stalk, decoying and pass shooting.
2. Shotgun, shotgun shells (ammunition), waders, facemask, hearing protection, fillet knife, hunting license and stamps and waterfowl identification booklet. (any five)
3. Binoculars, decoys, dog, calls, flashlight/headlamp, water, cooler and a gallon size freezer bag. (any three)
4. 12 gauge.
5. Small game proclamation for current year.
6. ½ hour before sunrise.

**COURSE OUTLINE:**

- I. Introduction
  - A. Give name and title.
- II. Give goals and objectives.
- III. Hunting techniques
- IV. Talk about 7 P's of waterfowl hunting.
  - A. Pre-Season scouting.
    1. This can save you tons of time and effort during the hunting season if you do your homework ahead of time.
  - B. Picking a shotgun and ammunition.
    1. Gauge and choke.
    2. Ammunition variables.
    3. Other legal sporting arms.
  - C. Equipment for the field
    1. List eight pieces of essential and eight pieces of non-essential equipment.
  - D. Practice
    1. Shooting and patterning.
    2. Identification of species.
    3. Calling.
  - E. Partnering

### F. Proclamation

1. Always have one with you in the field.

### G. Post-season scouting.

### V. Rules and Regulations

1. As a waterfowl hunter it is critical you know all the laws and regulations.
2. Remain ethical. Just because something is legal doesn't make it ethical.

### VI. Conclusion

## **COURSE CONTENT:**

### **Course Introduction and Overview**

**Waterfowl Hunting for Beginners.** Why is waterfowl hunting important? Hunting is a crucial tool used to control the overpopulated snow goose nesting grounds and manage the overall duck population as well as species sub-populations. Waterfowl hunting is a fun activity that pumps funds into the local sporting goods stores where waterfowl hunters buy their gear and equipment. Taxes on shotguns and ammunition, through the Pittman-Robertson Act, are distributed back to state game and fish agencies to benefit wildlife. In addition, the Federal Duck Stamp, purchased by waterfowl hunters 16 years old and older, generates a tremendous amount of revenue each year. Since the program's inception in 1934, over six million acres of habitat have been acquired using these revenues and more than 300 National Wildlife Refuges have been created or expanded. Spread the word— hunters benefit wildlife every day in multiple ways.

### **Goals and Objectives**

The goal for this presentation is to inform the novice and beginning waterfowl hunter about the basic techniques needed to harvest their first duck or goose. Swans, although waterfowl, cannot be harvested in New Mexico. Additionally, students will learn about the essential and non-essential waterfowling equipment 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 hunting techniques used to hunt waterfowl.
2. Name five pieces (from eight total) of equipment that are essential for hunting waterfowl.
3. Name three pieces of non-essential equipment (from eight total).
4. Name the most common gauge of shotgun for waterfowl hunting.
5. Name the legal booklet every hunter should always have on their person.
6. Name the time of day a waterfowl hunter can start shooting.

### **Hunting Techniques**

There are three types of hunting techniques used to hunt waterfowl. All of these techniques would benefit from pre-season and post-season scouting. The first technique is known as spot and stalk, also known as jump shooting. A hunter spots waterfowl on a body of water, such as a river, stock tank, pond or lake, or loafing or feeding on land, and uses available cover to sneak within shotgun range. Birds jump into the air and the hunter shoots from the shoulder. The difficulty of this increases exponentially the larger the flock because there are more eyes paying attention. This is the simplest, rawest (purest) form of hunting because it requires minimal gear and super stealth to get within range.

The second technique is known as decoying. Fake ducks or geese, called decoys, are placed in a body of water, or field, to imitate a real flock. These might lure in birds flying overhead with or without calling. There are a variety of decoy types including hollow shell, full body, rag/windsock and silhouette (2-D). Decoys can be made from a variety of materials, come in different poses, and are made to mimic different species of waterfowl. They can be placed on land or on top of the water. Calling needs to be gauged by the hunter. If ducks are trying to land in the decoys there is no need to call, but if they are flying high a minimal amount of calling could be attempted. Resist the urge to overcall, as this could scare the birds away. In this technique, the hunter is typically hiding in a blind constructed of natural vegetation or man-made materials. The hunter either shoots the duck before landing or after it is flushed upwards after landing near the decoys.

