

Eastern Fish & Game

THE 2017 GAME BIRD HUNTING SEASON



Fish & Game Eastern Region

If you need information about any of our services – then simply contact us! We take many calls on a wide variety of Fish & Game matters and are only too keen to help. Additionally, try our web site and Twitter feed for information.

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SEASON PROSPECTS

We are predicting that the mallard population is on the way up. Monitoring results point to an increase in population numbers, and mallard trapping results suggest plenty of birds around. Trapping in neighbouring regions also showed good numbers of ducks caught this year. For the 2017 season, the population is predicted to be in the intermediate zone which equates to a six week season and an eight bird mallard and grey duck limit, except in the Reporoa Area (refer to Reporoa article for details on the regulations).

Aerial counts of paradise shelduck indicate the long term population trend is stable with numbers up on last year's. Black swan trends are also stable over the long term with small increases on last year in all management areas. Unfortunately the numbers of swan are not yet high enough to have a season in management units B1 and B2 (Gisborne – Wairoa).

Upland game: Fish & Game staff conduct crow counts or pheasant call counts in November. We count calls over three days starting before sunup when the birds are generally most vocal.

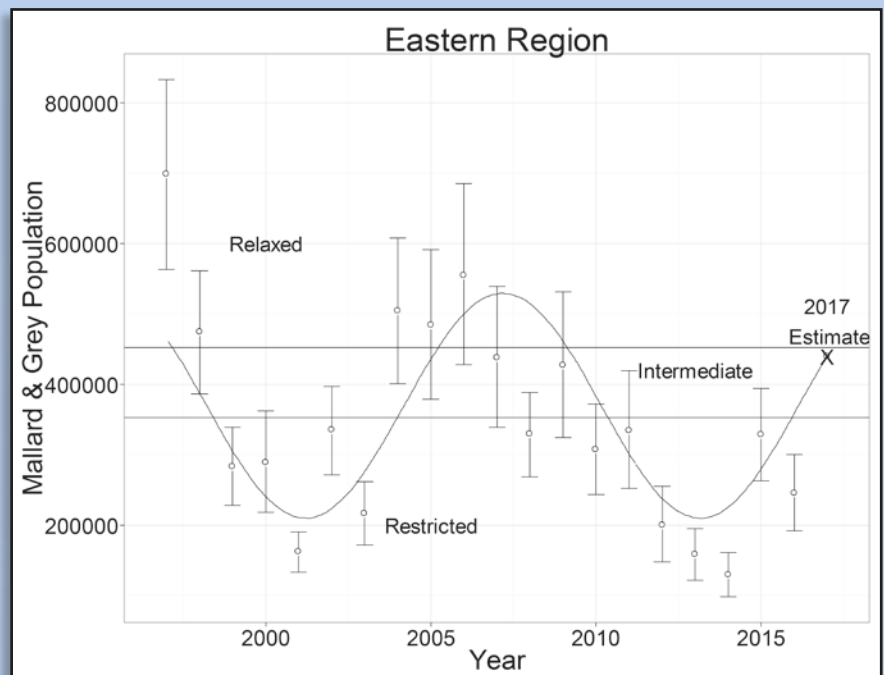


Figure 1. Mallard and grey duck population (1997 – 2017, circles, mean ± 95% CI). When the population is at or below 350,000 restricted regulations are applied; above 350,000 and below 450,000 intermediate regulations apply and above 450,000 relaxed conditions are implemented.

Although this is not a great indicator of population status at the start of the game bird season (as there is a breeding season between November and the game bird season following), it gives us a

rough indication of bird numbers. The number of calls recorded in November 2016 was similar to the number recorded the previous year.



