



Drought Can Mean Great Dove Hunting

By Steven Bridges
The Goldthwaite Eagle

As of press time this August, the City of Goldthwaite has declared a Stage 1 Drought emergency. If these dry conditions persist, water rationing will be the next step in Goldthwaite.

The sunflower and millet patches I planted for dove food plots this spring have withered and died over the dry, hot summer. My visions of shooting doves from the cover of chest high sunflowers have also dried up.

But, drought conditions in Mills County don't necessarily equate to bad dove hunting, wildlife biologists with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department suggest.

An extended drought across much of Texas could be beneficial for dove hunters as birds will have to rely upon limited food and water resources.

Water, especially in close proximity to dove feeding areas, should be at a premium heading into the September 1st dove season opener.

"Dove hunting over a water source should be excellent," said Corey Mason, TPWD dove program leader. "Additionally, dove may be concentrated on food sources, so if you can find a stand of sunflower, goat weed, etc., hunting should be productive. Native food sources are going to be more important this year because agricultural crops aren't as good as years past."

It is still too hot to get excited about much during the first part of September. Still, many hunters visit our county to set up deer stands and feeders and set up deer camp. Most bring their shotgun along just in case the doves are "in."

Mills County usually relies on a cool Norther to blow doves in from the North for good shooting. I have noticed more and more resident doves in my very informal, preseason dove scouting. Both whitewings and mourning doves seem to be on the rise in our area. Great news for area hunters. Also, good news for area merchants, who rely on hunters to leave a little of their money in Mills County.

Every dollar a hunter spends in Mills County bounces around the county an average of five times before leaving. For example, a group of hunters goes into a restaurant and spend \$50. The restaurant owner takes that \$50 to buy groceries at a local grocery store. The grocer spends the \$50 buying flowers in town for his wife for her birthday, etc., etc. This money would not be present had it not been for the hunters. Merchants in Mills County try to make the hunters feel extra welcome in Mills County each year. It is not only the neighborly thing to do... it is just



A few doves bagged near a water hole in Mills County last season. *Photo by Steven Bridges*

good business.

Part of dove hunting's popularity stems from the timing of the season, which marks the end of a long, hot summer and the beginning of the fall hunting season.

Many deer hunters open their camps and begin filling feeders on Labor Day weekend, and a dove hunt adds interest and some tasty eating. This year, September 1 falls on a Saturday so most dove hunters will hit the field Labor Day weekend.

Food sources and water concentrate doves, and TPWD biologists recommend keying on harvested grain fields and natural food sources such as sunflowers and croton.

Flight paths between roosting areas

and food and water sources produce the best shooting. Areas south of San Antonio and around Uvalde and Brownwood generally hold doves throughout the season. Hill Country counties such as Mills, Hamilton and Lampasas usually furnish good hunting.

Dove Hunting Do's & Don'ts

These are a few mistakes dove hunters make in the field according to Mills County Game Warden Vance Flowers...

No dove hunting from a vehicle. ATVs, UTVs, golf carts and pick-ups count. Don't even sit on the tail gate with the vehicle not moving.

Do not bait doves. Don't dove hunt over a corn feeder, put out food or even rock salt. It is all illegal.

Do plug your shotgun.

Do adhere to the dove bag limit and shooting times.

Remember all birds except Rock Doves (Feral Pigeons), Starlings, English Sparrows, Grackles, Red-Winged Blackbirds, Cowbirds and Crows are protected under state law. Fines for shooting protected birds can be \$25-\$500 per bird. Check local, state and federal laws for additional information.