The third hunting technique is known as pass shooting. A hunter hides in a blind in a location where birds are known to fly over at a low elevation. The birds are either flying to, or from, a nearby inaccessible (to the hunter) roosting 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. Depending on the situation, decoys and/or calling could be attempted. This would be to coax the birds to fly lower over the hunter's location. If flocks are consistently flying low (within range) fifty or more yards away, then change locations.

### **Seven P's of Waterfowl Hunting**

The Seven Ps of waterfowl hunting include: 1) Pre-season scouting, 2) Picking a shotgun and ammunition, 3) Purchasing equipment, 4) Practicing, 5) Partnering, 6) Proclamation and 7) Post-season scouting.

#### **Pre-season Scouting**

The best time to scout would be two weeks (or less) before the season starts because prior to that you risk seeing no ducks because the migration hasn't begun. It is recommended to scout as many areas around the state as possible so you have backup locations if your favorite spot is loaded with hunters during the season. Look for micro-locations where waterfowl like to swim, feed, sleep and loaf. Try to locate the flight paths they use to fly to their feeding and roosting locations. When you have selected places to hunt, research the land statuses. Are they Bureau of Land Management, Forest Service, Bureau of Reclamation, Wildlife Management Area, State Park, Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District or private land? Once land status is determined,

review rules for that land and talk to the law enforcement officer in that area for tips and special restrictions (is it only open certain days of the week, does it close before sunset). If the land status is private, talk with local landowners. Some landowners don't enjoy waterfowl eating their crops and will readily give permission to hunt. Make sure you obtain written and signed permission for private land.

### **Picking a shotgun and ammunition**

Waterfowl can be hunted with the following gauges of shotgun: 10, 12, 16 and 20 gauge. The smaller the number, the larger the diameter of the bore. In general, a 10 gauge is easier (assuming the same choke, shot size, shell length and shot material) to harvest a duck than a 20 gauge. The larger bore diameter means more shot/pellets are going downrange to hit the target. In general, a beginner should stick to a 12 gauge, unless the gun is too heavy or the recoil overpowering. In that case, the beginner should try a lighter, more "advanced" shotgun, like a 20 gauge.

A choke is a cylindrical piece of metal screwed into the muzzle of a shotgun. Its purpose is to decrease the diameter of the bore, thereby tightening the pattern of shot extruded from the barrel. The most common choke sizes for waterfowling are improved cylinder and modified. The modified choke has a tighter pattern than the improved cylinder and is suited for longer yardage shots.

Lead (toxic) shot has been outlawed for hunting waterfowl in the United States since 1991. This was due to the approximately 1.5 million ducks dying each year from lead poisoning throughout the 1980s. Most of these deaths were due to the birds ingesting spent shot from the bottom of lakes, rivers and streams when feeding. Common non-toxic, legal shot used for waterfowl hunting includes: steel, copper-clad iron, bismuth-tin and tungsten fused with a variety of other metals. By far, the cheapest and most commonly used of these is steel.

Shotgun shells (ammunition) come in three different lengths, 2  $\frac{3}{4}$ ", 3" and 3  $\frac{1}{2}$ ". Any of these lengths will work for waterfowl. The longer the shell, the more shot/pellets (spherical metal balls) it will hold. The 2  $\frac{3}{4}$ " and 3" shell is common for all sizes of ducks and the 3  $\frac{1}{2}$ " shell more suited for geese.

