

**VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE RESOURCES
2025-26 MIGRATORY GAME BIRD FACT SHEETS**

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Doves

Mourning Dove Background Information and Population Status

There are three dove management units (or flyways) across the country, including the Eastern (EMU), Central (CMU) and Western (WMU) Management Units. Virginia is in the EMU.

- Population trends in the EMU:
 - 10-yr (2015-2024): gradually declining population trend.
 - Long term (1966-2024): gradually declining population trend.
- Dove Banding Project – Annual program since 2003 to leg-band over 500 doves annually in VA, and 33,000 nationwide. Data used to provide estimates of movements, survival and harvest rates, and is the main monitoring program used to develop annual hunting regulations.
- Harvest Strategy: Revised Harvest Strategy adopted in 2014 allows for a standard dove hunting season of 90 days with a bag limit of 15 birds/day.
- Data from HIP (past 5-yr avg.): Hunters = 15,000 Harvest = 219,300

Recent Seasons

<u>Year</u>	<u>Season Dates (all 70 days until extended to 90 days in 2014-15)</u>		
2024-2025	Sept. 2 – Oct. 20	Nov. 23 – Dec. 01	Dec. 20 – Jan. 20
2023-2024	Sept. 2 – Oct. 22	Nov. 18 – Nov. 26	Dec. 22 – Jan. 20
2022-2023	Sept. 3 – Oct. 23	Nov. 19 – Nov. 27	Dec. 23 – Jan. 21
2021-2022	Sept. 4 – Oct. 27	Nov. 20 – Nov. 28	Dec. 22 – Jan. 17
2020-2021	Sept. 5 – Oct. 28	Nov. 21 – Nov. 29	Dec. 24 – Jan. 19
2019-2020	Sept. 2 – Oct. 27	Nov. 27 – Dec. 4	Dec. 24 – Jan. 18
2018-2019	Sept. 1 – Oct. 28	Nov. 21 – Nov. 28	Dec. 22 – Jan. 14
2017-2018	Sept. 2 – Oct. 29	Nov. 22 – Nov. 29	Dec. 23 – Jan. 15
2016-2017	Sept. 3 – Oct. 30	Nov. 19 – Nov. 27	Dec. 24 – Jan. 15
2015-2016	Sept. 5 – Nov. 1	Nov. 21 – Nov. 29	Dec. 24 – Jan. 15
2014-2015	Sept. 1 – Oct. 31	Nov. 22 – Nov. 30	Dec. 27 – Jan. 15
2013-2014	Sept. 2 – Oct. 14	Oct. 19 – Nov. 2	Dec. 31 – Jan. 11
2012-2013	Sept. 1 – Oct. 13	Oct. 17 – Oct. 27	Dec. 28 – Jan. 12
2011-2012	Sept. 3 – Oct. 10	Oct. 25 – Nov. 5	Dec. 26 - Jan. 14
2010-2011	Sept. 4 – Oct. 11	Oct. 20 – Nov. 6	Dec. 27 – Jan. 8
2009-2010	Sept. 5 - 26	Oct. 7 – Nov. 7	Dec. 25 – Jan. 9
2008-2009	Sept. 1 - 27	Oct. 4 – Oct. 31	Dec. 27 – Jan. 10
2007-2008	Sept. 1 – 29	Oct. 5 – Oct 27	Dec. 26 – Jan. 12
2006-2007	Sept. 2 – 23	Oct. 7 – Nov. 4	Dec. 28 – Jan. 15
2005-2006	Sept. 3 – 24	Oct. 8 – Nov. 5	Dec. 27 – Jan. 14
2004-2005	Sept. 4 – 25	Oct. 9 – Nov. 6	Dec. 28 – Jan. 15
2003-2004	Sept. 1 – 27	Oct. 8 – Nov. 8	Dec. 31 – Jan. 10
2002-2003	Sept. 2 - 28	Oct. 9 – Nov. 9	Jan. 1 – Jan. 11
2001-2002	Sept. 1 - 29	Oct 13 – Nov. 10	Dec. 29 – Jan. 9

