

# Guide to Waterfowl Hunting in Florida

*and information about other  
migratory game birds*



MyFWC.com



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*and information  
about other  
migratory game birds*



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## On the cover

Bo and Deidra Johnson find success harvesting some Florida mottled ducks and blue-winged teal during a late season duck hunt on Lake Okeechobee with their yellow lab, D-Bo.

## Waterfowl hunting in Florida

Waterfowl habitat covers vast expanses of Florida, and much of it is open and available for public hunting. This guide introduces the reader to waterfowl hunting in Florida and identifies popular hunting areas. Florida is a great place to hunt waterfowl with easy public access and a hunter success rate that is nearly twice the Atlantic Flyway average. Good management helps ensure that Florida's waterfowl populations are robust and healthy. This allows for long-term, sustainable hunting opportunities and continues Florida's terrific waterfowl hunting tradition.

### When can I hunt ducks? What are the season dates?

There is an early duck season in September; a nine-day phase that overlaps Thanksgiving; and a longer phase that covers most of December and January. To see current waterfowl and other migratory bird hunting season dates and bag limits, click [here](#).

### Is there a youth-only waterfowl season?

Yes, it's called [Youth Waterfowl Hunting Days](#), and it's the Saturday in November before the opening of the regular duck season and the second Saturday after duck season ends in February. Only youth 15 and younger are allowed to hunt ducks, geese, coots and common moorhens while supervised by a non-hunting adult (at least 18 years old). The same regulations and bag limits as the regular season apply, and only the kids may shoot and harvest waterfowl. No license or permit is required of the youth or supervising adult. There are also [youth waterfowl quota permits](#) that can be applied for beginning in October at [GoOutdoorsFlorida.com](#) to hunt various areas around the state.



### What license and permits do I need to be able to hunt waterfowl?

Hunters will need a [hunting license](#), [\\$5 Florida waterfowl permit](#), [no-cost migratory bird permit](#) and a [Federal duck stamp](#) to hunt waterfowl. If you are hunting on a wildlife management area (WMA), you will also need a [\\$26 management area permit](#). Youth (15 and under), seniors (65 and older) and those with a



**Resident Persons with Disabilities Hunting and Fishing License** are exempt from these license and permit requirements, except those 65 and older still need to have the Federal duck stamp.

If you are hunting on a WMA, you may also need a **quota permit**. Check the specific WMA rules and regulations online brochure under the “Migratory Bird Seasons” section to be sure.

All licenses and permits can be purchased at **GoOutdoorsFlorida.com**, county tax collectors’ offices and most retail outlets that sell hunting and fishing supplies, or by calling toll-free 888-HUNT-FLORIDA (486-8356). Quota permits may be applied for during specific **application periods** at **GoOutdoorsFlorida.com** and at county tax collectors’ offices.

## How do waterfowl hunters contribute to conservation?

Waterfowl hunters contribute to conserving wildlife, including nonhunted species, in several ways:

- Money from hunting license sales is used for managing the state’s native wildlife and their habitats.
- Florida waterfowl permit fees go directly toward waterfowl management.
- Revenue from management area permits helps fund managing Florida’s WMAs.
- Federal duck stamp sales are used to acquire and protect wetland habitat not just in Florida, but throughout North America.
- The no-cost migratory bird permit provides valuable data to waterfowl managers.
- In addition, manufacturers of firearms, ammunition and archery equipment and hunters who purchase these items contribute to conservation through the **Wildlife Restoration Program**, which brings funding back to state wildlife agencies such as the FWC.
- Many hunters also volunteer their time and contribute money to conservation organizations.

## If my friend or spouse is not going to hunt, can they be in the boat/blind with me? Or do they also need some kind of license or permit?

As long as they don’t hunt, they do not need any license or permit.

## Do I need to have my Hunter Safety certification to hunt waterfowl?

Hunters 16 years of age and older must have completed a state certified **Hunter Safety** course before they can buy a hunting license that allows them to hunt by themselves. Those who haven’t can opt to purchase a hunting license using the **mentoring exemption**, however, they must hunt under the supervision of someone who is at least 21 years old and meets the Hunter Safety requirements. Hunters born before June 1, 1975, are exempt from the Hunter Safety requirement.

## What are the daily bag and possession limits?

The daily bag limit is the maximum number of a single species that can be taken by one person in one day. The possession limit for waterfowl is three times the daily bag limit and is the maximum number of a single species that one person may possess while in its whole (unprocessed/uncleaned) condition/form.

To see current bag and possession limits for legal-to-take waterfowl and other migratory bird species, click **here**. It is illegal to take or attempt to take harlequin ducks and purple gallinule.