The third component of ammunition is shot size. Another name for shot is pellet. Common waterfowl shot sizes include: 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, B, BB and BBB. The higher the number, the smaller the shot is. The smaller the shot size, the more spheres of shot that will fit inside the shotgun shell. So, an ounce of #4 steel will contain 192 pellets, while an ounce of #1 steel will have 103. Common duck loads are 2  $\frac{3}{4}$ " and 3" shotgun shells in #2 or #3 shot sizes and for goose 3  $\frac{1}{2}$ " inch BB or BBB.

A shotgun is not the only legal sporting arm waterfowl can be hunted with. Other legal arms include: bow and arrow, a muzzle-loading shotgun firing non-toxic shot and a crossbow and bolts. These are advanced methods to hunt waterfowl, because of the difficulty involved, so we won't be covering these. However, if a student would like to view waterfowl hunting with a bow and arrow, on their own time, they can search for "Tim Wells Bow Hunter" on YouTube.

#### Instructor Notes:

Show photographs of the different essential and non-essential equipment used to hunt waterfowl.

The most important piece of equipment for a waterfowl hunter is the shotgun. If regularly cleaned and oiled, a shotgun should last a lifetime. Invest in a high-quality shotgun from a known manufacturer as it should be more durable and require less maintenance than an off-market brand. The most common gauge for waterfowl hunting is the 12 gauge.

The three main shotgun actions for hunting waterfowl are break, pump and semi-automatic. The break action can be sub-divided into single and double barreled, and the double barreled can be further sub-divided into side by side and over and under. A break action shotgun breaks open at the breech of the muzzle and the barrel rotates upward to load. The over and under has one barrel mounted on top of the other and the side by side has two barrels mounted beside each other. A pump action uses a sliding forearm handle to eject a shell and load a new one. A semi-automatic ejects a shell and loads a new one with each trigger pull. These function on gas, inertia or recoil. A break action will limit the hunter to one or two rounds because only one shotgun shell can be loaded per barrel. The pump and semi-automatic need to be equipped with a plug to limit the magazine capacity to two shotgun shells and one in the barrel to be legal. In general, a semi-automatic, twelve-gauge shotgun would be perfect for the beginner, because they load the fastest and there are fewer moving parts. If your shotgun doesn't come with a sling, this would be a wise investment. Slings the shotgun on your back frees both hands to set up decoys or cushion a fall if you happen to trip. Always walk to and from your hunting location with an unloaded shotgun.

Buying waterfowl ammunition can be simple, or extremely complicated. There are lots of brands, sizes, and different non-toxic metals used for shot. Loads can accentuate speed or weight. Some shot isn't spherical but uses different geometric shapes. To simplify things, any brand selling steel shot will work sufficiently to harvest ducks or geese. Generally, steel shot shotgun shells are much cheaper than those containing other non-toxic metals. Just remember, the gauge of shells you are buying needs to always match your shotgun gauge. You can pick the most inexpensive shotgun shells, for ducks 2 3/4" or 3", #2 or #3 shot; for geese 3 1/2" BB or BBB shot. A box of shotgun shells typically contains 25 shells.

Unless you hunt waterfowl exclusively in agricultural fields, you will need a pair of waders. Waders won't last forever so you won't need to buy the most expensive pair. In New Mexico, cactus needles, thorns, briars, rocks, tree limbs and severe temperature fluctuations can destroy waders after several seasons. There are two types of waders: hip and chest. Chest waders come up to the hunter's chest and hip waders rise up to the waist. Chest waders are suitable for all but the very deepest water; if the water is deeper than waist deep and you only have hip waders than you are out of luck. Waders come in camouflage or solid colors and are insulated or uninsulated. Camouflage color is recommended to blend into your surroundings and insulated will keep you warm on those sub-freezing New Mexico mornings.

A facemask, preferably in the same camouflage pattern as the waders, is needed to keep ducks and geese from flaring after seeing your face. Waterfowl have stellar eyesight and will instantly balk at any color that seems "off" in their natural environment.