SEPTEMBER TEAL SEASON FACT SHEET - 2024

- Special teal seasons were initiated in late 1960's to provide harvest opportunities on blue-winged and green-winged teal. When the blue-winged teal breeding population (BPOP) is above 3.3 million, a 9-day season can be offered. If the BPOP exceeds 4.7 million, a 16-day season can be offered.
- Blue-winged teal are one of the earliest migrants. Many pass-through Virginia from late August through October, prior to the opening of the late duck season.
- Green-winged teal are also early migrants and arrive in September and October. However, some Green-wings remain through the winter depending on weather conditions.
- Virginia has held a special September teal season since 1999 (see dates listed below). The season was initially held only in the area east of I-95 because there are greater numbers of teal and teal hunters in the coastal plain. Even in the coastal plain, teal are not widespread, and the harvest has been relatively small. The season was expanded in 2011 to provide some teal hunting opportunity in the area west of I-95.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Season Dates</u>	<u>Season Dates</u>
	<u>East of I-95</u>	<u>West of I-95</u>
2024	Sept. 16 – 30	Sept. 21 - 30
2023	Sept. 17 – 30	Sept. 21 - 30
2022	Sept. 17 – 30	Sept. 21 - 30
2021	Sept. 17 – 30	Sept. 21 - 30
2020	Sept. 17 – 30	Sept. 21 - 30
2019	Sept. 17 – 30	Sept. 21 - 30
2018	Sept. 17 – 30	Sept. 21 - 30
2017	Sept. 16 – 30	Sept. 21 - 30
2016	Sept. 17 – 30	Sept. 21 - 30
2015	Sept. 17 – 30	Sept. 21 - 30
2014	Sept. 17 – 30	Sept. 22 - 30
2013	Sept. 16 – 30	Sept. 23 - 30
2012	Sept. 17 – 29	Sept. 24 - 29
2011	Sept. 19 – 30	Sept. 26 - 30
2010	Sept. 20 – 30	na
2009	Sept. 21 – 30	na
2008	Sept. 20 – 30	na
2007	Sept. 17 – 26	na
2006	Sept. 15 – 25	na
2005	Sept. 16 – 24	na
2004	Sept. 16 – 25	na
2003	Sept. 13 – 23	na
2002	Sept. 14 – 24	na
2001	Sept. 15 – 25	na
2000	Sept. 14 – 23	na
1999	Sept. 16 – 25	na

5- year Average Annual Harvest: 840 teal

FACT SHEET - Waterfowl Hunters and Harvests - 2024

- Liberal duck seasons (60 days, 6 bird bag limit) and resident goose seasons have resulted in high waterfowl harvests in Virginia during the past ten years. Harvest has averaged ~125,540 ducks and ~42,450 Canada geese from 2013-2022, compared to 114,770 ducks and 25,000 geese during the 1990's. The long season length and liberal bags offer greater opportunity and a greater cumulative harvest over the course of the season.
- Waterfowl hunter numbers in Virginia have been generally stable since the late 1990's. Since 1999, the Harvest Information Program (HIP) has been used to estimate hunter effort and harvest. The average number of duck and goose hunters over the past 3 years, as measured by HIP, was 15,500 and 9,600 respectively.
- Conditions during the 2023-2024 season were mild for most of the season but puddle duck harvest was higher than the previous year. Mallards were the most commonly harvested duck in Virginia, followed by buffleheads, wood ducks, green-winged teal and black ducks.