Ron Bielefeld

Purple gallinule are protected and may not be hunted

## What are the legal methods of take for hunting waterfowl and migratory game birds?

- Shotguns (not larger than 10 gauge) plugged to a three-shell capacity.
- Bows and crossbows.
- While hunting ducks, geese and coots, you may only use and be in possession of [non-toxic shot](#), such as iron (steel), bismuth-tin and various tungsten alloys. No lead shot may be used, or on your person or boat/blind.
- It is illegal to use rifles, pistols, air guns, swivel guns, punt guns, battery guns, machine guns, sinkboxes, live birds as decoys, fish hooks, nets, traps, snares, drugs, poisons or explosive substances.
- It is prohibited to shoot waterfowl and migratory game birds while moving under power of a vehicle or vessel, or to herd or drive waterfowl/migratory birds with vehicles/vessels.

## What are the shooting hours?

The legal shooting hours for waterfowl is a half-hour before sunrise until sunset. To learn sunrise and sunset times where you are hunting, click [SunriseSunset.com](http://SunriseSunset.com) or get the [FWC's Fish/Hunt FL app](#).

## Can I use bait or feed to attract waterfowl?

Hunting waterfowl or other migratory birds over bait or with the aid of feed is strictly prohibited, where a person knows or reasonably should know that an area is or has been baited. More information can be found at [FWS.gov](http://FWS.gov).

## Where can I hunt waterfowl in Florida?

Waterfowl hunting is permitted on private property with landowner permission and on any water body that has public access ([public boat landing/launch](#)). However, some public water bodies may be closed for specific reasons, such as being in a park or in an area where the discharge of firearms is prohibited. In addition, wildlife management areas, water management district lands and national wildlife refuges that offer duck hunting may have special permit requirements and restrictions on when and where you can hunt.



Tim Donovan, FWC



## Popular duck hunting areas

**1. Northwest Florida coast (Perdido Bay east to Piney Island):** A variety of divers and dabblers sporadically use the shallow bays and inlets throughout the Panhandle coast. Redheads often winter in large numbers offshore. Winds, tides, fog and oyster bars coupled with large areas of shallow water can make hunting in open waters of the bays challenging. Proper scouting is a must.

**2. Lake Wimico:** This is a large, shallow lake accessible by boat from Apalachicola via the Jackson River (Intracoastal Waterway). When heavily vegetated with submersed aquatic plants, Lake Wimico supports a wide variety of diving and dabbling ducks.

**3. Lake Seminole:** Lake Seminole is a large, man-made reservoir in Jackson County that straddles the Florida-Georgia state line. The state line approximately corresponds to the marked navigation channel up the Chattahoochee River. Hunters must have a Georgia license to hunt on the Georgia side of the lake. The portion of the lake west of Highway 271 and some adjacent shoreline areas east of Highway 271 are within the Apalachee WMA, which has special regulations. The lake offers opportunity for ring-necked ducks and historically attracts wigeon and canvasbacks. The ring-necked ducks are found in areas of topped-out



hydrilla, which vary from year to year. Teal, wood ducks and some of the larger dabbling duck species are taken by hunters from the more remote areas. This is a large, open-water lake with numerous stumps, so boaters should exercise caution.

**4. Tallahassee area lakes (Miccosukee, Iamonia, Jackson, Carr):** Being close to Tallahassee, these lakes receive fairly high hunting pressure. Lakes Iamonia and Miccosukee are large (approximately 6,000 acres), shallow, sinkhole lakes, with areas of abundant, thick vegetation. The most common ducks on both lakes are ring-necked ducks, teal and wood ducks. Lake Jackson (4,000 acres) is less heavily vegetated and can hold a variety of dabbling ducks. Somewhat smaller but very heavily vegetated, Carr Lake is just north of Lake Jackson and offers some good hunting opportunities. It is important to note that these lakes are subject to specific hunting days and motor restrictions during the regular duck season, and have permanent blind restrictions. Click [here](#) for details.

**5. Hickory Mound Impoundment:** This impounded salt marsh in Taylor County is part of the Big Bend WMA. The impoundment is managed to provide brackish marsh habitat for waterfowl and other wetland wildlife. The area provides hunting opportunities with variable success for species such as teal, gadwall and wigeon. This WMA has specific regulations and is open to hunting on certain days. Refer to the online area brochure for details.

**6. PotashCorp – White Springs WMA:** This 2,400-acre management area is on reclaimed phosphate mining land in Hamilton County. All duck hunting takes place on Beehaven Bay Pond. The area has specific regulations and is open to hunting on certain days. Refer to the online area brochure for details.

**7. Alligator Lake:** This sinkhole lake is comprised of a north and south basin that are interconnected and total about 340 acres of open water. Waterfowl hunting on the lake basins is permitted daily outside of the city limits and is subject to statewide waterfowl season regulations. A separate area known as [Alligator Lake Public Small Game Hunting Area](#) totals about 500 acres and is managed independently from the lake basins. This area represents an isolated portion of the lake that was diked and drained in the mid-1950s for agricultural production. Waterfowl hunting is restricted to certain days of the week. Refer to the online area brochure for details.