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, more portable and make mounting a shotgun easier 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.

A sharp fillet knife can make fast work of field cleaning. The feathers and skin can be pulled off by hand and then the unskinned breasts and legs removed carefully with the fillet knife. When field cleaning, be sure to keep the carcass and an attached wing in a separate disposable plastic bag until you arrive at home. The carcass and wing are used to identify species and gender of the harvested waterfowl when checked by a conservation officer in the field. If waterfowl are cleaned at home, a fillet knife is still essential because it is naturally flexible and allows cuts that shear meat as close to the bone as possible. Make sure to regularly sharpen the knife blade. A dull knife will waste game meat.

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, a Federal duck stamp and a habitat management and access validation. Make sure to affix the duck stamp to your game hunting license and write your signature across it. A habitat stamp is required if hunting on Bureau of Land Management or Forest Service lands.

Another essential item is a waterfowl identification booklet. These can be picked up free at any New Mexico Department of Game and Fish office.

Some non-essential pieces of equipment include: binoculars, decoys, dog, calls, flashlight and/or headlamp, water, cooler and a gallon size freezer bag to store duck breasts and legs in if field dressed. Binoculars can assist with identifying birds from a long distance away. As stated previously, if you know where the ducks want to be, then decoys and calls aren't essential. However, if you don't have time to pre-season scout then they can be useful to lure ducks in. A dog is non-essential when hunting fields, non-moving water and even shallow moving water. Only in the fastest, deepest water is a dog absolutely necessary for retrieving ducks. If you don't have a dog, don't hunt in this situation. Even though dogs aren't essential, they can be a great hunting companion. If you have the money and time to buy and train a dog, they can create lasting memories and allow you to hunt in more difficult conditions. The other non-essential equipment on this list can make life bearable, but isn't necessary as most waterfowl hunts last for five hours or less.

**Practicing** in the off-season can be a great way to increase your effectiveness as a hunter.

Practice shooting and patterning your shotgun. Participate in trap, skeet and five-stand before the waterfowl season begins. This will allow you to gain confidence and master lead and follow through while shooting clay targets. Patterning a shotgun with different chokes, on a paper target, with a duck silhouette, with hunting loads will allow the hunter to see shot distribution at different distances to determine effective range.

Practice identifying species and gender of ducks and geese when you are pre-season or post-season scouting. Use your waterfowl identification booklet or cell phone application to identify flying, swimming, feeding, walking and sleeping waterfowl. Over time, this will lead to identifying

ducks and geese during the hunting season before they are shot, which is critical with the individual species' bag limits.

Practice your duck or goose calling. The tube call, where air is breathed in through one opening and exits through another, is the dominate type of call sold today. These calls are made with one of three different materials: wood, polycarbonate and acrylic. Wood is inexpensive, has a soft and realistic sound, but isn't very durable; polycarbonate is inexpensive, durable, but the sound is not as realistic as wood or acrylic; acrylic is expensive, durable and the sound is loud and realistic.

After selecting a call material, the next thing to do would be to select the number of reeds in your call. A single reed call produces a variety of loud sounds, but is hard to master, it would be more suited to an intermediate to advanced caller. The double and triple reed calls are user friendly, perfect for a beginner and offer less volume than a single reed.

Once you've purchased a call, watch YouTube videos with duck (or goose) sounds and practice them on your call(s). Common duck sounds to imitate include: quack, greeting call, feeding call, hail call, comeback call, lonesome hen, pleading call and drake whistle. As stated before, it isn't necessary to own a duck call to duck hunt. If you know where the ducks want to be then they will go there regardless of your calling. In fact, overcalling may scare them off. However, if you haven't scouted, or are new to an area, setting out decoys and calling can be an effective method of hunting.

**Partnering** with a seasoned mentor can be a great way for a beginner to learn all the aspects of waterfowl hunting. A mentor provides the quickest way for the beginner to learn all the answers to any questions they might have as well as hunt with someone who can show them how to do it safely, legally, ethically and to enjoy themselves.

