

when hen birds are raising their broods.

Flushing coveys of young birds can break up family groups, which can impact bird survival rates and push birds out of their preferred habitat.

The permitting process isn't intended to prohibit trainers from obtaining pen-raised birds for training purposes. That practice has a separate permitting process. This process will help ensure people looking to train dogs in Montana have a clear way to obtain the appropriate permit.

Once submitted, the application will be reviewed by FWP's regional staff, who will ensure the proposed training area isn't a place where game birds could reasonably establish a nest. The permit holder will need to get permission from private landowners or other land management agencies, if necessary.

If you are interested in training a hunting dog in the open field, the permit is free and the application can be printed from the FWP website at fwp.mt.gov. Click on Fish and Wildlife, then licenses, then Wildlife Possession. Permits can also be obtained through FWP regional offices.

NEBRASKA

PUBLIC URGED TO NOT DISTURB NESTING DUCKS

Reports of ducks nesting under bushes and in gardens and landscaping near houses are common this time of year. Most reports are of concern about the hen and nest or how the ducklings, once hatched, will make it to the nearest water.

"The best thing you can do for a hen and her nest is to leave them alone," said Mark Vrtiska, waterfowl program manager for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. "I've seen a lot of people put food or water near the nest site and that has a lot of potential to attract predators. Hens can find food and water, and they are equipped to take care of themselves and their nest. If something gets the nest, then that is a reflection of a hen's poor choice in nesting sites."

Mallards are the most common duck nesting in urban areas. In the wild, they are known to nest up to a mile or more from water. "People also are concerned that there isn't any water around," Vrtiska said. "Well, it doesn't take much, and the hen will find it."

Wood ducks also commonly nest in urban areas, using tree cavities as nesting sites. "We get calls each year about wood duck hens that have abandoned their ducklings," Vrtiska said. "Likely, that's far from the truth. She may have left them temporarily – especially if you have come around – but she will get back to them if you don't interfere."

State and federal law protects ducks and their nests, and it is illegal to disturb hens, eggs, nests or ducklings.

PENNSYLVANIA

2017-18 WATERFOWL SEASONS SET

Pennsylvania's 2017-18 migratory game bird seasons have been selected.

Annual migratory game bird seasons are selected by states from frameworks established by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Game Commission selections were made after reviewing last year's season results, population survey data, and input gathered from hunters and the public.

"The new regulatory schedule introduced by the USFWS in 2016 continues this year," said Ian Gregg, chief of the Game Commission's Game Management Division. "States now make season selections in early spring rather than late summer, allowing them to be published alongside other hunting season dates and providing additional time for hunters to plan their vacations."

While seasons for webless migratory birds are similar to those selected in 2016-17, waterfowl hunters will notice some changes this year including more restrictive September Canada goose seasons in northwestern Pennsylvania, modifications to daily bag limits for some duck species, and later dates for some youth waterfowl hunting days.

WATERFOWL SEASON HIGHLIGHTS

In a portion of western Crawford County, the September Canada goose season will run Sept. 1-16 rather than the typical Sept. 1-25, and the daily bag limit will be 1 goose. This shorter season applies to the area south of state Route 198 from the Ohio state line to intersection of state Route 18, state Route 18 south to state Route 618; state Route 618 south to U.S. Route 6; U.S. Route 6 east to U.S. Route 322/ state Route 18; U.S. Route 322/ state Route 18 west to the intersection of state Route 3013; and state Route 3013 south to the Crawford/ Mercer County line. The season on State Game Lands 214 remains closed. In the rest of the Southern James Bay Population Zone in northwestern Pennsylvania, the season remains Sept. 1-25 but the daily bag limit has been reduced to 1 goose. The bag limit restrictions do not apply to youth participating in the youth waterfowl hunting days, when regular-season regulations apply. Hunters should carefully consult the maps and descriptions at www.pgc.pa.gov to determine the specific regulations applicable to the area they plan to hunt.

Game Commission biologist Jeremy Stempka explained that the goose season restrictions are being enacted in an attempt to stabilize or increase the resident goose population on and around Pymatuning Wildlife Management Area.

"The migratory Southern James Bay Population of Canada geese no longer provides the large component of the Pymatuning goose harvest it once did, due to declining numbers overall and a northward shift in wintering range," Stempka said. "Consequently, current goose hunting opportunities in the Pymatuning area are largely dependent on local resident geese."

"With this population also showing some recent declines, a reduction in harvest is warranted to ensure adequate goose hunting opportunities over the long term," Stempka said. "The Game Commission will be closely monitoring the results of this year's changes."

For ducks, the daily bag limit is increasing from 1 to 2 for black ducks and decreasing from 2 to 1 for pintails, in accordance with established USFWS harvest strategies for these species.

"Pintail bag limits have fluctuated frequently from year to year, but the black duck limit is changing for the first time in over three decades," said Stempka. "In response to recent analyses suggesting that a small increase in black duck harvest will not cause population declines, additional opportunity is being provided to hunters. If this change has any negative effects, they will be detected by existing population surveys and banding programs, and the bag limit could be reduced again in future years if needed."

Similar to past years, there will be a statewide youth waterfowl hunting day in mid-September (Sept. 16) and a second youth day varying by duck zone.

"In three of our four duck zones, constituents have requested experimenting with holding the second youth day later in the season than previously," said Gregg. "The second day in the Northwest Zone will be Dec. 16; in the North Zone, Jan. 20; and in the South Zone, Jan. 27. Previously, the North and Northwest Zones had their second youth days in September, and the South Zone's second youth day was in early November."

In the Lake Erie Zone, the timing of the second youth day (Oct. 21) will be similar to previous years. Also new this year, due to a recent change in federal frameworks youth waterfowl days are open to licensed junior hunters 12-16 years old. Previously, 15 was the upper age limit. A federal duck stamp is required for 16-year-olds to participate.

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