**8. Orange Creek Basin lakes:** This basin includes areas in both the north central and northeast regions and includes the [Orange Creek Public Small Game Hunting Area](#), and [Orange](#), [Lochloosa](#) and [Newnans](#) lakes. The Orange Creek PSGHA comprises approximately 3,400 acres east of Highway 301. The area has specific regulations. Orange, Lochloosa and Newnans lakes, which lie west of Highway 301, have marshy areas that, depending upon water levels, provide attractive duck habitat. In years when hydrilla is abundant and growing to the surface, counts of ring-necked ducks have been as high as 3,000-5,000. Resident wood ducks and black-bellied whistling ducks use the lakes as well. There are several public and private access points.

**9. Guana River WMA:** This area offers a variety of managed wetland habitats that include Lake Ponte Vedra, a 2,300-acre brackish impoundment, and several smaller ponds and impoundments located in the adjacent uplands. Hunters can find a variety of ducks at Guana, ranging from teal to diving ducks. This WMA has specific regulations and is open to hunting only on certain days. Refer to the online area brochure for details. Contact the Guana River WMA office for current information at 904-825-6877.

**10. Rodman Reservoir (Lake Ocklawaha):** Ring-necked ducks are most common. The abundance of hydrilla determines the ring-necked duck population, and hydrilla conditions vary dramatically from year to year. Rodman Reservoir is a deep-water reservoir built and maintained by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Numerous stumps and floating logs create boating hazards.

**11. Ocklawaha Prairie Public Small Game Hunting Area:** This area in Marion County consists of 2,400 acres of impounded marsh along the Ocklawaha Canal. See online area brochure for restrictions and regulations. This area requires a quota permit to hunt.

**12. Emerald Marsh Public Small Game Hunting Area:** This area in Lake County consists of old muck farms in the floodplain of Lake Griffin that have been restored as wetlands. Habitat conditions can be favorable to duck hunting in some years. See online area brochure for restrictions and regulations.



**13. Merritt Island NWR:** This refuge, administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, provides good duck habitat and traditionally holds concentrations of wigeon and pintails. Teal, mottled ducks and scaup also are common. Hunting pressure can be high. Hunting is allowed only in certain areas and on certain days by permit. You can obtain the specific regulations by contacting the refuge headquarters at 321-861-0667. Additional information on hunts, hunting, permits and hunt quotas can be obtained on the refuge's website.

**14. Upper St. Johns River lakes and marshes:** The upper basin of the St. Johns River, from Indian River County north to Lake Harney, historically has been considered among the best waterfowl habitat in the state. This extensive area provides virtually unlimited opportunities for diverse hunting experiences in terms of species, habitats and modes of hunting. However, the diverse and constantly changing habitats require hunters to do extensive scouting to find and access the good hunting spots. St. John's Water Management District allows walk-in access to certain areas where you don't need a boat. Much of the area south of Lake Poinsett is within the Upper St. Johns River Marsh WMA. Otherwise, statewide regulations apply. The online area brochure and the St. John's public recreation website offer more information.

**15. T. M. Goodwin Waterfowl Management Area / Broadmoor Marsh Unit:** Collectively, these two areas comprise 6,600 acres in the upper St. Johns River basin. These areas are managed by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) to provide high-quality habitat for waterfowl and other wetland wildlife. This area is open to hunting only on Tuesdays and Saturdays and requires a quota permit. Public access is controlled through the area headquarters. Call 321-726-2862 or refer to the online area brochure for details.

**16. Tampa Bay:** Concentrations of scaup and redheads can sometimes be found out in the open waters, especially in Old Tampa Bay south of the Highway 60 causeway. A wide variety of dabbling ducks use habitats associated with spoil islands in Hillsborough Bay created by dredging navigation channels. Access to some areas may be restricted, particularly spoil islands; otherwise statewide regulations apply. Winds and tides coupled with large areas of shallow water can make boating challenging.

**17. Central Florida lakes:** Excellent duck hunting opportunities exist on many of the large public lakes in central Florida. Ring-necked ducks and teal are most abundant. These lakes include the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes (Kissimmee, Tohopekaliga, East Tohopekaliga, Cypress and Hatchineha), lakes Pierce, Marion and Weohyakapka in Polk County, and Lake Istokpoga in Highlands County. Habitat conditions on these lakes change from year to year. As a result, duck hunting is unpredictable. Of the lakes in this region, Lake Kissimmee probably consistently supports the most birds because its extensive natural marsh provides habitat in addition to hydrilla and other submersed plants.

**18. Lake Okeechobee:** This lake is one of the more popular and historically acclaimed areas for duck hunting in the state. Good hunting opportunities are still available, but habitat quality has degraded because of water-level stabilization and high levels of nutrient input. Lake Okeechobee still attracts large numbers of wintering ducks, including ring-necked ducks and a variety of dabbling duck species. These birds primarily are found in the marshes along the western shore, from Okeechobee to Moore Haven. Hunting pressure in this area can be high. Large flocks of scaup (up to 90,000) are often found in the middle, open-water portions of the lake, but conditions make them difficult to hunt. Maps showing access points and other information may be obtained from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Statewide regulations apply.

