

Ask About Wildlife

QUESTION: One of my hunting companions was issued a citation during last year's dove season for hunting over a baited field— which, he insists, he didn't know had been baited. Can you tell me what a "baited" field, as related to hunting doves, is and what to look for to determine if a field has been baited? I consider myself a sportsman and don't want to find myself in a similar situation while on hunts this fall.

ANSWER: Essentially, a "baited" dove field is any area where grain or other bait has been placed or scattered specifically to attract doves for the purpose of hunting them. However, grains scattered as a normal by-product of harvesting crops do not make a "baited" field. Most dove hunting in North Carolina is done in fields where agricultural crops (corn, wheat, rye, millet, soybeans, sunflower, cucumber, etc.) have been harvested. Doves are attracted to such areas as perfectly legal. If a person were to scatter additional grain in the field after the crop had been harvested, however, it would be considered baited and hunting over it would be illegal.

A considerable amount of dove hunting is also done over fields that have been planted with winter cover crops, which is also perfectly legal. To plant a field two or more times, however, is not a normal agricultural practice, and would be considered baiting.

A number of hunting clubs each year plant agricultural crops and mow them just prior to the opening of the season to attract doves. This is a legal practice as long as no additional grain is scattered in the field.

Things to look for to determine if a field has been baited would be piles of grain not left by normal harvesting practices; evidence of grains or other bait having been scattered in a field; or indications that a field has been "planted" with a winter cover crop more than once, etc.

Hunting over fields that have been baited cannot be resumed until 10 days after all bait has been removed, and it is the responsibility of the hunter to make sure the fields hunted are not baited.

"Ask About Wildlife" is a cooperative effort of the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission and (this paper).

Questions should be sent to Curtis Wooten, Wildlife Education Specialist, Route 1, Box 824, Morganton, N.C. 28655

Question: I just recently picked up my copy of the 1983-84 North Carolina Inland Fishing, Hunting and Trapping Regulations Digest and noticed that there is no information on the dove hunting season in it. Can you provide the season dates and tell me if there are any changes in the shooting hours or bag limits from last year?

Answer: Because information on the dove population level is gathered up to mid-summer, the dates for the fall dove hunting season is not set until late summer—which is too late to include the information in the Regulations Digest. The season dates, shooting hours and bag limit for doves was only adopted last week.

As was the case last year, this fall's dove hunting season will be split. The first portion opens on Saturday, September 3rd and extends through Saturday, October 8th. The season reopens on Monday, December 12th and runs through Saturday January 14th, 1984. Shooting hours are

the same as last year— from noon until sunset during the first portion of the season and from one-half hour before sunrise until sunset during the second portion of the season. The bag limit is also unchanged. It's 12 birds per day with a possession limit of 24 after two days of hunting.

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There's the story of the hunter who was determined to find the perfect hunting partner. After more than a few years, he was sure that he had finally found a candidate that met all of his high standards. Unfortunately, they hunted together only once. He later learned that the man he had chosen was himself also searching for the perfect hunting partner.

Perfection, of course, eludes us all. How often have we forgotten to pack in an extra sandwich or box of shells or that our partner drinks his coffee only with milk? These faults are

universal, and we could all compile our personal list of such shortcomings. However, when it comes to hunting safety or hunting ethics, forgetfulness or carelessness are no excuse.

When you go afield this fall, whether it's with an old hunting buddy or with a new friend, keep the following points in mind. They're just some of the things that will help make you that "perfect" hunting partner in gun safety and ethics.

If you'll be hunting on private land, be sure that you've gotten permission in advance. Landowners who find uninvited hunters on their property have every reason to be upset. It doesn't help the public image of hunters, and your partner deserves better.

If at all possible, stop by the landowner's house before you start hunting. Take the time to introduce your partner to him, and check to see if there are any areas on his property that you should steer clear of. Most landowners don't mind if you bring a friend or two along, but don't invite the whole gang.

If you're hunting with a novice, explain to him the habits and characteristics of the game

you're hunting and the proper etiquette for the kind of hunting you're doing. Taking unfair advantage of game by a novice may be an act of ignorance, not callousness.

When you're out in the field, keep in mind that you're not in competition with your partner. Instead of arguing over who shot a bird, compliment your partner on making a nice shot. Adopt this attitude, and both you and your friends will have an enjoyable day afield and pleasant memories of the hunt.

Make sure that everyone in your group understands that safe gun handling should always be the foremost concern. Be especially careful not to shoot across your partner's path, swing your muzzle in his direction (even if your gun is unloaded), and be sure to always know where your partner is.

Keep in mind that the measure of the hunt is largely a measure of yourself—whether you're hunting alone or with others.

"He who has health has hope and he who has hope has everything."
Proverb

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