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Dove hunt can't open before Sept. 1

If you're a dove hunter, you know how agonizing it can be to watch rain fall in August.

No matter how many birds you've seen and coos you've heard, a single storm can move doves out of Utah in a hurry.

So why doesn't Utah start its dove hunt sooner than Sept. 1?

"We can't," says Tom Aldrich, migratory game bird coordinator for the Division of Wildlife Resources. "International law won't allow us to."

Aldrich is referring to the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. The act prohibits migratory bird sport hunts from occurring in the United States between March 11 and Aug. 31. Sport hunts can resume on Sept. 1.

"So we're tied to the Sept. 1 opening date," Aldrich says. "But if the weather stays warm and dry, plenty of doves should be in Utah on opening day."

Dove numbers

The number of mourning doves that bred in Utah this year was similar to the number of doves that bred in the state last year. In fact, if you average out the survey data, the number of mourning doves in Utah and the six other states that make up the Western Dove Unit hasn't changed much in the past 10 years.

Aldrich says the number of doves that are produced isn't the critical factor in determining how many doves you'll see each season.

"The critical factor is whether the doves that were produced are still here once the season starts," he says.

Eurasian collared-doves

The Eurasian collared-dove is one dove that's showing up in Utah in greater numbers every year.

There's no bag limit on Eurasian collared-doves, so you can take as many as you like. But if you don't want the birds to count as part of your 10-dove limit, wait until you get home before you pluck or breast the birds.

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Aldrich says once a dove is plucked, it's difficult to tell whether the bird is an Eurasian collared-dove, a mourning dove or a white-winged dove. "If you pluck the birds before you get them home, you'll have to count them as part of your 10-dove limit," he says.

Aldrich also reminds you that mourning and Eurasian collared-doves are often found together. "Make sure you can identify the two doves so you'll know which ones have to be counted as part of your 10-dove limit," he says.

Drawings that show the three dove species found in Utah are available on page 39 of the 2010 – 2011 Utah Upland Game Guidebook.

The guidebook is available at www.wildlife.utah.gov/guidebooks.

Take your kids hunting

If you want to get your children involved in hunting, the dove hunt is a good one to try. "You don't need a lot of equipment," Aldrich says, "and it's usually warm during the hunt.

"It's also a fairly easy hunt. You don't have to hike to the top of a mountain to find doves."

Seeds, seeds, seeds

To find doves, Aldrich says you should look for two things: a water source that has cover and shade near it, and lots of wild seed.

"Doves eat mostly seeds," Aldrich says. "If you can find the seeds they like, you should find the doves."

Wild sunflower seeds and seeds from a variety of weeds and grasses are among the seeds doves eat. Aldrich says some of the best weed-producing areas are places where road building has disturbed the area.

Doves also eat seeds from agricultural crops, such as waste grain that's left in fields after the grain is harvested. Safflower, wheat and sorghum seeds are especially important to doves.

Reminders

- Make sure you're registered in the Migratory Game Bird Harvest Information Program (HIP) for the 2010 season. You can register at www.uthip.com.
- It's a good idea to wear hunter orange during the dove hunt, especially on opening day. "Doves don't seem to notice the hunter orange," Aldrich says, "and wearing it makes you stand out to other hunters."
- Much of Utah's dove hunting happens on private land. Make sure you get written permission from the landowner before hunting on his or her land.
- It's usually hot during the dove hunt. Make sure you clean your doves quickly (unless they're Eurasian collared-doves you don't want to include as part of your bag limit), and keep them cool in an ice chest.

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- Take good care of your dog. Bring water for it. And be careful about taking your dog into an area that might have rattlesnakes.

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Duck Hunt Starts at 7:30 a.m.

Salt Lake City -- Hunters in five counties will get a 30-minute head start when Utah's duck and goose hunt opens Oct. 2.

On Aug. 19, members of the Utah Wildlife Board approved a 7:30 a.m. start time in Box Elder, Cache, Davis, Salt Lake and Weber counties.

Over the past 16 years, the hunt in the counties has started at 8 a.m.

Across the rest of the state, the Oct. 2 opener will start even sooner—at 6:55 a.m.

Tom Aldrich, migratory game bird coordinator for the Division of Wildlife Resources, says starting the hunt sooner should make opening day better for those in the marsh.

"You should have more chances to take ducks coming into your decoys," Aldrich says. "By the time 8 a.m. arrives, some of your best chances have past."

For years, the hunt opened at noon. Then, the start time was moved to 8 a.m. "Now the board has approved our recommendation to move it to 7:30 a.m.," Aldrich says.

Aldrich says the DWR is comfortable starting the hunt 30 minutes earlier. "There's plenty of daylight at 7:30 a.m.," he says. "And, after 16 years of opening the hunt at 8 a.m., we're comfortable allowing hunters to start 30 minutes earlier."