**19. Holey Land / Rotenberger / Everglades WMAs:** Collectively these three WMAs, which are managed by the FWC, contain over 700,000 acres in Palm Beach, Broward and Dade counties. In any given year, the WMAs and Everglades may provide good waterfowl habitat and hunting opportunities depending on water level conditions, ongoing restoration projects and management activities. Teal, mottled ducks and ring-necked ducks can be abundant. All areas have specific regulations. See online area brochures for more information.

**20. South Florida Water Management District marshes:** The stormwater treatment areas (STA) are home to large areas of topped-out submersed vegetation that attract a variety of dabbling ducks and diving ducks, including pintails, wigeon and the occasional canvasback. These filter marshes, whose primary function is to clean water going into the Everglades, provide hunting opportunities through limited entry/quota hunts. These areas are paddle in only, so most hunters use canoes or kayaks to get across ditches and arrive at their hunting locations. Hunts are held Friday, Saturday and Sunday, depending on the area. See online brochures and the district website for information about the STAs and other areas.



## What equipment do I need to hunt waterfowl?

There are a variety of ways to hunt waterfowl in Florida, so “necessary” equipment can vary. The basic equipment needed is a shotgun, waders and decoys. Most hunters use 12- or 20-gauge shotguns with steel shot size #4 to #2. Many WMAs provide walk-in opportunities in shallow wetlands where no boat or watercraft is needed. Deeper lakes and impoundments usually require at least a kayak or canoe, but larger boats can simplify the hunt. Decoys are beneficial for attracting waterfowl, but should be used strategically. More information on this is found on page 16 under tips for waterfowl hunting.

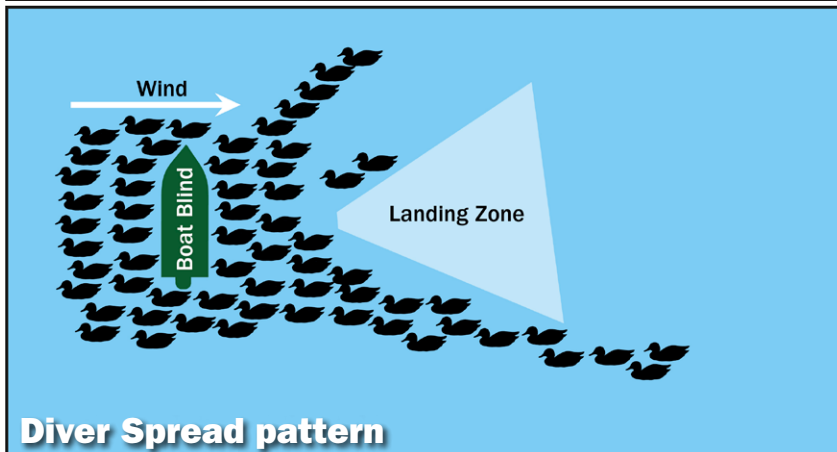
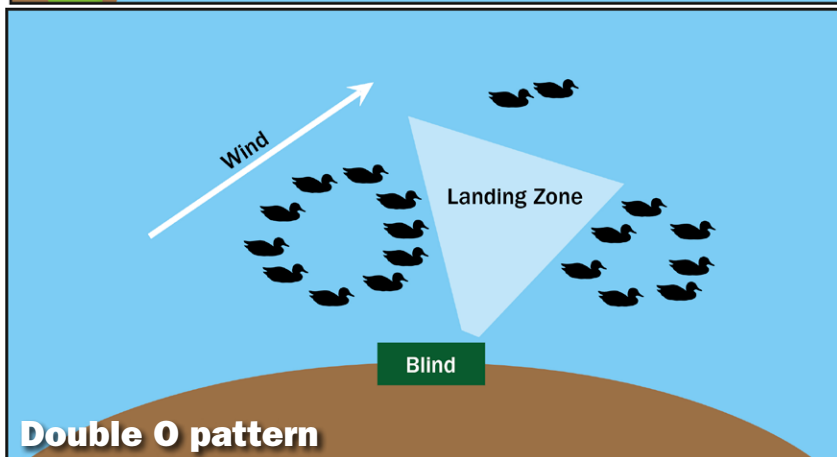
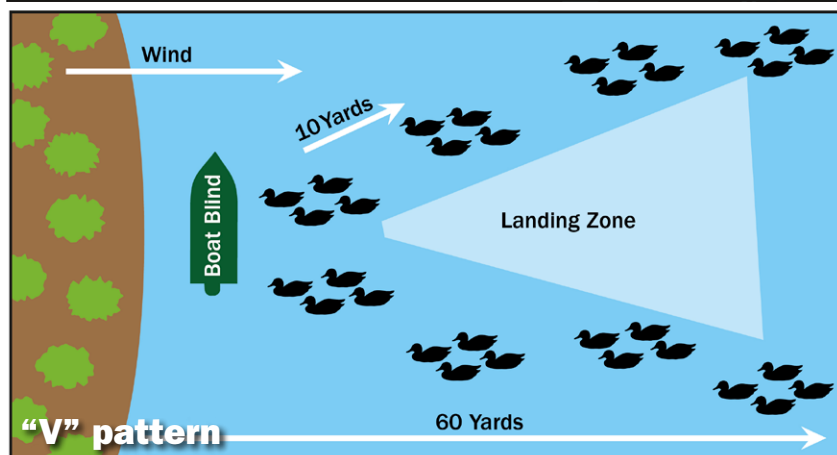
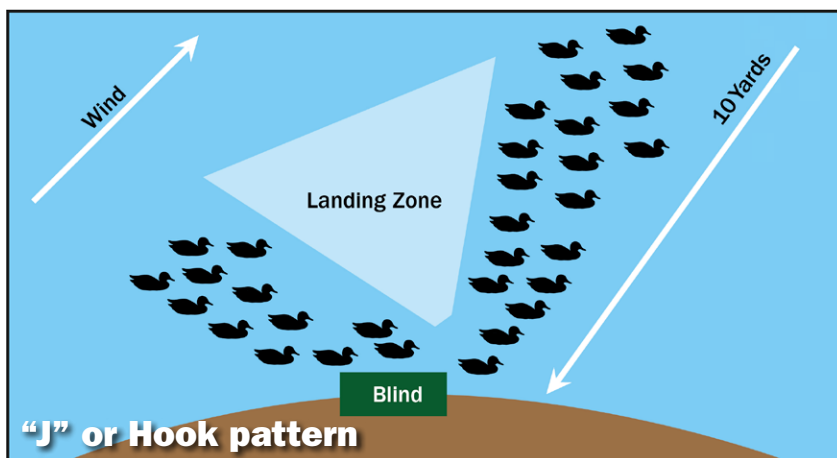
## Can I use recorded game calls and duck decoys to hunt waterfowl?

