

2004 Mourning Dove Season Legislative Report

Minnesota Session Law of 2004 (Chapter 215, Section 35) requires the Commissioner of Natural Resources to report to the legislature on the results of the 2004 mourning dove season and the impact of the season on the mourning dove population in the state. This report addresses that requirement.

The mourning dove is the most abundant and widespread gamebird in North America. Dove hunting is the most popular gamebird hunting with numbers harvest easily exceeding all other game birds combined. In 2004 Minnesota conducted it's first mourning dove season since 1946. Reports from field managers and Conservation Officers indicated that the hunt went smoothly and no significant problems were reported.

Minnesota hunter participation and harvest estimates are based upon two independent sources of data. The Harvest Information Program (HIP) data set collected and analyzed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the Statewide Small Game Harvest Estimates conducted by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. Both sources provide estimates of the number of hunters age 16 and over, but do not collect data on hunters under age 16. The number of youth hunters is expected to be significant, but is not measurable at this time.

In 2004 federal HIP surveys estimated 13,700 hunters (+/- 2,740) and an estimated harvest of 107,000 birds (+/- 44,940) (Dolton and Rau, 2004). MNDNR's estimates, based upon hunter mail surveys, estimated 15,524 hunters and a total bag of 96,568 (+/- 22,208) birds. In summary both State and Federal estimates are similar, indicating approximately 15,000 dove hunters and an estimated bag of approximately 100,000 birds.

Minnesota's estimated fall population of doves is 12 million birds, which comprises approximately three percent of the total fall dove population in the United States of 400 million birds. Roughly 25 million doves are harvested annually nationwide (Dolton and Rau, 2004).

The Minnesota harvest in 2004 was less than 1% of the total Minnesota dove population which is well below the estimated continent-wide hunting mortality rate of 10-15%.

The mourning dove season opens prior to most other hunting seasons, and provided 17 days of opportunity prior to the regular small game opener for Minnesota hunters in 2004. Because the period during early September is generally warm and minimal hunting equipment is required, dove hunting provides a unique opportunity to introduce new and young hunters to wingshooting. Recruiting hunters through dove hunting will likely increase future participation in other forms of hunting. Recruiting new hunters is valuable because hunters are the primary source of funding for wildlife management through license fees, habitat stamps, and federal excise taxes on hunting equipment.

In summary, Minnesota's first dove season since 1946 resulted in a relatively low mortality factor of less than 1% on the statewide dove population and a virtually undetectable mortality factor on a national scale. It is expected that the number of hunters and number of birds harvested will increase over time as a dove hunting tradition develops and hunters become more skilled at locating and harvesting Mourning doves.

Literature Cited:

Dolton, D.D. and R.D. Rau. 2004. Mourning Dove Population Status, 2004. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Laurel, M.D. USA. 19pp.

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