

TEAL: Alabama hunters should see plenty of the birds

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3.18 million, up four percent from the 3.04 million in 2018, but the numbers remain 47 percent above the long-term average.

“Overall, teal numbers have been above the long-term average for the past several years,” Maddox reported. “The breeding grounds in the northern prairies had enough water for a good hatch. In Alabama, we had a wet year so conditions for vegetation growth were good. We should see plenty of teal this season.”

This year, the state delayed the teal season by a week so more birds would arrive in Alabama by opening day. The season begins on Sept. 14 and runs through Sept. 29 with a daily bag limit of six teal per person in any species combination.

Although the special season specifically targets lightly harvested bluewings, Alabama hunters can also shoot green-winged teal during September since both species look so similar without their vibrant winter breeding plumage. Greenwings customarily account for about five percent of the September harvest.

With most waterfowl not yet in their colorful winter plumage, all ducks look similar in September. Look for the distinctive blue “shoulder patches” on the wings of blue-winged teal. However, shovelers, also called spoonbills, show some blue on their wings as well so look for the big shovel-nose on a spoonbill.

People might also see wood ducks, especially in timbered areas like the upper Mobile-Tensaw Delta. Hunters might also spot a few young pintails, gadwalls or wigeons. Every teal hunter in September must



Photo by John N. Felsher

Steven Ladner watches for ducks as the sun rises over Mississippi Sound near the Alabama-Mississippi state line. He hunted out of a boat equipped with a pop-up blind. In public waters like Mississippi Sound, hunters with boat blinds can set up wherever they like and hunt.

positively identify each bird before pulling the trigger, a challenging task when ducks come in fast and low at first light. If in doubt, don't shoot!

Teal routinely fly fast and low. They frequently seem to miraculously appear over the decoys and then disappear. Low-flying teal habitually just drop out of the sky wherever they choose or crash-land into the water.

Since teal mostly pass through Alabama while migrating this month, they might appear and disappear quickly. A pond holding several hundred teal today might not hold a feather tomorrow. Scout often and set up decoys where the birds already want to land.

For decoys, leave the

large, colorful “green-headed” mallards at home. Most people use bluewing decoys in September, but some people add a mix of greenwings or other species in the spread. In salty marshes, hunters could place a couple pairs of hen mallard decoys off to the side to simulate mottled ducks.

Some of the best waterfowl hunting in Alabama occurs in the bays and marshes of the lower Mobile-Tensaw Delta. In the lower delta, large open bays and streams bordered by marshes create a wetland crisscrossed by numerous sloughs and potholes. Some people also hunt around the islands in Mississippi Sound.

“The delta looks good for

the teal season,” explained Thomas Harms, a state biologist in Spanish Fort. “The Bay Minette Basin usually holds a lot of teal. The western side of the lower delta also traditionally holds some birds. North of Interstate 65 has some duck holes and ponds that attract teal in the early season. The vegetation is healthy. We should have a good year for ducks as long as we get good weather.”

To keep more ducks in the delta, the state designated a no-hunting zone between the Mobile Causeway and Interstate 10 and some no-motor zones. For boundaries and more details, see the 2019-20 Alabama Waterfowl Hunting Guide or www.outdooralabama.com.