**Proclamation** is critical to have when waterfowl hunting; don't leave home without it. This can be stowed in the inner pocket of your waders for quick reference. The sub-bag limits for ducks can change year to year, so make sure you have the most current proclamation. If you are brave enough to take your cell phone with you into the field, the most current Small Game Hunting Rules and Information can be downloaded as a .PDF from the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish website. <http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us/home/publications/>

**Post-season Scouting** can be extremely beneficial to the hunter. This can be done from a few days to up to a month after the end of the hunting season. Once hunting pressure has subsided for a few days, the ducks and geese will revert to their preferred spots for feeding, sleeping, loafing, swimming and hanging out. Identifying these micro-locations can be helpful when the following season commences. Especially if there was no time to pre-season scout.

### **Rules and Regulations**

All of the rules and regulations pertinent to waterfowl 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 species. Studying the current small game rules and information booklet and having a copy of

it in the field will allow the hunter to know the rules and follow them. Here are a few of the major rules and regulations, but make sure you know all of them before going waterfowl hunting.

1. Shooting hours are ½ hour before sunrise until sunset (unless otherwise stated in proclamation or on a posted sign on land you are hunting).
2. Non-toxic shot is mandatory for hunting waterfowl.
3. Anyone taking small game must transport the edible portions of the meat from the field for human consumption.
4. Wounded birds must be killed immediately. Possession of live birds without a permit is illegal.
5. Migratory game birds may be taken with a shotgun fired from the shoulder, provided it is no larger than 10-gauge and is not capable of holding more than three shells.

**It is unlawful to:**

1. Hunt while under the influence of alcohol or other intoxicants, including medical marijuana.
2. Take or attempt to take game species by the aid of baiting. An area is considered to be baited for 10 days after the removal of the bait.
3. Use electronically or mechanically recorded calling devices, except during the Light Goose Conservation Order.
4. Shoot at any protected species from within or upon a motor vehicle, motor-driven boat, sailboat or aircraft. However, a person may shoot from a motor-driven boat when, the motor has been completely shut off and its progress therefrom has ceased.
5. Litter and/or pollute streams, lakes and other waters. This includes leaving spent shotgun shells.

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.

Note, even though teal have a special September season in the Central Flyway, they are still part of the daily bag limit during the regular duck season. So, during the regular season, in the Central Flyway, in New Mexico, a hunter could harvest a bag limit of teal. If hunting the Pacific Flyway, in New Mexico, a hunter could harvest a bag limit of teal. Note, at the time of this writing (5/2020), the regular season duck bag limit in New Mexico in the Central Flyway is 6 ducks/day and in the Pacific Flyway it is 7 ducks/day. The possession limit, the number of ducks in cold storage, is 3X the daily bag limit.

Remember that just because something is legal, doesn't make it ethical. For instance, shooting hours are until sunset, but if it is too dark to identify what type of waterfowl you are shooting at before the sun sets, then ethics say you should stop hunting. Ethics and the law need to be weighed in every hunting situation.

### **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. In addition to taking a Hunter Education class, a beginning waterfowler should consider joining a waterfowl hunting organization. Ducks Unlimited and Delta Waterfowl may allow novice waterfowl hunters to ask questions on their internet chat forums, see waterfowl migration maps, meet potential mentors and receive their magazines and/or newsletters packed with waterfowl hunting information. These organizations benefit waterfowl by funding habitat restoration and survey projects across the country.

### **Post Test**

1. What are the three hunting techniques used to hunt waterfowl?
2. Name five pieces (from eight total) of equipment that are essential for hunting waterfowl.
3. What are three pieces of non-essential equipment (from eight total)?
4. Name the most common gauge of shotgun for waterfowl hunting.
5. What legal booklet should a waterfowl hunter always have on their person?
6. What time of day can a waterfowl hunter start shooting?