REPOROA REGULATION CHANGES

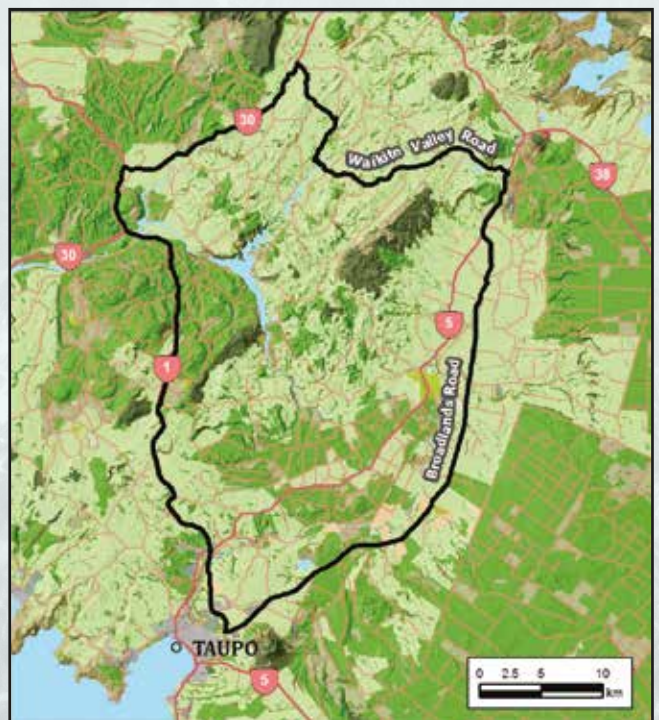
The Eastern Council has restricted the harvest of ducks in the Reporoa area following calls by hunters. Hunting has traditionally been hard in this area, with the old Caithness Hunter Diaries (1968 – 1990) reporting some of the lowest mallard bags in the country.

In April 2016, Fish & Game conducted aerial transect counts of mallards in the Reporoa area and compared them with the Bay of Plenty and neighbouring regions. The Reporoa counts were a lot lower than in any of the other areas. We followed up on these counts with an assessment of ponds in the area and found relatively few ponds and very little good duck habitat.

The lack of ponds is due in part to the underlying geology which is volcanic ash with good drainage and a slight annual water deficit. A number of other contributing factors such as land use and hydro power generation have probably exacerbated the situation.

Given the low duck numbers present the Eastern Council has decided to reduce bag limits and the season length of mallard and grey duck in this area. The bag limit for mallard and grey duck in the Reporoa area will be four and the season length four weeks (i.e. it will finish at the end of Queens Birthday Weekend). The Reporoa area for the purposes of this regulation is described as that area bounded by Waikite Valley Road (Waiotapu) to SH 5 to Settlers Road, which becomes Broadlands Road to SH 1 (Taupo Bypass) to SH 30 to Whirinaki Valley Road (Ngakuru) to Waikite Valley Road.

Fish & Game is increasing the amount of effort spent on enhancing mallard and grey duck habitat in this area in an attempt to improve the situation. If you know of, or own land in the Reporoa area that would be suitable for creating or improving wetlands on we would be very keen to hear from you. The Waikato Catchment Ecological Enhancement Trust and the Waikato River Authority are two potential funding sources, and we can assist with applications.



TIPS

- Pick one bird to shoot. Particularly when a covey of quail gets up in front of you.
- Shoot the trailing bird first as your follow through will put you on to the lead birds.
- Create an open hole in the decoys for the ducks to land.
- Ducks don't like to land over decoys so create a "U" shaped opening.
- Get your stance right before shooting – place your feet at 1.00 o'clock and 2.30 (for left handers 11.00 and 9.30).

WHAT'S HAPPENING TO THE NUMBERS OF MALLARD HARVESTED?

The annual harvest of mallard and grey duck in the Eastern Region over the last 5 – 6 years has been fairly consistent but over the longer term it has plummeted (Figure 1). The decrease in harvest can be explained by two factors, a decrease in hours hunted (Figure 2), and increasingly restrictive bag limits which have come into effect over time.

The decrease in hours hunted can be explained in part by mallard and grey

duck population size, e.g. when bird numbers are high hunters generally hunt for longer, the opposite being the case when numbers are lower. The decrease in hours hunted can also be attributed to other activities or interests vying for hunters' time.

When hunters hunt for fewer hours this can have a compounding effect on harvest in the sense that fewer hours being hunted results in fewer ducks

being put up for other hunters to shoot. While ranging we often observe ducks taking refuge in areas that receive little or no hunting pressure.

Given the predictions of more ducks around this year we believe there will be a corresponding increase in harvest this coming season.

