

## Legal Issues Regarding Mourning Dove

Note: The following information is a portion of a publication entitled "Management and Hunting of Mourning Doves in Alabama" produced by Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division, 64 North Union Street, Montgomery, Alabama 36130-1456. July 2004.

Mourning doves and other migratory birds are a national resource protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Federal and state game laws and regulations help ensure that these birds continue to thrive while providing hunting opportunities.

One of the most common problems associated with dove hunting is hunting over bait. This is usually caused by a basic lack of understanding of what constitutes baiting. According to federal and state law, no person shall take or attempt to take migratory game birds by the aid of baiting or on or over any baited area. Baiting is placing, exposing, depositing or scattering salt, corn, wheat or other grain, or any feed that may lure or attract doves to or over an area where hunters are attempting to harvest them. Any area where bait has been placed constitutes a baited area. A baited area is considered baited for 10 days following the complete removal of the bait. Often times doves will habitually return to a feeding area for a few days after the bait has been removed.

Doves may be hunted over a standing crop or any field where any grain, feed or salt has been distributed or scattered as a result of a normal agricultural operation. This includes lands planted as wildlife food plots, providing that the seed is planted in a manner consistent with the recommendations for planting. Standing crops may also be manipulated by any method to attract doves such as mowing, disking or burning so long as it is not harvested and then redistributed on the field. The practice known as "hogging down," occurs when livestock are allowed to enter a field and feed on standing or harvested crops. Usually this practice involves peanuts or corn and it provides a legal field for harvesting doves.

### **Normal Agricultural Planting and Hunting of Dove Regulation**

As required by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources recognizes the Alabama Cooperative Extension System as the authority on what is considered a bona fide or normal agricultural operation. Your local county extension office has free publications explaining proper farming practices and techniques.

Recently the Alabama Cooperative Extension System determined that top sowing of wheat is a normal agricultural practice for establishing a cover crop in low-input management systems. Regulation 220-2-.114, entitled "Normal Agricultural Planting and Hunting of Dove" was recently amended to read as follows:

1. Top sowing of wheat is a recommended planting practice for establishing a cover crop in low-input management systems. This planting practice requires a well prepared seedbed. A well prepared seedbed involves adequate tilling of the soil so that when the seeds are planted there will be good soil-to-seed contact and the soil is not excessively hard (i.e. it can easily be penetrated by the developing root of the germinating small grain seed). Growers should be aware that the risk of establishing a stand associated with this planting practice is higher than with drilling or other methods that result in coverage of seed. Recommended practices of planting small grain without a prepared seedbed are: (1) no till drilling; (2) broadcasting small grains into the cotton stubble that remains after harvest followed by mowing the cotton stubble; and (3) aerial seeding small grains into standing crops such as cotton or soybeans prior to defoliation or leaf drop.

2. It is recommended that small grain other than as outlined above be planted in a prepared seedbed by broadcasting or drilling and a bona fide attempt be made to cover seed by cultipacking, disking, raking, etc. Some incidental seed may remain on the surface following a bona fide covering attempt. All small grain planting should adhere to planting dates recommended in printed tables furnished by the Alabama Cooperative Extension System. Recommended seeding rate for small grain is no more than 200 lbs./acre. Seeds should be uniformly distributed.

The earliest recommended planting dates for wheat in the North, Central, and South planting zones are North zone – August 25; Central zone – September 1; South zone – September 15. Refer to the map contained within this brochure for planting zone locations.

It will be illegal to hunt over wheat planted before these dates or outside of dates recommended in printed tables furnished by the Alabama Cooperative Extension System. Any small grain planting that does not conform to these guidelines shall be considered bait. Multiple seedings are not permitted.

A responsible hunter will always ask the landowner or his agent if the field is baited prior to the hunt. Take a quick walk around the field and check for the presence of grain, feed, salt or any material that is not part of a normal agricultural operation. Make sure the grain on the field was grown there and that it is evenly distributed throughout the field. If it is a freshly plowed field, ask when the soil was turned and what was planted. If the hunter has any doubt, it is probably best to leave the field.

### **Harvest Information Program (HIP) Permit Required to Hunt Doves**

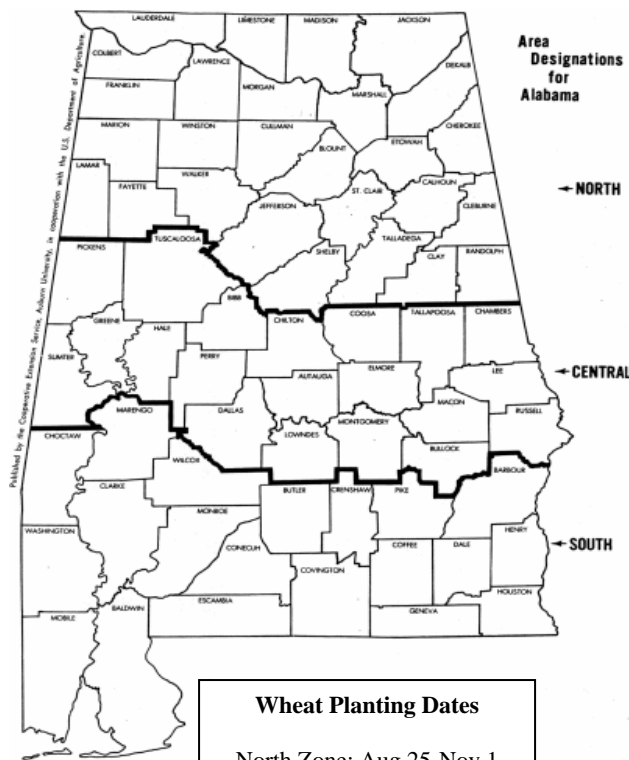
Since 1996, a Harvest Information Program (HIP) Permit has been required to hunt doves in Alabama. The permit is free and can be obtained from sporting license agents in the state. This federal program's objective is to obtain migratory game bird harvest information from hunters. Information gained from this survey is used in managing dove and other migratory game bird populations.

Hunters must complete a brief survey about past hunting success. After completing the survey, hunters are given a permit that sticks to the back of their hunting license. Anyone (ages 16-65) hunting doves in Alabama must have a valid state hunting license and HIP permit in their possession. Persons exempt from the license requirement are not required to obtain the HIP Permit.

### Exotics

The Eurasian Collared Dove, Ring-necked Dove, and Pigeons may be harvested and do not count as part of your bag limit. It is illegal to harvest the Common Ground Dove because it is a protected species.

### Area Zone Designations for Alabama



**Wheat Planting Dates**

North Zone: Aug 25-Nov 1  
 Central Zone: Sept 1-Nov 15  
 South Zone: Sept 15-Dec 1



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