FACT SHEET - The Status of Ducks - 2024

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- Waterfowl harvest in the Atlantic flyway is managed by the stocks of four different species of eastern waterfowl populations (wood ducks, American green-winged teal, ring-necked ducks and goldeneyes). In 2024 estimated breeding population size for wood ducks was 0.87 million (SE = 0.12 million), 0.47 million (SE = 0.10 million) for American green-winged teal, 0.73 million (SE = 0.12 million) for ring-necked ducks and 1.20 million (SE = 0.32 million) for goldeneyes.
 - The total 2023 mid-continent mallard breeding population is predicted to be 6.10 million (SE = 0.25 million)

Virginia: Habitat conditions in Virginia during the spring of 2024 were average with slightly drier conditions towards the end of the breeding season that could have potentially impacted brood rearing habitat.

- The 2024 Virginia breeding pair estimate for mallards (15,100) was lower than last year (21,033). Estimated black duck pairs (64) decreased from last year (629). The number of Wood duck pairs (6,245) was lower than last year (9,259). The breeding pair estimate for Canada geese (25,230) was also lower than the 2023 estimate (44,516).

Return to the 4-Mallard Bag Limit in the Atlantic Flyway

The mallard has been one of the most abundant duck species in eastern North America. However, mallard numbers in the Northeastern U.S. declined about 40% from the late 1990's through around 2019. About 60% of the mallards harvested in Atlantic Flyway states, and around 80% of those harvested in Virginia, are derived from the Northeastern U.S. Mallard numbers in Eastern Canada were stable or slightly increasing during this same time period, but overall, the breeding mallard population in eastern North America had declined. This decline prompted waterfowl managers to enact harvest restriction on mallards in the Atlantic Flyway in 2019. The bag limit was reduced from 4 to 2 mallards daily, with a limit of 1 hen mallard. Those restrictions were in place for the past 4 hunting seasons.

Since 2019, Eastern Mallard numbers have increased 15%. In addition, a new Eastern Mallard Harvest Strategy and Population Model was developed based on recent population dynamics. This Strategy was put in place for 2023-2024 hunting season regulation process and allows for a return to a 4-mallard bag limit (2 hens). Projections from the new harvest strategy indicate that under current conditions, Atlantic Flyway regulations should allow for a liberal mallard bag limit (4 mallards total, only 2 hens) around 80% of the time.

FACT SHEET - The Status of Resident Canada Geese - 2024

- The resident Canada goose population increased significantly in Virginia during the 1980's and 1990's, and peaked at 260,000 geese in the late 1990's. This population caused significant conflicts with human and wildlife populations, and management actions were taken to reduce their numbers. The current population estimate is 122,400 (+/- 49,000) in Virginia and over 1 million in the Atlantic Flyway.
- Special resident goose hunting seasons were initiated in 1993 to help manage this population and to provide recreational opportunities for hunters. These seasons occur prior to the arrival of most migrant geese (~Sept. 25 in Virginia), or in areas where there are fewer migrant geese. The Federal Framework allows Virginia to conduct a statewide September Resident Goose season from September 1-25.
- There are fewer migrant geese in the western portion of Virginia, and special “Goose Hunting Zones” have been established that allow more liberal seasons in areas with a greater percentage of resident geese.
- Special resident goose hunting seasons have been very popular and have increased hunter participation and resident goose harvests. These seasons have been very effective in managing resident goose populations and helping to meet our statewide population objectives.
- In areas where hunting is not feasible, other options including special Depredation Orders for Airports, Agricultural areas, and Nest and Egg removal have been implemented to help manage resident goose conflicts.