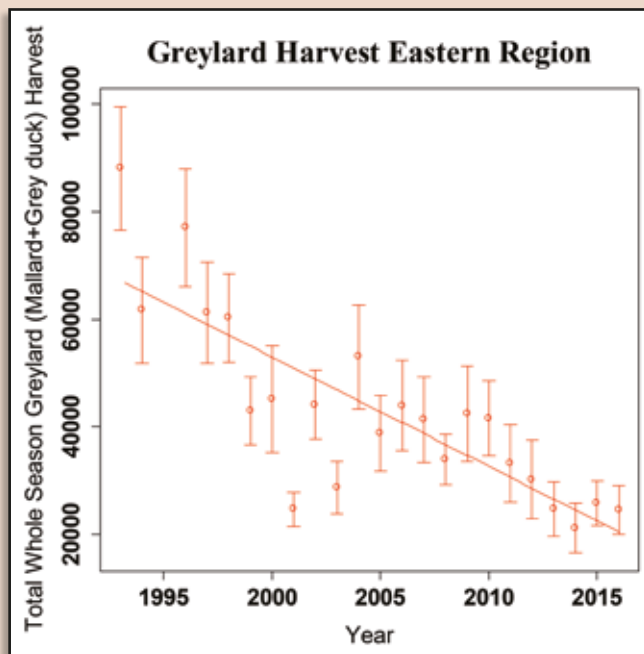


Figure 1: Eastern Region greylard (mallard & grey duck) harvest (mean \pm 95% CI) from 1993 to 2016.

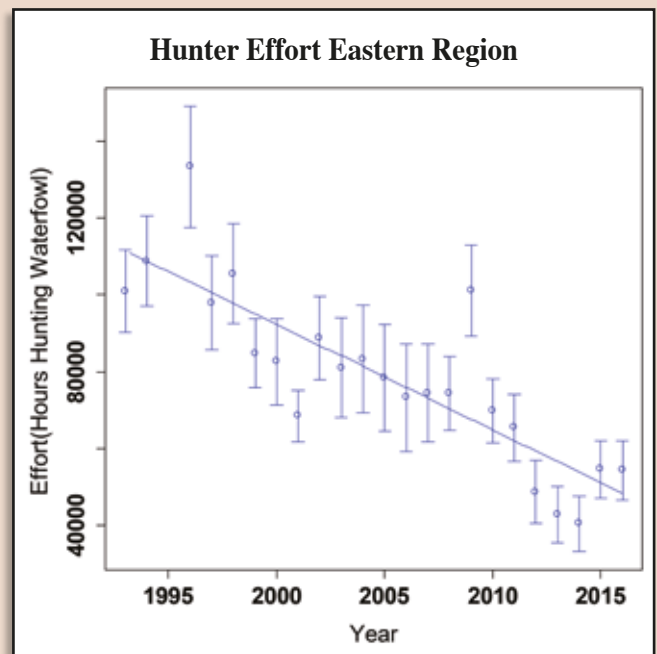


Figure 2: Total hunter hours (mean \pm 95% CI) hunting waterfowl in the Eastern Region from 1993 to 2016. Note that the survey was not conducted in 1995.

GET IN THE DRAW FOR A HUNTING SITE

Eastern Fish & Game holds an annual ballot for hunting sites in the wetlands it manages. Hunters must register for the 2018 ballot before the first Friday in November 2017. All you have to do is write or ring with your name, address, and phone number and we will send you a ballot application form. Alternatively you can download an application form in mid-October

from Eastern's hunting page. Hunters in the ballot for the 2017 season will automatically be sent an application form in mid October. If you have changed your address make sure you notify us of the changes.

Information on the hunting sites or ballot forms can be obtained from our web site: (<http://eastern.fishandgame.org.nz/eastern-region-hunting>).

ARE WE AFFECTING THE BREEDING SEASON?

The more mallard hens we harvest over the game season the fewer will be available for breeding. It's not rocket science, we know. But what's not clear is how much of an impact the hunting season has on pair formation and breeding potential. All the research suggests early breeders are more fecund (more eggs) and successfully raise more ducklings, or in other words, ducklings born early in the season are more likely to survive.

The game season has one other compounding effect on breeding, and that is on hen survival. It appears that longer seasons reduce hen survival but not entirely as you might expect. Clearly, the longer the season the more hens are shot. We also believe however, that a longer season affects the ability of a hen to put on condition going into the breeding season, and we know birds in poorer condition don't do as well. Research in the Eastern Region has shown that hen survival is more a

function of season length than harvest. So hunters shooting more birds than they would have in a short season are not only killing more hens but are also stressing those that are not harvested and impacting on their ability to settle down post season and feed undisturbed. We don't have empirical data for this but the explanation is in line with the impact of hunting disturbance on waterfowl species that's been documented overseas.

There's also another theory relating to the potential impact of a longer season which is plausible too. Late in the season, mallards have paired up and are often seen on farm dams. Hunters going out for an evening shoot may jump shoot a couple of dams and pick off one or both birds, and over a period of time this could end up decimating a local breeding population. This could explain why there are literally hundreds of farm dams with no ducks on them. Some of the dams are clearly not suited

to holding ducks while others that appear ideal never seem to have ducks on them when we do our aerial counts in summer. We do know that there are a few important ingredients for a dam to hold ducks, but when these are all present and yet there are still no birds utilising it you have to wonder if many of them weren't shot.