Manual (mouth-operated) duck calls may be used, but recorded game calls and sounds may not be used to hunt any game animals, including waterfowl. However, most species of waterfowl in Florida do not readily respond to calls, so most Florida hunters do not use duck calls. If one is used though, it should be used sparingly, as too much calling can turn ducks away. You may use decoys, including those with spinning wings. To the right are some examples of commonly used decoy spreads.

## Do I need to wear hunter orange, like I do when I’m deer hunting?

No. It is only required that you wear 500 square inches of fluorescent orange above the waistline when deer hunting on public land.

## Commonly used decoy spreads





## Can you use dogs to hunt waterfowl?

Yes. Retrievers, labs and spaniels can be a big help in retrieving downed waterfowl, especially if the water is too deep for wading. Use caution during the early September season and on warm days because alligators may be active.

## Are there certain precautions I should take when hunting waterfowl or other migratory birds out of a boat?

Always remember to have and use the [required boating safety equipment](#) and obey all boating laws. If you are using a smaller boat, they are typically less stable than most larger-sized boats, so be sure to distribute and balance the weight evenly, stay seated and do not exceed the boat's capacity. Make the smart decision of wearing a personal flotation device (PFD). Life jackets are so much easier to wear these days, thanks to inflatable PFDs, particularly the belt packs. They come in a variety of styles, come in camouflage, they don't get in your way and can be a real lifesaver if you end up falling out of the boat. But be sure any inflatable life jacket is worn on the *outside* of your clothing. Always transport your shotgun in a gun case unloaded, with the action open and safety on.

## When scouting for a good waterfowl hunting area, what should I be looking for? What habitats do waterfowl prefer?

Waterfowl in Florida use a variety of habitats, depending on many different factors such as pressure, weather, breeding cycle and water level changes. For proper scouting, hunters should arrive at a water body at early dawn, and use binoculars to scan the area and watch for ducks flying to feed. It is important to try and not disturb birds in the area they are using, so they will continue using it. If you cannot scout early in the morning, there are general plants and habitat types you can look for that ducks use.

The aquatic plant hydrilla is a significant factor affecting the distribution of ducks and coots in Florida. Hydrilla is an invasive exotic plant that impedes navigation and competes with native



Tim Donovan, FWC



PO2 Nate Littlejohn, USCG





*This shows the mixture of open water/submersed plants and emergent plants that waterfowl prefer.*

plants, but it is also a highly preferred duck food. Hydrilla often grows to the surface of the water and forms large mats that attract ducks and other water birds. Herbicide control efforts cause the amount of hydrilla to vary from year to year in lakes where it has become established. When a lake has large amounts of hydrilla growing to the surface, you can expect large numbers of birds, particularly ring-necked ducks and coots.

