

Fall hunting season is upon us

By Hal Spain

Let's talk about the good news first. That is always a good place to start. As of this writing (Oct. 16, 2023), we are at the tail end of what has to be termed an excellent dove season for our area. Our annual dove hunt on opening weekend in the area around Haskell, Texas, was a resounding success with 272 dove cleaned over the weekend. I have to qualify that statement to include the fact that we had up to eight or nine hunters each day, with some of the younger, flat-bellied nephews who can really shoot hunting early morning to late evening each day. Suffice to say that we had a great weekend. Since that time I have heard shooting all around my home place near Lake Spence throughout the season thus far, with some really good numbers being taken. Dove season will close on Oct. 29, 2023, with the late season set for Dec. 15, 2023 through Jan. 14, 2024 in our area (Central Zone). Legal shooting hours are from one-half hour before sunrise to sunset, with possession limits at three times the daily bag limit.

always best to review our weather data during the growing season to get a good idea of our upcoming hunting prospects. Unfortunately, we are still in the grips of what is now a two-year drought for our county and most of the rest of the state. My official rainfall totals for 2023 so far include a modest amount for the 1st quarter of 1.89 inches, followed by a really good April through June quarter of 7.38 inches. Then the record 100 degree temps hit from July through September, with .48 inches in July and .06 inches for August. September rebounded somewhat with a total of 3.14 inches, but not enough to get any wheat grazing up to help the fall hunting season.

In spite of the bleak rainfall totals during the growing season, Texas Parks and Wildlife is predicting a good white-tailed deer season. This may come as a surprise to most hunters, but the good spring rains have led to some really good antler growth conditions. We are once again recommending harvesting more antlerless deer this year, as in most cases, area ranches have a high doe to buck ratio, which limits available shrubs and other

browse, thus hindering antler development.

As to seasons, archery season for deer and turkey will close on November 3, 2023, with no antlerless permit required except on MLD properties. The general deer and turkey season will run from November 4, 2023 through January 7, 2024. The special late general season will run from January 8 - 21, 2024, for antlerless and spike bucks only. The bag limit for deer is 5, with no more than 2 bucks, all seasons combined.

Turkey season in Coke County (North Zone) will run concurrently with deer season, November 4, 2023 through January 7, 2024. Spring turkey season has been set for March 30 through May 12, 2024, gobblers or bearded hens only, with a bag limit of 4 (all seasons combined).

We started this spring with a good quail hatch. In spite of the good spring rains, this summer's high temps and lack of forage and cover have brought our expectations back down to earth again. This will be another good

year to forego any quail hunting and see if we can get the numbers up for next year. Quail season will run statewide October 28, 2023 through February 25, 2024, with a daily bag limit of 15 and a possession limit of 45.

Legal shooting hours for all game animals and nonmigratory game birds are from one-half hour before sunrise to one-half hour after sunset.

Hunters are reminded that licenses are on sale now for the 2023-2024 hunting seasons and can be purchased through the agency's 28 law enforcement field offices, at more than 50 state parks and over 1,700 retailers across the state. Licenses may also be purchased online through the TPWD website or by phone at (800) 895-4248. Call center hours are Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. and there is a required \$5 administrative fee for each phone or online transaction. The online transaction system is available 24/7.

Enhancements have also been

made to make the licensing process simpler and faster. "Expedited checkout" speeds the process of re-purchasing the same license items bought most recently within the last three years. It's also now easier to show proof-of-license. Now hunters can use a digital image of their license as proof-of-license for any hunting that doesn't require a tag, like dove hunting. Accepted formats include: (1) a digital photo, (2) an emailed receipt, (3) within the Outdoor Annual app or the My Texas Hunt Harvest app, or 4) online purchase record.

In addition to a hunting license, anyone born after Sept. 1, 1971, must successfully complete a hunter education training course in order to hunt legally in Texas. The TPWD Hunter Education certification is valid for life and is honored in all other states and provinces. More information about hunter education is available online. If you misplace your certification you can print a replacement online at no cost.

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