



Dove numbers up across most of Lone Star State

By Jessica Domel
Multimedia Reporter

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There's good news for Texas dove hunters. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) reports an increase in both white-winged and mourning doves across much of the state.

"We had a good, wet, cool spring across most of the state, so there was really good production. That came out in our dove surveys that we do in May and June," Owen Fitzsimmons, TPWD Webless Migratory Game Bird Program leader, said. "As far as bird numbers go, we're looking better than we have in five or six years."

There was a 44% increase in mourning dove numbers statewide and a 20% increase in white-winged dove numbers.

“In terms of numbers, we’re looking great,” Fitzsimmons said in an [interview](#) with the [Texas Farm Bureau Radio Network](#). “Of course, we’ve had an extremely hot and dry summer through July and August, so we’ll see how that plays out come Sept. 1. Things are drying out very quickly. That may concentrate birds around water holes and food sources, but in terms of pure numbers, we’re looking better than we have in several years.”

There are an estimated 28.3 million mourning doves in Texas this year, which is 3% above the long-term average.

TPWD estimates there are 11.7 million white-winged doves in Texas, up 19% from the long-term average.

“It’s speculation really, but typically what we see in the spring is carryover from hatch-year production last year,” Fitzsimmons said. “We had some late summer rains last year that I think produced a really good late summer hatch, and I think that carried over to this year in terms of the number of breeding adults. That’s what we’re seeing in these numbers. Having a second year of good hatch-year production is just going to boost these numbers even further.”

On average, nearly 70% of the state’s mourning doves are in the Shortgrass Prairie region, which is the western side of the Panhandle down to the San Angelo area, the Oaks and Prairies region, which includes much of North and Central Texas, and the Tamaulipan Brushlands, which is the Winter Garden area and much of the Rio Grande Valley.

“The classic dove strongholds you’re going to see up in that west of (Dallas-Fort Worth), Abilene area, Albany through Morton, Breckenridge area,” Fitzsimmons said. “Of course, around Uvalde, San Antonio, southwest and all throughout South Texas has been doing really well the past several years. I don’t see that being an exception this year.”

The largest increase in mourning dove numbers this year, at 129%, was in the Central Mixed Grass Prairie region.

“That’s big. That’s the eastern Panhandle, the Rolling Plains over toward Dallas-Fort Worth and that North Texas area,” Fitzsimmons said.

While 32% of the state’s mourning doves can be found in the Shortgrass Prairie region, the western side of the Panhandle is the only area of the state where population estimates were below the long-term average.

“Best guess is it was a really, really windy and stormy spring that knocked back nesting a little bit up there, but otherwise, the rest of the state is looking better than they have in many years,” Fitzsimmons said.

About 38% of the state’s white-winged doves are in the oaks and prairies region, which is north and central Texas.

Around 20% of white-winged doves are in the Winter Garden and Rio Grande Valley, and 13% are along the Gulf Coast of Texas.

There were declines in white-wing numbers in the Oaks and Prairies region, the Pineywoods and the Winter Garden/Rio Grande Valley region.

There are some areas where it may be more difficult for hunters to bag a dove this year.

“I think a lot of that depends on whether we get any rain between now and dove season,” Fitzsimmons said. “This heat wave is drying things up extremely quickly, so there are places in Central Texas where basically all the ponds are dried up. That’s the driest part of the state right now. So, I think finding water is going to be key in some of the dry areas.”

In dry areas, hunters may also want to focus on food sources, like fields with sunflowers and other small grains.

“They’re going to be pretty dried up, but if they seeded out before this heatwave killed the plants, I think there should be plenty of food available, and it’s going to be pretty hot and heavy dove hunting,” Fitzsimmons said.

About 89% of mourning doves may be found in rural areas, but their populations are typically denser when in more urban areas.

An estimated 85% of white-winged doves in Texas are in urban areas.

TPWD’s dove report this year indicates white-winged dove populations are much denser in urban areas—about 213 times more dense than in rural areas.

“Outside of South Texas, the historic range for white-winged doves, everywhere that they’ve expanded to across the state, they’re very, very tied to urban areas and human habitation,” Fitzsimmons said. “Mourning doves, not so much. Basically, all of our doves are pretty well adapted to dry conditions, so I don’t know how much

mourning doves would need to necessarily utilize urban water sources, but it may come to that in some areas if there is no water available.”

There were no regulation changes for dove hunting this year.

The regular season for the north zone is Sept. 1-Nov. 12 and Dec. 15-31.

The regular season for the central zone is Sept. 1-Oct. 29 and Dec. 15-Jan. 14.

The south zone season dates are Sept. 14-Oct. 29 and Dec. 15-Jan. 21.

The special white-winged dove days are Sept. 1-3 and Sept. 8-10.

Hunters in Texas must have a valid Texas hunting license, a state migratory game bird endorsement (stamp) and must be Harvest Information Program (HIP) certified.

New year hunting and fishing licenses go on sale Aug. 15.

The bag limit remains 15 doves per day with no more than two white-tipped. The possession limit is three times the daily bag.

The online *Outdoor Annual* will be updated with new season information later this month.