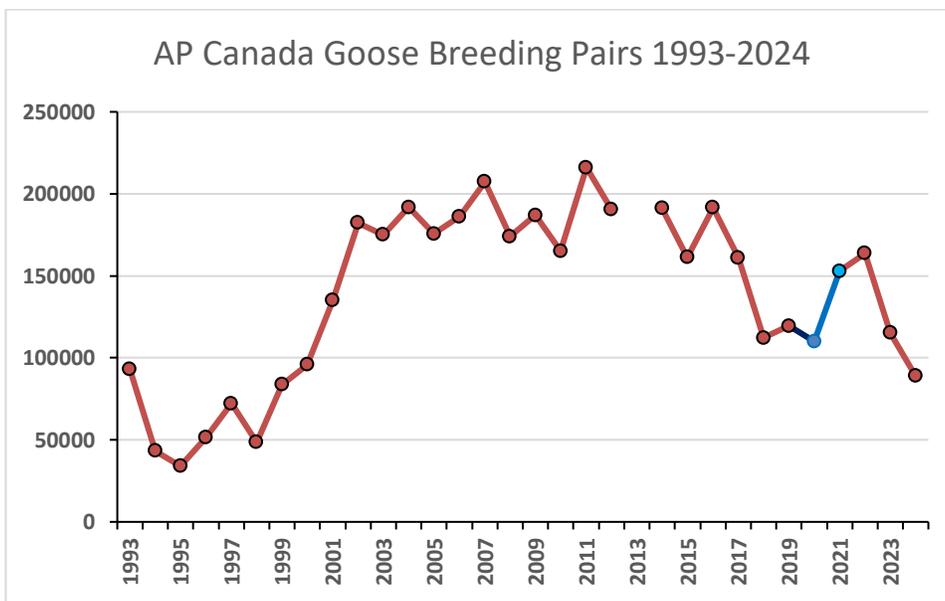
Year	Population Estimate *	September Harvest
2024	143,529 +/- 29%	n/a
2023	161,747 +/- 24%	n/a
2022	170,540 +/-26%	3,300
2021	177,056 +/-29%	6,300
2020	163,198 +/- 24%	13,000
2019	125,966 +/-20%	6,300
2018	132,633 +/- 24%	5,600
2017	142,167 +/- 21%	5,500
2016	158,200 +/- 19%	900
2015	150,651 +/- 22%	6,100
2014	130,503 +/- 26%	7,500
2013	144,910 +/- 26%	10,700
2012	158,267 +/- 28%	9,700
2011	165,022 +/- 28%	14,700
2010	147,313 +/- 29%	15,600
2009	145,019 +/- 29%	16,800
2008	157,560 +/- 29%	17,500
2007	154,030 +/- 27%	13,600
2006	136,700 +/- 27%	11,100
2005	129,486 +/- 26%	10,100
2004	143,741 +/- 25%	17,000
2003	186,753 +/- 23%	14,800
2002	218,719 +/- 24%	14,300
2001	218,384 +/- 27%	11,800
2000	227,164 +/- 32%	10,800
1999	261,554 +/- 34%	11,400

*3-year running average

FACT SHEET- History and Status of Migrant Canada Geese - 2024

- Migrant Canada geese from the Atlantic Population (AP) declined significantly from 1985-1995. The hunting season was closed in 1995 to allow the population to recover. Goose numbers rebounded quickly and a limited season (6 days with a 1-bird bag) was held in both 1999 and 2000. As the population increased, the season was extended to 30 days in 2001, then 45 days in 2002, and 50 days from 2012-2018.
- As the population increased, hunting regulations were liberalized. The season was extended to 30 days in 2001, then 45 days in 2002, and 50 days in 2012. The AP bag limit was increased to 2 per day in 2004. In 2019 the AP bag limit was reduced to 1 per day with a 30-day season. This was the result of several years of poor conditions on the arctic breeding grounds.
- After several years of below average productivity, two concurrent above average breeding seasons led to an increase in AP Canada goose production. This led to liberal harvest regulations for the 2022-2023 hunting season. Unfortunately, this was followed by a poor production year in 2023 and 2024 where the observed pair estimates (115,300 in 2023) and (89,000 in 2024) were down significantly from 2022 (164,000). The 2025 predicted number of breeding pairs based on the integrated population model was 133,500 which falls within the range (125,000 to 160,000 pairs) under which moderate harvest regulations are recommended in the AP Canada goose Harvest Strategy. Due to the 66+ discrepancy in the 2024 IPM prediction and the observed breeding pair estimate the Atlantic Flyway Council voted to go with the restrictive harvest regulation for the 2025-2026 season which is a 30 day season with a 1 goose daily limit.