In addition to hydrilla, [other submersed plants that form large mats on the surface](#) will attract waterfowl. These include chara, Illinois pondweed, southern naiad and eelgrass. Floating leaved plants, such as watershield, fragrant waterlily, Mexican waterlily and spatterdock also provide good duck habitat. It is important to find areas where there is a mixture of open water/submersed plants and emergent and floating leaved plants. These areas provide cover for both the ducks and duck hunters. It is important to scout and take note of the type of habitat you most often see ducks using. But even though an area may look perfect, if ducks aren't using it, keep looking until you see ducks.

### **How can you best identify the different waterfowl species?**

There are numerous resources online pertaining to [duck identification](#), but there is no substitute for going into the field and practicing identifying birds in flight. When hunting, do not shoot unless you have positively identified the species of waterfowl and know that it is legal to take.

**What kinds of ducks can I expect to see?**

Approximately 20 species of waterfowl regularly winter in Florida. Blue- and green-winged teal, shovelers and other puddle ducks frequent shallow marshes. Large numbers of redheads winter on the Gulf coast. Scaup (bluebills) congregate in brackish marsh and lagoons. In addition, mottled ducks, wood ducks, black-bellied whistling ducks, fulvous whistling ducks and Canada geese live in Florida year-round and can be found in many types of wetland areas.



Ron Bielefeld

Mottled duck



Ron Bielefeld

Blue-winged teal



Ron Bielefeld

American green-winged teal



USFWS

Lesser scaup (bluebill)





Ron Bielefeld

*Redhead*



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*Black-bellied whistling duck*



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*Fulvous whistling duck*



*Wood duck*



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*Northern shoveler*



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*Ring-necked duck*





*American wigeon*

Ron Bielefeld



*Gadwall*



*Bufflehead*



*Hooded merganser*

Ron Bielefeld



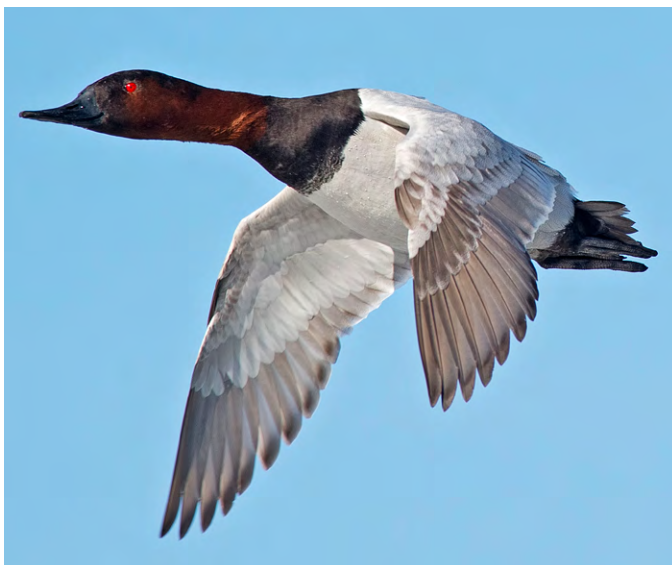


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*Northern pintail*



*Ruddy duck*



*Canvasback*



*American coot*

Ron Bielefeld

## What about Canada geese?

Canada geese are often found in urban areas, but are expanding into rural and agricultural lands where they can be hunted. The largest populations are around Leon and Duval counties, but they can be found throughout areas of north and central Florida. There is a September season, along with a two-phase regular season that closely aligns with duck season. Click [here](#) for additional details.

## What are some tips for waterfowl hunting?

- Ducks have great eyesight and are good at detecting movement, so make sure you and your boat/blind are fully camouflaged and you sit still when waterfowl are approaching.
- Hunt with the wind at your back. Decoying/landing birds most often land into the wind.
- The most effective way to use decoys is to mimic what you are seeing the birds doing. If teal are sitting in small groups scattered throughout a wetland, use a small amount of decoys in the same fashion. If you are seeing ring-necked ducks landing in larger groups of coots, use a larger spread of coot decoys to attract them.
- The effective range of most shotguns is 40 yards. Shooting beyond that distance is unethical and often leads to wounding birds that you don't recover.
- Identify and select a single bird as a target before shooting. Shooting into a flock often results in a miss or wounded birds.

## Where should I aim before pulling the trigger on waterfowl?

Most hunters aim at the tip of the bill of flying waterfowl for the most ethical shot placement. It is important that you follow through with your shot and continue to swing the shotgun after pulling the trigger. Spending some time at your local [shooting range](#) will get you more familiar with your shotgun and how it shoots. Skeet and sporting clays provide moving targets at multiple angles that are helpful to duck hunters.