Same season, same bag limits

Except for a slightly shorter light goose hunt next spring, Utah's seasons and bag limits will be identical to last season—the season will run for 107 days, and the duck, goose and swan limits will be the same.

Except for the North Goose Zone, the light goose hunt will be slightly shorter this season, however. Outside of the North Goose Zone, the spring hunt will run March 5 – 10.

The board shortened the hunt by six days so it wouldn't conflict with the popular Snow Goose Festival viewing event that's held in Delta each spring.

All of the rules the board approved will be available in the 2010 – 2011 Utah Waterfowl Guidebook.

The guidebook should be available at www.wildlife.utah.gov/guidebooks starting the week of Sept. 6.

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Cougar Hunting Permits Set for the Next Three Years

Salt Lake City -- The number of cougar hunting permits in Utah has been locked in for the next three years.

On Aug. 19, members of the Utah Wildlife Board approved Utah's first three-year cougar guidebook. The permit numbers and the rules in the guidebook will guide cougar hunting in Utah for the next three seasons.

"Keeping the hunting rules and the permit numbers consistent—instead of changing them from year to year—will give our efforts to manage cougars more time to work," says Kevin Bunnell, mammals coordinator for the Division of Wildlife Resources.

"It will also help us better evaluate the effectiveness of the rules and the number of permits we're offering," he says. "That will lead to future recommendations that will be best for the cougars and for the animals the cougars prey on."

You can see the rules and the permit numbers the board approved in the 2010 – 2011 Utah Cougar Guidebook.

The guidebook should be available at www.wildlife.utah.gov/guidebooks starting the week of Sept. 6.

Slight increase

At their Aug. 19 meeting, the board approved changes that should result in the number of cougars taken by hunters climbing by about six percent.

Biologists say the six percent increase should result in hunters taking an average of 325 cougars each season for the next three seasons.

Over the past three seasons, hunters took an average of 300 cougars each season.

New plan

Utah's cougar management plan was updated in 2009. This is the first season cougars will be managed under the new plan.

In addition to keeping the number of hunting permits consistent for three years, the plan provides more direction for managing cougars on units that have bighorn sheep. It also provides more direction to manage cougars on units where the number of mule deer—the main animal cougars prey on—is still under the goal specified in unit management plans.

You can read the state's cougar management plan at www.wildlife.utah.gov/pdf/cmgtplan.pdf.

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Two New Otter Populations Possible

Utah has a new otter management plan

Salt Lake City -- River otters might pop up in areas you've never seen them before.

A plan that will guide how river otters are managed in Utah through 2020 was approved by the Utah Wildlife Board on Aug. 19. Among the plan's highlights:

- Utah could have two new otter populations by the time the plan is revised in 2020.

The Weber River in northern Utah and Straight Canyon near Joe's Valley Reservoir in south-central Utah are the spots the plan identifies as the best places to put otters in Utah in the future.

- If otter populations reach a point where trapping can be allowed, a new trapping opportunity might be available to trappers in Utah.
- The plan provides direction in dealing with otters that get into private fish farms and hatcheries.

"I think river otters have a bright future in Utah," says Justin Dolling, game mammals coordinator for the Division of Wildlife Resources.

The plan that's currently available at www.wildlife.utah.gov/pdf/otter_plan.pdf is the old management plan.

The new plan should be available at the same address (www.wildlife.utah.gov/pdf/otter_plan.pdf) by the week of Aug. 30.

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Helping Bobcats: More Rabbits, New Rules

Salt Lake City -- The number of bobcats in Utah may have bottomed out a year ago. But some trapping and hunting changes approved on Aug. 19 should help the small cats rebound.

The Utah Wildlife Board has also reopened six areas to beaver trapping.

All of the rules the board approved will be available in the 2010 – 2011 Utah Furbearer Guidebook. The guidebook should be available at www.wildlife.utah.gov/guidebooks starting the week of Sept. 6.

The following is a summary of the furbearer action the board took:

Beaver

Trappers will have more chances to trap beavers in Utah this season.

Board members closed three areas to beaver trapping. But six areas that were closed to trapping in the past have been reopened.

Bobcat

Biologists say the number of bobcats in Utah may have reached its lowest point since the Division of Wildlife Resources started keeping bobcat records in 1983.

But Justin Dolling, game mammals coordinator for the DWR, says more rabbits in Utah should lead to more bobcats.

“Bobcats prey mostly on rabbits,” Dolling says. “Unfortunately for the cats, rabbits go through a 10-year population cycle.”

Every five years, Dolling says Utah’s rabbit population bottoms out. Then the population builds again for the next five years.

“Rabbit populations are starting their upward climb again,” he says. “That’s good news for the state’s bobcats.”