Figure 1. Atlantic Population Canada Goose Breeding Pair survey estimates 1993-2024. Blue dots/lines are population model estimates for surveys that were not conducted in 2020 and 2021.



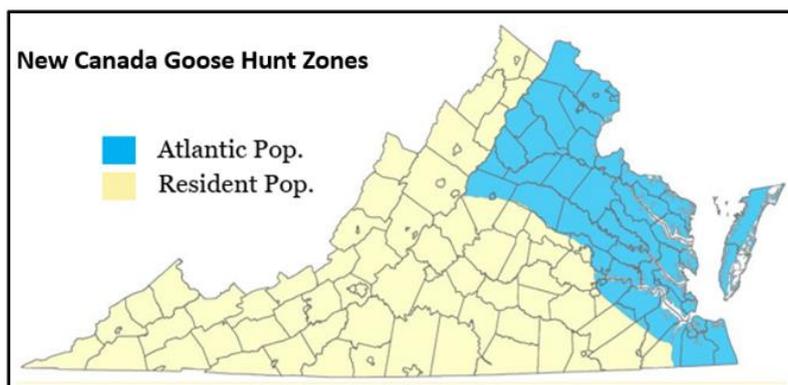
Change in Migrant Canada Goose Hunt Zones

- In 2020 there was a change in how the Atlantic Flyway, the Mississippi Flyway and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are managing the different “Migrant” Canada goose populations in the Eastern United States. The Southern James Bay Population (SJBP) is no longer recognized as a separate population, and the eastern portion of this population is now considered part of the Atlantic Population (AP). The AP along with the North Atlantic Population (NAP) are now the only recognized subpopulations of “migrant” Canada geese in the Atlantic Flyway. Nearly all the migrant geese that winter in Virginia are from the Atlantic Population, therefore we do not have a separate NAP hunt zone in Virginia.
- Due to this change, the SJBP Zone had to be eliminated in Virginia. No more than 10% of the band recoveries of arctic banded AP Canada geese can occur in a state’s RP zone. To accomplish this 90/10% split the new goose zones are as follows. **The area north of I-64 in the former SJBP zone has been placed in our AP Zone, while the area south of I-64, where fewer migrant geese are located, has been included in our Resident Population Zone (RP).**
- The hunting regulations for the areas in the former SJBP zone have changed, so hunters need to make sure they are aware of the new zone boundaries. The new Canada geese hunt zones are shown below.

Atlantic Population (AP) Hunt Zone – The area to the east of the following line: the “Blue Ridge” (Loudoun County-Clarke County border) at the West Virginia-Virginia Border, south to Interstate 64 (the Blue Ridge line follows county borders along the western edge of Loudoun-Fauquier-Rappahannock-Madison-Greene-Albemarle and into Nelson Counties), then east along Interstate Rt. 64 to Interstate 95 in Richmond, then south along I-95 to Route 460 in Petersburg, then southeast along Route 460 to Route 32 in the City of Suffolk, then south to the North Carolina border.

Resident Population (RP) Hunt Zone – The portion of the state west of the above AP Zone boundary.

The Southern James Bay Population Zone has been eliminated



FACT SHEET - Status of Light Geese (Greater and Lesser Snow Geese, and Ross's Geese) - 2024

