

# WILDLIFE

*management guide*



Wildlife Management Section  
South Carolina Department  
of Natural Resources  
P.O. Box 167  
Columbia, SC 29202

## *Mourning Dove*

**Mourning doves are the most abundant game bird in the Southeast and are one of the most abundance birds of any kind in the United States.**

**D**oves prefer open or semi-open lands and are primarily farm game birds that thrive where grain crops are grown. Doves can travel considerable distances in search of food, water, and gravel, but prefer easy access to them. Because the dove is such a highly mobile species, local habitat conditions generally do not limit the population, nor will manipulation of the environment increase populations in the local area.

### **HABITAT REQUIREMENTS**

#### **▲ Food**

Ninety-nine percent of a dove's diet is seeds obtained from native or cultivated plants. Favored food types can include: corn, small grains, pine seeds, sorghum, millets, wild peas, sedges, sunflower, and pokeweed. Doves generally do not feed in areas containing heavy, densely-matted vegetation. Bare ground on which seeds are available is preferred.

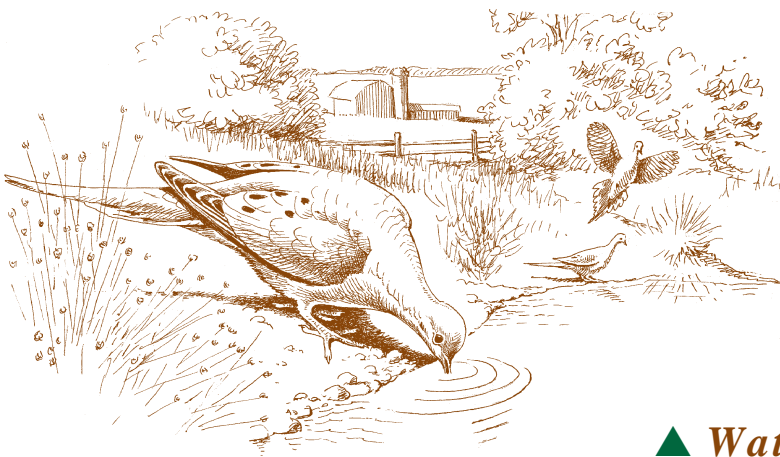
Care should be taken when planting food for doves near areas where doves are hunted. Federal regulations concerning the baiting of migratory birds prohibit the shooting of doves where grains, salt, or other foods are placed (i.e. carried to an area, not grown) for the purpose of attracting birds. It is recommended that State and/or Federal wildlife officers be consulted concerning plans for dove food production and hunting.

#### **▲ Cover**

Nesting habitat is not usually a limiting factor for doves. Generally, trees and shrubs available for roosting and nesting are unlimited. Doves typically nest in trees along the edges of fields, pastures, or clearings and are seldom found in densely wooded areas. Nests are usually 10 to 30 feet above the ground and often found in red cedar, shortleaf and loblolly pines.

#### **▲ Water**

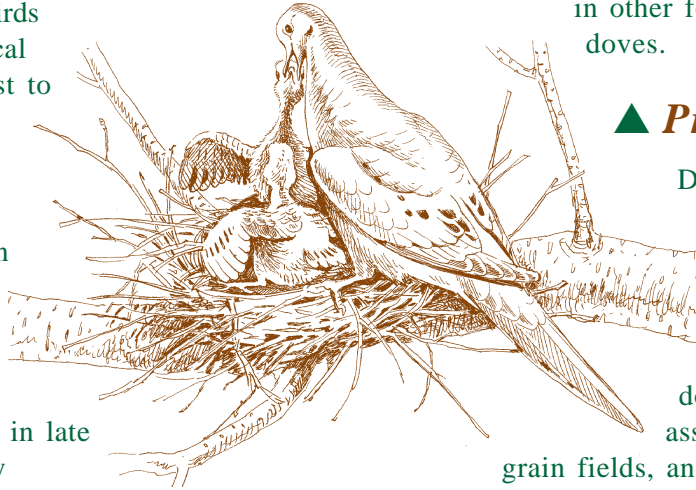
Water is an important requirement for doves and watering sources are used more frequently if bare ground is found adjacent to a portion of the water's edge.



## ▲ *Population Objectives*

Migratory doves over-winter in the Southeast but the greatest dove concentrations in South Carolina are resident flocks in the early fall. Birds resident to a local area are the first to breed in the spring.

The dove breeding season runs from February through October reaching a peak in late spring and early summer; although it may be observed during any month. Doves reproduce at high rates producing 3-5 broods each year. They are however a short-lived species and generally survive less than a year. Doves tend to over-winter in the same area each year and remain longest in the best habitat. Wintering doves prefer river and creek bottoms near agricultural fields that produced corn or grains the previous summer.



## ▲ *Intermediate Treatments*

Early and frequent thinning of pine stands stimulates the production of herbaceous plants valuable as dove foods. Intermediate treatments in other forest types have little impact on doves.

## ▲ *Prescribed Burning*

Doves readily feed in burned areas where desirable seeds are abundant and exposed. Prescribed burning in park-like stands is an inexpensive and effective technique for managing dove habitat, especially when used in association with openings, cultivated grain fields, and water sources. Winter burns are preferred since more seed is produced from herbaceous plants. Do not burn stream bottoms, slopes over 20 percent, or mast-producing hardwood inclusions.

## **DIRECT IMPROVEMENTS TO HABITAT**

Control understory vegetation so that birds may move freely on the ground and easily locate seeds. Mow, or disc small areas (10-20 acres) in shrubby vegetation. Avoid fall plowing of agricultural fields following harvest. Leave some areas of small grains like wheat, rye, corn, browntop millet, and sorghum unharvested and leave waste grain.

Regeneration areas can be planted to grains in the growing space not occupied by seedlings for the first few years following harvest. Plant dove foods immediately following site preparation. Millets work well in this situation. Plant small grains in the vicinity of water and coniferous cover. Row cultivation is preferred, although broadcast seeding can be used. In areas of extensive crop and grasslands, coniferous trees can be planted for nesting and roosting sites. These will hold a breeding population in the summer and attract migratory flocks in fall and winter.

## **STANDARD MANAGEMENT PRACTICES**

Seed tree, shelterwood, and clearcuts are all appropriate timber harvest methods for dove management. Rotation length, stand size and shape are not important factors.

## ▲ *Regeneration*

Regenerated areas are beneficial to doves for 2 to 3 years following site preparation and the more thorough the site preparation the more beneficial to doves. For maximum benefits, perform site preparation prior to mid-June so that herbaceous plants mature and produce seed by fall. Pokeberry is a highly preferred dove food often found on recently regenerated areas.

---

## OTHER SPECIES THAT BENEFIT FROM MOURNING DOVE MANAGEMENT

Many species with open field habitat requirements benefit from dove management. Management plans should also emphasize the following species that are associated with early successional habitats that can be managed for doves:

<u><i>Open Fields</i></u>	<u><i>Early Regeneration</i></u>	<u><i>Park-like Pine Stands</i></u>
yellow-rumped warbler	rabbit	red-cockaded woodpecker
goldfinch	white-tailed deer	Bachman's sparrow
indigo bunting	ruffed grouse	wild turkey
meadowlark	yellow-breasted chat	bobwhite quail
red fox	chestnut-sided warbler	
Cooper's hawk	towhee	
	song sparrow	
	bobwhite quail	





The South Carolina Department of Natural Resources prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, sex, color, national origin, religion, disability or age. Direct all inquiries to the Office of Human Resources, P.O. Box 167, Columbia, S.C. 29202.