## If I'm uncomfortable trying to hunt waterfowl by myself, are there any guides I could hire to take me hunting?

You can find waterfowl hunting guides at [MyFWC.com/Outfitters](http://MyFWC.com/Outfitters).

## What if I shoot a duck that has a band around its leg?

Please report banded birds to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) online at [ReportBand.gov](http://ReportBand.gov). Some information to include in your report is the number on the band, the date and location where the bird was harvested, and what species of waterfowl it is. The data received from duck band recoveries provides valuable information about duck survival, the demographics (species, age, gender) of birds harvested, and also provides information about duck movements and migration. The information ensures good waterfowl management, and is used in setting annual hunting season dates and bag limits.

## How can I best transport my harvested waterfowl home?

It is important to keep harvested waterfowl as cool as possible until they can be cleaned. Most hunters use coolers once they get out of the field to keep birds cold until they arrive home.

## Can I clean any waterfowl I shoot in the field or on the water, or do I have to transport them whole/uncleaned back to my home?

You are allowed to clean waterfowl and other migratory game birds in the field or in the boat/blind, but you must keep either a head or a wing attached to each bird you harvest until you get home.



## How do you clean a duck?

There are two common methods for cleaning ducks. The first is to “breast them out,” which is simply removing the two breast halves from the duck. This is the bulk of the meat found on birds. Some hunters will also pluck the bird, remove the entrails, and roast the entire bird. A quick internet search will provide more information on this topic.

## Am I allowed to sell any of the meat or feathers from my harvested waterfowl?

No, the sale (includes trade, barter and exchange) or purchase of waterfowl and other migratory game bird meat or parts is prohibited, but you may give away any of the meat or parts.

## How can I best preserve my harvested waterfowl for taxidermy work?

If you harvest a waterfowl that you want to get mounted, do your best to keep the bird dry after retrieving it. The bird should be placed in a sealable plastic bag and frozen until you can get it to the taxidermist. Some hunters also place the bird headfirst in a pair of pantyhose for added protection to the feathers.

## Where can I find recipes about how to cook waterfowl?

When field dressed and prepared correctly, ducks and geese can be tasty. Waterfowl meat is a healthy choice because it’s lean, organic protein that’s locally harvested. Ducks Unlimited, Delta Waterfowl and many online forums have different tips and tricks for cooking waterfowl properly. Duck can easily be overcooked, so make sure you research recipes and cooking times for specific species.

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## Additional migratory game bird hunting opportunities

To hunt all species listed below, hunters will need a [hunting license](#) and [no-cost migratory bird permit](#). If you are hunting on a WMA, you will also need a [\\$26 management area permit](#). Youth (15 and under), seniors (65 and older) and those with a [Resident Persons with Disabilities Hunting and Fishing License](#) are exempt from these license and permit requirements. If you are hunting on a WMA, you may also need a [quota permit](#). Check the specific WMA rules and regulations online brochure under the “Migratory Bird Seasons” section to be sure.

### Mourning and white-winged doves

Mourning doves are one of the most popular game species in Florida. In south Florida, white-winged doves are also popular among hunters. Good dove hunting opportunities can be found near agricultural lands where birds feed on crops and seed. Doves concentrate on areas where they can find an easy meal, primarily because they have weak feet and cannot scratch through heavy vegetation for seed. The best place to find dove are cultivated fields where the soil has been disked (turned over). There, they can land and readily pick up seed. Doves also seek out sources of water and grit. The most successful dove hunts often occur when large numbers of doves migrate into Florida with seasonal cold fronts, but resident doves also can provide good hunts on opening days of each phase.

Most hunters prefer a 12-gauge shotgun, although youths, some women or those that seek more of a challenge may opt for a smaller gauge. Shot sizes normally range from #7.5 to #9. A retriever or bird



Mourning dove

Jamie Adams

dog can be an asset but not a necessity. Even when downed birds are carefully marked they are sometimes difficult to find. A trained dog should have no problem locating birds that have been shot.

Click [here](#) for hunting season dates, legal shooting hours and bag limits.

## Common snipe

Florida ranks amongst the top states in the nation in the number of snipe harvested each year. Snipe hunting in Florida can offer unparalleled excitement. Snipe fly with a fast, erratic flight pattern, presenting a challenge for hunters. The skill it requires to shoot a moving snipe is probably the main reason many hunters trounce through mud and muck to locate and flush snipe. The common snipe is a migratory game bird that is found in Florida only during the winter months. Snipe are mostly found in shallow wetlands, low pastures and open shorelines of lakes, ponds and streams. Hunters should note that habitat conditions for snipe can change with periods of rain or drought, and snipe will respond to these changes. Periods of dry weather tend to reduce available snipe habitat, but can improve snipe hunting. During these periods, snipe often concentrate around lakes and ponds as water levels recede, exposing muddy shorelines. Snipe can also be heavily concentrated around certain impoundments during drawdowns. During rainy periods, snipe move to soggy pastures and fields. Recent rainfall trends are important for snipe hunters to consider when trying to locate birds.



