



Dove Hunting Slow? Give Teal a Try!

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Mills County dove hunting can be hit or miss. I'm not talking about lack of shooting ability on the part of our hunters, but the "here today gone tomorrow" dove themselves.

If dove hunting on your land or around your ranch pond is slow, give teal hunting a try.

Teal hunting is a little utilized two-week season running from September 19-24 statewide. Daily bag limit is four in the aggregate (Blue-winged, Green-winged, and Cinnamon Teal). Remember to use steel shot for all waterfowl hunting.

The First Ducks We See in the Sky

Blue-winged teal are the early birds of the fall waterfowl migration. Most of these ducks nest in the prairie region of the northern U. S. and Canada, but when the first cool fronts of autumn blow through, they head south. By the time regular duck seasons come in, most blue-wings have arrived on wintering grounds in Mexico and Central America. This is the reason for the early teal season. It gives hunters a chance before the ducks head offshore.

Blue-wings, green-wings and cinnamon teal are legal targets, though blue-wings make up the vast majority of the bag. Blue-winged teal are the most common in Mills County.

Early teal seasons were started in the mid-1960s. Today they are offered in "non-production states" in the Central, Mississippi and Atlantic flyways (not in the Pacific flyway). "Non-production states" including Texas are those in middle and southern latitudes where teal don't nest in large numbers.

Despite warm temperatures and sometimes bothersome insects, the early teal season has grown more popular as the years have passed.



Texas Teal Season (September 19-24, 2019) is a great time to get out and enjoy some variety if you are wanting a change from hunting doves.

For many hunters, the early season provides a chance to sharpen their shooting eyes and give retrievers a refresher course before the regular duck season arrives.

Teal are also among the tastiest of ducks. Waterfowl hunters everywhere revere the teal as the waterfowl with the least "ducky" taste.

Tried and True Teal Tactics

Migrating blue-winged teal stop over on marshes, reservoirs, river

sloughs and other waters, especially those with moss or aquatic grass growing near the surface. Teal haunts can be small and obscure, but offer superlative shooting to hunters who find them. They include such varied bodies of water as farm ponds, the Colorado River, Pecan Bayou and small Caliche mining pit ponds.

An understanding of the ducks' migratory habits can help a hunter formulate a successful hunting strategy. In September, any north wind can bring a new flight. A body of water can be devoid of teal one afternoon,

then covered up the next morning on the heels of a new front. Hunters should be diligent and pay attention to local weather forecasts.

Waterfowlers also should scout their hunting areas just before and during the season to locate teal. If ducks are present and there's abundant food, they will usually hang around until the next cold front pushes them farther south.

Hunting teal is not difficult. The birds are typically uneducated as to the purposes of decoys and the hunters who set them out. A realistic spread and a good blind are important, but blue-winged teal are far less wary than bigger ducks that have been subjected to heavy pressure.

On small waters, hunters can usually make do with a small decoy spread and a temporary blind. Over the years I've enjoyed many teal shoots while hiding on a farm pond bank. I've used a hatchet to gather camouflage, sat on a 5-gallon plastic bucket and worn full camo to blend into the bushes.

Jump shooting teal on small ponds is both a fun and hassle-free way to hunt teal. Simply load your dove shotgun with steel shotshells, walk quietly up over the dam of your farm pond and blast away as the teal take off the water.

I use a 12 gauge with number six steel shot. Many more accomplished waterfowl hunters use teal as an opportunity to field a 20 gauge shotgun. Either way, a modified choke will give you some room for error at teal shooting distances while still offering consistent patterns downrange.

When raising your shotgun up at fast-flying teal, don't forget to mutter to yourself the Teal Hunters Motto: Lead them farther!

Texas teal hunters will be able to take up to six teal daily during the statewide September teal-only season, set to run September 14-29, 2019.