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For more information, contact: Adaven Rohling
Diversified Agriculture and Natural Resource Agent, Wildcat Extension District
adaven@ksu.edu, (620) 331-2690

After the Hunt – Cleaning and Handling Dove

Four species of dove are legal to hunt in Kansas. These species are the mourning dove, Eurasian collared dove, ringed turtledove, and white-winged dove. Mourning doves are one of the most popular game birds in North America, being hunted in 39 of the continental states, with an annual harvest of more than all other bird species combined. Kansas is among the top five states for dove harvest. Fall migration generally begins in the middle of August, but can vary depending on weather conditions. Dove can be found in a variety of landscapes, but they are mostly found in grasslands, crop fields, and land with abundant shrubs. Seeds from native plants and crop seeds make up a dove's diet. In Kansas, most dove have migrated south by October; however, some will stay in Kansas throughout the fall and winter.

Morning and White-winged dove season in Kansas opens September 1st this year and goes through November 29th. If you are lucky enough to get a few doves while hunting, it is important to know how to properly care for and handle dove to ensure the safety of the meat as it is harvested. While dove hunting is fun and dove is a nutritious meat, if it is not handled correctly when it is harvested it could become contaminated with bacteria which can lead to people who consume the meat getting sick. To reduce this risk, it is important to remember the following tips during hunting, storage, and preparing the food. As well as making sure to follow all the game regulations for hunting, transporting, and storage of wild game. Below are a few recommendations on cleaning and handling dove from Karen Blakeslee with the K-State Rapid Response Center.

Be prepared

- Bring a sharp hunting knife, a whetstone or steel, light rope or nylon cord, plastic bags, clean cloths or paper towels, and a cooler filled with ice.

Field care and transport

- Wear latex gloves while cleaning wild game.
- Do NOT harvest and eat sick or abnormal birds.
- Field dress the birds right away
- Birds may be plucked or skinned in the field
- Remove intestines and crop right away, as the grain in the crop may ferment if not removed.

- Wipe out the cavity with a clean cloth or paper towel, do not use grass or snow, this may contaminate the bird.
- Do not cross contaminate. Wash hands, knife, and cutting board with hot soapy water and wash thoroughly.
- Store birds in a plastic bag on ice to keep them clean and cold. Keep birds under 40°F. If a cooler is not available, put the birds in the back seat in the shade.
- Do not transport birds in the trunk of a vehicle, this does not allow heat to escape from the birds.

Safe Processing

- For immediate use, birds should be stored in the refrigerator at 40°F or less and used within 3 days. For long-term storage, the whole cleaned carcass may be frozen at 0°F or lower. Freezing the meat while it is fresh and in top condition will enhance the quality of the meat.
- Freeze game meat using moisture/vapor-proof wrap such as heavily waxed freezer wrap, laminated freezer wrap, or freezer-weight polyethylene bags. Wrap tightly, pressing out as much air as possible. Label the packages with the date and content. Be sure to use the packages within a year.

Safe Preparation

- After freezing, thaw the birds in the refrigerator or microwave. If microwaving, be sure to cook immediately after thawing.
- Fully cook game birds to an internal temperature of at least 165°F.
- Game birds may be prepared like chicken.

Dove season in Kansas goes until November 29. Remember to stay safe and have fun while hunting!

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