The dilemma is that hunters want a reasonably long season but still want to shoot ducks the following year. There is really only one solution other than having a shorter season (less than a month), and that's to move the season forward. Moving the season forward impacts on hunters who also hunt the roar, and it's also unacceptable to traditionalists and those who co-ordinate their holidays around the game bird season.

It could be argued that the current timing of the season is something of an unhappy compromise. But I guess we just won't know unless we try it...

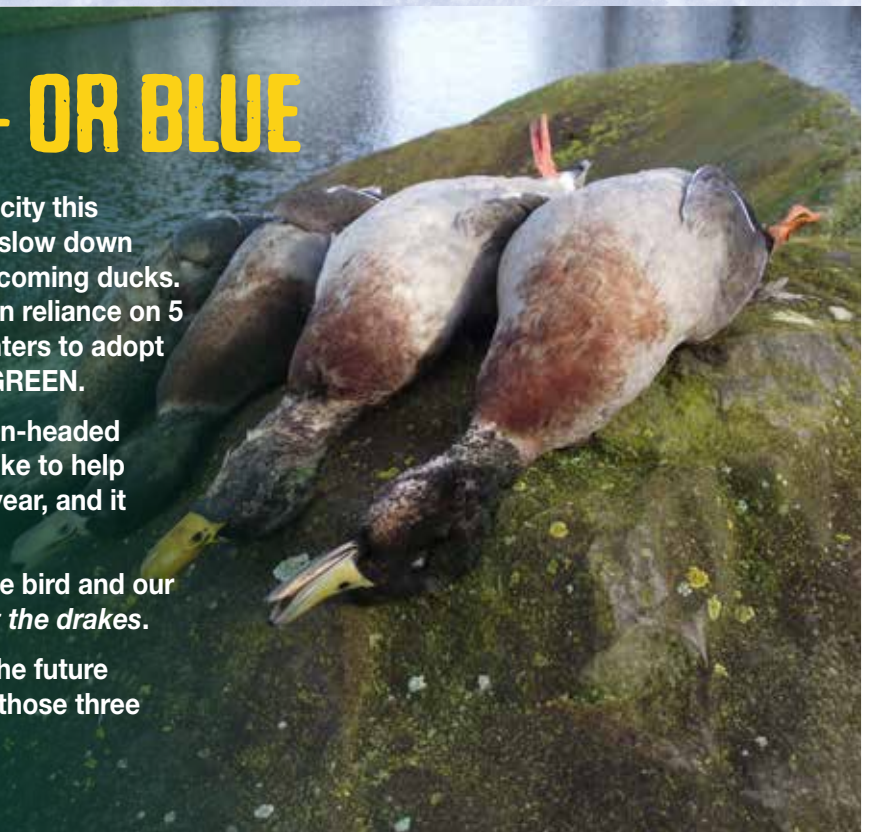
GO FOR GREEN — OR BLUE

The introduction of a 3 shot maximum capacity this season provides the perfect opportunity to slow down your shooting and really target individual incoming ducks. Selection and accurate shooting, rather than reliance on 5 plus cartridges being fired, encourages hunters to adopt a simple conservation measure – **GO FOR GREEN**.

This translates into *go for drakes* – the green-headed male mallards! This is an easy choice to make to help conserve the hens or brood stock for next year, and it works well.

Shoveler are another popular huntable game bird and our message is similar – **GO FOR BLUE** – *target the drakes*.

We need hunters to do their bit as well for the future of the sport. So come on, be selective with those three shots – **GO FOR GREEN**, or **BLUE**!



DUCK HUNTERS

– COME AND UPSKILL!

Want to learn more about successfully attracting ducks to improve your tally?

Come along to our Duck Hunters Day on Sunday 23rd April for some highly practical tips provided in realistic hunting situations – to upskill before the coming season.

The day begins at 10am with a presentation from highly experienced 'big water' and 'field' waterfowl hunter Kevin Hutchinson from the Waikato. This will be followed by field sessions on different topics, which provide a range of options. There will be a break for lunch (BYO) then field sessions will continue with the programme timed to finish about 2.30pm.

Thanks to great support from our sponsors, two multiple-draw raffles will be held on the day to help recover costs. So please, bring along some money for the raffles and play the odds to win some great prizes. Some sponsors will also have stands, so bring some cash for specials on the day.