Common snipe

USFWS

Hunting strategy is simple—find their habitat, walk until you flush one out and use a shotgun with shot size ranging from #8 to #9. A close-working bird dog or retriever can be helpful in finding, flushing and retrieving snipe.

Hunting season dates for snipe are Nov. 1 – Feb. 15. The daily bag limit on snipe is eight, with a possession limit of 24.

## Woodcock

Bird hunters wanting to experience something different should try woodcock hunting. Woodcock make excellent game birds because they hold well for pointing bird dogs and provide a challenging shot when flushed. American woodcock are migratory game birds that winter in Florida. They prefer cypress swamps and thickets with heavy overhead cover. Finding and shooting them is a real challenge. Look for woodcock in wet bottom hardwood hammocks along rivers and creeks. Within this general habitat, particularly watch for thickets of wax myrtle, gallberry, tree saplings, titi, honeysuckle, blackberries and grapevine. During the colder months, woodcock are found in all parts of the state, but better concentrations of birds are more common in central and north Florida. Woodcock tend to move with cold fronts and large flights of them can often be found a day or two after a strong cold front has passed through, making it a great time to hunt them.



Woodcock

USFWS

Hunting strategy is much like quail hunting. Walk with your bird dog until it points. Keep in mind, when preparing for a shot, woodcock often flush straight up into the air before choosing a direction. Shotguns using shot size ranging from #7.5 to #9 work best.



Hunting season dates for woodcock are Dec. 18 – Jan. 31. The daily bag limit on woodcock is three, with a possession limit of nine.

### Rails and common moorhens

Hunters who enjoy trekking through salt marshes and lake shores for the chance to jump a bird will love hunting rail and moorhen. Florida is a great place to be if you are up for this challenge. There are four rail species legal to hunt in Florida, including the clapper, king, Virginia and sora. Rails, in general, are elusive, marsh-dwelling birds that feed on invertebrates (insects, crayfish, fiddler crabs), fish, frogs and plant matter. Common moorhens are in the rail family, but they are different from their rail cousins. To start with, most rails prefer shallow water marshes, whereas moorhens prefer deep-water marshes. Moorhens primarily eat aquatic vegetation and, unlike rails, they are not cautious. On the contrary, they are known to walk across lily pads, chattering at intruders who they perceive are in their territory.

The most common method for hunting rails and moorhens is by using a shallow-draft boat and push-poling through the marsh until a bird is spotted or flushed. This works best if you have one person in the front of the boat doing the shooting and the other in the back doing the poling. Another effective strategy involves wading through marshes in order to flush birds. This method can be strenuous and should only be attempted by hunters who have lots of stamina and are in good physical condition. Shotguns using shot sizes between #4 and #6 are best for moorhens and larger rails. Smaller shot sizes may be adequate for smaller rails.

Hunting season dates for rail and common moorhen are Sept. 1 – Nov. 9. The daily bag limit on common moorhen is 15, with a possession limit of 45. The daily bag limit for king and clapper rails combined is 15, with a combined possession limit of 45. The daily bag limit for sora and Virginia rails combined is 25, with a combined 75-bird possession limit.



*Clapper rail*

USFWS



*Common moorhen*

USFWS



# *Bird Hunters' Code of Conduct*

We are fortunate to have healthy populations of several different waterfowl and migratory bird species to hunt in Florida. How hunters behave and how their conduct is perceived by others can help keep hunting viewed in a positive light. Here are some suggestions for good hunter conduct:

- Obey and support wildlife laws. Know the bag limits and do not shoot birds to fill another hunter's bag – that is illegal. Report wildlife violations to 888-404-FWCC (3922) or at [MyFWC.com/WildlifeAlert](http://MyFWC.com/WildlifeAlert).
- Study and become proficient in [identifying ducks](#). For example, male scaup and female redheads are often mistaken for ring-necked ducks, and both have restricted bag limits.
- Leave nothing behind. Retrieve all gear and shell casings after the hunt.
- Respect other hunters. Don't set up any closer than 200 yards from other parties. Do not shoot at birds circling or approaching other parties.
- Support local and national waterfowl and wetland conservation organizations.
- Respect other users of Florida's lakes, rivers and coastlines.
- Share the fun of safe and responsible hunting with others, especially youth.
- Transport harvested birds discreetly – don't display them.
- Be a credit to, and good representative of, the sporting community.
- Be respectful to others who may not share your views on hunting.
- Questions about migratory birds or hunting regulations can be emailed to the FWC's Waterfowl and Small Game Management Office at [Ducks@MyFWC.com](mailto:Ducks@MyFWC.com).

As a hunter, please continue to do your part in helping build upon the overall support for hunting in Florida.

*Good luck, have fun and be safe!*





Florida Fish and Wildlife  
Conservation Commission  
[MyFWC.com](http://MyFWC.com)

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