- The majority (95%) of the “Light” geese found in the Atlantic Flyway are Greater Snow Geese, while less than 5% are Lesser Snow Geese, with even smaller numbers of Ross’s Geese.
- The principal nesting areas for greater snow geese are on Bylot, Axel Heiberg, Ellesmere, and Baffin Islands, and on Greenland. They winter along the Atlantic Coast from New Jersey to North Carolina.
- The Greater Snow Goose population is monitored on spring staging areas along the St. Lawrence Valley in Quebec. The 2024 population estimate was 628,000 geese.
- Banding crews at the major snow goose breeding colony on Bylot Island reported above average nest densities and low levels of nest predation.
- Over the last 30 years, snow goose populations increased nearly ten-fold. A shift from feeding almost exclusively in marshes to feeding more on agricultural grains has allowed them to expand their range and habitat use. This shift has also allowed them to return to their breeding habitats in better physical condition, which has led to increased productivity.
- This population has generally stabilized over the past 5 year, however concerns about habitat degradation on their breeding, migration and wintering areas still remain. Snow geese can cause damage to these habitats by pulling up plant roots and denuding marshes of vegetation. Snow geese can also cause conflicts with agricultural interest by pulling up green grains including wheat and barley.
- Current hunting regulations for snow geese are as liberal as Federal Frameworks will allow and include a 107-day season that runs from October to January, and a bag limit that was increased from 15 to 25 in 2010. Liberal seasons have helped increase the harvest, however, the population is still quite large.
- In addition to the regular hunting season, a Conservation Order (CO) was established in 2009 that authorizes additional snow goose hunting after the end of the regular season frameworks. The CO allows the use of alternative management strategies (unplugged shotguns, electronic calls, shooting to ½ hour after sunset, no daily bag limit) to further increase the harvest of snow geese. The snow goose harvest in Virginia has averaged around 300 birds during the regular season and 600 birds during the Conservation Order over the past 5 years.

FACT SHEET - Status of Atlantic Brant and Tundra Swan - 2024

- **BRANT.** The main breeding areas for Atlantic Brant are in the Eastern Canadian Arctic on Baffin, Southampton, and Ellesmere Islands. Most brant winter along the Atlantic Coast from MA to NC.
- The 2024 mid-winter survey (MWS) estimate for brant was 112,842 which is lower than the 2023 estimate of 121,475 and 20% below the long-term average, 140,897 (2001-2024). The Atlantic brant productivity estimate was 19.9% young which is much higher than the 2022 estimate of 8.6% and higher than the long-term average of 17%.
- The annual brant hunting regulation is now based on the Atlantic Brant Integrated Population Model (IPM) that was adopted by the Atlantic Flyway in 2021 and provides an index to the brant population. The model prediction for this year is 111,000 birds. As per the Brant Harvest Strategy, this estimate calls for a 2025-2026 harvest regulation of 30 days with a 1-bird daily limit. This strategy is the same as last year but a reduction from the past several years when the harvest regulation was 50 days with a 2-bird daily limit.
- **TUNDRA SWANS.** The Eastern Population of tundra swans nest in arctic tundra areas from Alaska, east to Hudson Bay and Baffin Island. These birds winter in coastal areas from Maryland to North Carolina.
- Estimated productivity of eastern population tundra swans in 2023 was 9.6% immature birds. This estimate is lower than the 2022 estimate (11.7%) and lower than the long-term average (13%).
- There were 64,437 eastern population tundra swans counted in the Atlantic Flyway on the 2024 Mid-Winter Survey. This count was 53% lower than the 2023 count (137,781) and 36% lower than the long-term average (2001-2024: 101,563)
- Nine states in the U.S. hunt tundra swans including Alaska, Utah, Montana and Nevada in the Pacific Flyway, North Dakota and South Dakota in the Central Flyway, and Delaware, Virginia and North Carolina in the Atlantic Flyway.
- There are no changes in the total number of hunting permits allowed for EP tundra swans this year (9,600 across the U.S., with 5,600 of those in the Atlantic Flyway) as the three-year average of the population estimate is still within the 70,000 to 110,000 range. In the Atlantic Flyway, the allocation of hunt permits is split between the 3 states in approximate proportion to the number of swans in each state. The 5,600 permits available in the Atlantic Flyway for the 2025-2026 season will be distributed as follows: NC– 4,853, VA-475, and DE-272.
- The tundra swan hunting season in Virginia is authorized and conducted as specified in the Atlantic Flyway Tundra Swan Management Plan and Hunt Plan, with limits and guidelines as specified under an MOU with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.