

MOURNING DOVE - MANAGED SPECIES

(*Zenaida macroura*)

Dove hunting is a social event as well as the season opener.



Mourning Dove

The Mourning Dove is a species that holds a special place in the hearts and minds of B-CC IWLA chapter members. The Mourning Dove hunting season, which is the first season to open each year, is eagerly anticipated by our members. As a chapter, we usually celebrate the opening day of hunting with an after-hunt picnic, which has become a popular social event. The chapter expends a fair amount of time and energy in the preparation for dove opening day, within the guiding principles of wise stewardship of the land and its resources. To make proper choices in dove management, we must first know about the characteristics, habits and habitat requirements for doves.

The Mourning Dove is a webless migratory bird, weighing between 4-6 ounces, feathered in light gray and brown muted colors. It is a strong flier; capable of speeds up to 55 mph. Mourning Doves eat almost exclusively seeds. Rarely, they will eat snails or insects. Mourning Doves generally eat enough to fill their crops and then fly away to digest while resting. They often swallow grit such as fine gravel or sand to assist with digestion.

The species usually forages on the ground, walking but not hopping. Mourning Doves do not dig or scratch for seeds, instead eating what is readily visible. Mourning Doves raise three or more broods in a single breeding season. Both parents build a flimsy platform nest of twigs located from 5 to 25 feet up in a tree or bush. Two white eggs hatch in about 14 - 16 days. One egg is laid in the evening, and the second on the next



Mourning Dove with Fledglings

morning. The male usually incubates the egg during the day, and the female incubates at night. Nestlings, cared for by both parents, fledge in about 12-14 days. The parents continue to care for the fledglings until they are 25 to 27 days old. Banding studies reveal that Mourning Doves can live up to 10 years in the wild, and more than 17 years in captivity. Northern populations are migratory, and the mortality rate of juveniles can be as high as 70% in their first year of life. Many doves fall prey to hunting and predation by hawks, especially the Cooper's

MOURNING DOVE - MANAGED SPECIES

(*Zenaida macroura*)

and Sharp-shinned Hawks that stake out back yard feeders in the winter months. The number of individual Mourning Doves is estimated to be approximately 475 million. The large population and its vast range explain why the Mourning Dove is considered to be of the lowest level of conservation concern, meaning that the species is not at risk of extinction. As a game bird, the Mourning Dove is well-managed, with more than 20 million (and up to 40–70 million) taken by hunters each year.

Our farm has all the ingredients for good habitat for Mourning Doves, namely open fields with multiple small seed and weed crops, water, sources of grit, and suitable nesting sites. To attract larger flocks, we have adopted additional



Dove Food Sorghum

management practices of planting small grains crops, i.e. millet, milo, sorghum, or larger seed crops such as sunflowers or corn, with the express purpose of enhancing dove numbers. These crops are manipulated, in accordance and compliance to Maryland DNR regulations. These manipulations are accomplished by selective bush hogging of the maturing crops shortly before the start of hunting season. In

addition, adjacent swaths of ground are exposed by disking, to allow for easy access to grit, and to the seed crop. All these plantings and manipulations are done in conjunction with our no-till farming practices and policy of protecting and preventing our streams from sediment and erosion, and are consistent with our overall habitat management plans.

Even with proper preparations and decent crop success, migrant doves are not always abundant on opening day. We are still subject to the migratory nature of Mourning Doves, which does not always coincide with opening days. None the less, a good number of our members prepare for the 1st of September by purchasing their hunting licenses, coming out to the farm during the pre-season to walk the fields in scouting trips; to exercise their dogs; and visit the shotgun range to hone their wing-shooting skills— all in preparation for the harvest season to come.



Migrant Doves