To give the bobcats some extra help, the board approved the following:

- The number of bobcat trapping and hunting permits has been capped at 4,600.
- Each trapper and hunter may not have more than three bobcat permits. (Last season, each trapper and hunter could have up to four permits. Each permit allows a trapper or hunter to take one bobcat.)
- The season will be one week shorter this year. It starts on Dec. 1, 2010. It ends about two months later, on Feb. 6.

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Reducing Limits Could Lead to Bigger Bass

Biologists recommend bass fishing change for 2011

Many of Utah's anglers aren't happy about the size of the bass they're catching. Division of Wildlife Resources biologists have an idea to fix the problem: get more anglers who are willing to keep fish involved in bass fishing.

All of the DWR's proposed fishing changes for the state's 2011 fishing season should be available at www.wildlife.utah.gov/public_meetings starting Aug. 23.

Learn more, share your ideas

After you've reviewed the ideas, you can let your Regional Advisory Council members know your thoughts by attending your upcoming RAC meeting or by sending an e-mail to them.

RAC chairmen will share the input they receive with members of the Utah Wildlife Board. The board will meet in Salt Lake City on Sept. 23 to approve rules for Utah's 2011 fishing season.

Dates, times and locations for the RAC meetings are as follows:

Southern Region

Sept. 7
7 p.m.
Richfield High School
510 W. 100 S.
Richfield

Central Region

Sept. 14
6:30 p.m.
Springville Junior High School
165 S. 700 E.
Springville

Southeastern Region

Sept. 8
6:30 p.m.
John Wesley Powell Museum
1765 E. Main St.
Green River

Northern Region

Sept. 15
6 p.m.
Brigham City Community Center
24 N. 300 W.
Brigham City

Northeastern Region

Sept. 9
6:30 p.m.
Uintah Basin Applied Technology College
450 N. 2000 W.
Vernal

E-mail

You can also provide your comments to your RAC via e-mail. E-mail addresses for your RAC members are available at www.wildlife.utah.gov/public_meetings.

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The group each RAC member represents (sportsman, non-consumptive, etc.) is listed under each person's e-mail address. You should direct your e-mail to the people on the RAC who represent your interest.

Fewer bass limits

Reducing the number of bass limits in Utah—from eight major limits to two—is the idea biologists have to get more anglers involved in bass fishing.

Specifically, biologists are recommending the following:

- A limit of six bass—with no size restrictions—at most of Utah's bass waters.
- Five reservoirs—Jordanelle, Quail Creek, Sand Hollow, Gunlock and Huntington North—would also have a six-bass limit. But only one bass in that six-bass limit could be longer than 12 inches.

Biologists would also like to simplify the bass limits at Lake Powell and Flaming Gorge. But they need to do additional work with biologists in Arizona and Wyoming to make that happen.

More anglers, bigger bass

If you think of Utah's bass fishing waters as a big cookie jar, it helps to understand why they have so many small fish: with the exception of Lake Powell, anglers are keeping only four percent or less of the total adult bass population at Utah's bass waters every year.

They're releasing at least 96 percent of the bass they catch.

The amount of room in the cookie jar is limited. You can fill the jar with lots of small crumbs, or you can fill it with a few cookies. But there isn't room in the jar for both.

"Right now, many of Utah's bass waters are filled with bass in the nine- to 12-inch range," says Drew Cushing, warm water sport fisheries coordinator for the DWR.

"Anglers need to remove more of the smaller bass to make room for bigger fish. The smaller fish are eating most of the food and utilizing most of the cover."

Cushing says the new limits should benefit all bass anglers, ranging from those who are new to bass fishing to those who have fished for years.

"Beginning anglers aren't as concerned about catching a big fish," Cushing says. "They're happy with smaller fish. And they want a chance to keep some fish."

Cushing says it's tough to get new anglers interested in bass fishing when the state has eight different bass limits, including some that are fairly restrictive. "If we can reduce the number of bass limits, make the limits easier to understand and give anglers a chance to keep some fish, we think more anglers will give bass fishing a try."

And that, in turn, should lead to bigger fish to catch.

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Four waters and big bass

Cushing says Jordanelle, Quail Creek, Sand Hollow and Gunlock are four waters biologists believe have the potential to grow large bass. Allowing anglers to keep six bass—but limiting them to not more than one bass longer than 12 inches—should keep plenty of big bass in these waters.

Cushing says that won't happen, though, unless those who fish the waters are willing to keep bass that are less than 12 inches long. "If they don't take some of the smaller bass, it will be difficult for the bass to grow to a larger size," he says.

Cushing says the regulation at Huntington North should give bass in the reservoir some extra protection. "The water level at the reservoir fluctuates a lot," he says. "In fact, water levels in all of our bass waters are the limiting factor facing bass in Utah. Good water years mean great fishing. Poor water years mean poor fishing."

For more information, call the nearest Division of Wildlife Resources office or the DWR's Salt Lake City office at (801) 538-4700.

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