

# Texas hunters set sights on favorable dove season

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The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) is forecasting a favorable dove season this fall.

“Just about every season is a good season in Texas,” Owen Fitzsimmons, TPWD Webless Migratory Game Bird Program leader, said in an interview with the [Texas Farm Bureau Radio Network](#). “Texas, by far, leads the nation in the number of hunters and harvest for doves. Even in a bad year, it’s considered a pretty good year relative to other states.”

Due to the coronavirus, many of the migratory game bird monitoring efforts that typically occur were canceled this year.

“That includes our spring dove surveys that we usually conduct in May and June. They give us a better idea of what the breeding populations look like

each year,” Fitzsimmons said. “We don’t have that data, but I’ve been trying to get as many reports as I can from our field staff around the state. For the most part, things look pretty good.”

People are reporting more mourning doves than in the past few years.

“A lot of this comes down to habitat, as well. We’ve had average to above-average rainfall for most of the year so far,” Fitzsimmons said. “Range conditions are still looking pretty good. We’re starting to get dry now, but I think that probably equates to a good year for production for doves in Texas.”

The forecast holds true for mourning doves and white-winged doves, because they have the same requirements during the breeding season and typically target the same types of food.

“I think it’s going to be a pretty good year all around,” he said.

There’s been an increase in white-winged dove populations in Texas over the past 10 to 15 years.

“That’s something a lot of hunters are starting to key in on, especially those outside of the traditional white-winged areas,” he said.

Dove season for the north zone is Sept. 1-Nov. 12 and Dec. 18-Jan. 3.

Dove season for the central zone is Sept. 1-Nov. 1 and Dec. 18-Jan. 14.

The south zone regular season is Sept. 14-Nov. 1 and Dec. 18-Jan. 23.

After TPWD announced this year’s dates, some hunters questioned the Monday start on social media.

In 2018, Fitzsimmons said TPWD opened the south zone season as early as Sept. 14 to give hunters more time in the field.

“Historically, the south zone has always had to open a little later than the north and central zones. That goes back decades to when there were thoughts and concerns that opening hunting too early in the south zone might affect birds that might be still breeding at that point,” he said.

That’s probably not likely, but research is ongoing, Fitzsimmons said.

“Since then, we’ve been trying to open up more of September to the south zone hunters,” he said. “I think it was back in 2016, we were able to expand the special white-winged zone to the entire south zone, and in 2017, we got the overall dove season expanded from 70 to 90 days.”

Prior to the Sept. 14 start date, the south zone opened on the Friday closest to Sept. 17.

“Sept. 14 was a strategic date. The idea behind that was we have our four special white-winged days that we’re allowed early on in the season in the south zone,” Fitzsimmons said. “By setting the opening day of the regular south zone season on Sept. 14 every year, we can guarantee no matter how the calendar days fall, every single year the four special white-winged dove days will cover the first two weekends in September and the 14th will come after that and cover the next weekend and then on.”

It gives south zone hunters an opportunity to hunt every weekend in September.

“Considering that 70 to 85 percent of the doves that are harvested in Texas are harvested the first weeks in September, trying to get more of early September as possible for our south zone hunters is important,” he said.

The additional days for special white-winged dove season in the south zone are Sept. 5-6, 12 and 13.

There are no major changes to this year’s bag limit or other regulations.

“We have a 90-day season and 15-bird bag limit,” Fitzsimmons said. “The only thing hunters need to be aware of is, as usual, the special white-winged days in the south zone do have special regulations.”

Hunters who bag Eurasian-collared doves are encouraged to keep some sort of plumage or a wing on it to identify it as a non-native or non-game species.

Eurasian-collared doves do not count toward the daily bag limit.

Fitzsimmons reminds hunters to get the migratory game bird endorsement along with their hunting license.

“If you buy your super combo, it should be included,” Fitzsimmons said. “You do need to be HIP certified, and that stands for Harvest Information Program.

That's a federal program that helps estimate overall harvest and number of hunters on a nationwide scale. When you buy your license, make sure you answer those HIP questions and get your HIP certification to be legal."