

GET READY FOR DOVE SEASON

September 4 marks the opening day of Dove Season in North Carolina, and you can bet a lot of sportsmen and sportswomen will be in the field that weekend to test their skills against these birds. Warm up for this exciting season with rounds of Sporting Clays.

Doves are an extremely popular game bird, with roughly 45 million shot by hunters in the United State each year. North Carolina takes about 1.24 million doves a year.

The mourning dove, the most abundant game bird in the Southeast, is a streamlined bird, about 12 inches long, with a plump four-ounce body and a small head. It has a long, pointed tail with a brownish back flecked with black. The breast is tan to light rose.

History shows that doves inhabited the continent long before man. However, the population grew when man brought with him agricultural practices that included crop farming, forest clearing, burning, and the introduction of new seed-bearing plants. Even more recent advancements like irrigation and grain storage have aided the growth of the species. Doves feed on all kinds of grain, which are often left behind by farmers after harvest. They also consume several types of weeds, commonly found in open areas and fields.

Doves generally do not feed in areas containing heavy, densely-matted vegetation. Instead they prefer bare ground on which seeds are plentiful. Dove can travel considerable distances in search of food and water, but prefer easy access to them. Since the dove is a migratory species, local environmental changes generally do not limit their ability to survive.

In North Carolina, Dove Season is September 4 to October 9, November 22 to 27, and December 18 to January 14. Doves may be taken from noon until sunset on Sept. 4 and half hour before sunrise until sunset thereafter. The daily bag is 15 and the possession limit is 30.

The North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission maintains areas primarily to attract mourning doves on many game lands across the state. Areas managed to attract doves are typically seeded in millet, milo, sunflowers, sorghum, corn, or a mixture containing some or all of these crops. These fields are normally harvested, mowed or burned prior to the opening of the dove-hunting season to ensure seed is available and attractive to doves in the area. For more information, check out <http://www.ncwildlife.org>.

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A Mourning Dove standing on a tree stump.