This event is also about introducing young people to the sport, and a youth competition will be run throughout the day. So if you know a kid who wants to enter for the chance of winning a new shotgun and other great prizes, check out our website to see the competition rules and registration form (www.fishandgame.org.nz/eastern and click on the 'Hunting' link). Get a completed entry sent in promptly. The youth prize presentation will be held at the close of the programme.

The Duck Hunters Day will be held at 10am, Sunday 23rd April 2017, at the Lower Kaituna WMR wetland, 6km northeast of Te Puke. The entrance will be well sign-posted and a location map posted on our website (www.fishandgame.org.nz/eastern and click on the 'Hunting' link). The grounds are no more than an easy one hour's drive from Eastern Region's main centres.

- This is a free demonstration day with these topics covered in the field:
- Pond decoy layouts – do's and don'ts.
- Field decoy layouts, including mallards, parries, Canada geese and layout blinds.
- Duck calling.
- Gun fitting and patterning: what is it and how to do it (no live firing).
- Dog retrieving displays and skills advice (dogs from Rotorua Gun Dog Club only).
- Predator and pest animal trapping tips and guidance.
- Maimai preparation.

Please turn up before the 10am start and if you have access to a 4WD you might wish to bring that as the entrance track may be muddy. Bring your own camping seat to relax while the prizes are presented, some wet weather gear as the day will go on rain or shine – we're hunters after all.

Be sure to mark the date on your calendar – see you there!

Event organiser contact: John Meikle, Fish & Game Officer, 021-375480, or email jmeikle@fishandgame.org.nz



REGULATIONS MADE BY HUNTERS FOR HUNTERS

If you've ever felt annoyed to see another motorist run a red light, you'll appreciate the work our rangers have to do during the hunting season. Red light runners put lives in danger. There are rules around hunting, mostly to ensure the populations are not over harvested, but some are for safety too. Generally the regulations are formulated by hunters for hunters and most hunters abide by them. In fact it averages out that around 98% are fully compliant, an impressive figure. That's the good news...

The bad news is that we still come across hunters who push the boundaries. Every year we find lead shot ammunition being used over or within 200 metres of open water when it shouldn't be. Every season we also encounter some hunters who don't have a current game bird hunting licence. Other issues include shooting from a boat under power, and shooting excess bag limits. Occasionally our rangers deal with more serious issues involving obstruction or similar offending. All of which is taken seriously and dealt with appropriately which means those responsible get hit in the pocket, end up in court, and face forfeiture of valued guns and gear.

Fish & Game carries out intensive compliance efforts not only on opening weekend of the season but also during the season and not just weekends either. Staff and honorary rangers work alongside Police Officers checking hunters and this is a win-win situation for both agencies with game regulations and firearms compliance being checked at the same time. In fact for law abiding hunters it is quite a novelty seeing Coppers out with Fish & Game rangers, and leads to some great interactions and question and answer sessions out in the field.

New this season is a regulation change restricting gun magazine capacity to 2 shots meaning you can have 3 in the gun if a semi auto or pump, i.e. one in the chamber and two in the magazine. The magazine just needs a block like a piece of dowel fitted into it; it doesn't have to be a permanently fitted restriction. It is important that this restriction is complied with as we want hunters to take more careful shots, not just put more shot into the air! The restriction was brought in after careful consideration by the Eastern Fish and Game Council, your elected representatives.

With fines for hunting without a licence and other regulation breaches being up to \$5000 and possible forfeiture of guns and equipment, it makes good sense to ensure hunters have their licence on them and have correct ammunition, and check the regulation booklet before heading out hunting to make sure they are aware of the rules.

While landowners, their spouse, and one son or daughter may hunt on their own land without holding a hunting licence, the technical parts of this exemption, i.e. the Law, means that the landowner must actually reside on the land to be exempt. Any landowners who are not sure about details of this exemption can contact us at Fish & Game and we will answer your questions and make sure you have the correct information.

To sum up, thanks to all you hunters – and that is the majority of you - who are making a big effort to get things right. It's not hard is it, and we appreciate your efforts. To those who are the small minority, or maybe have been in the past, it's time to get it right! Good luck this season!

BANDING SNIPPETS

- 86% of reported band recoveries are within 50km of where they were banded.
- 88% of grey duck banded in the Eastern Region are recovered in the Eastern Region.
- Ducks banded in the Eastern Region have been recovered in South Otago, a distance of 1026km. Mallard and grey duck banded elsewhere in New Zealand have been recovered in Adelaide and New Caledonia.
- One bird was recaptured four consecutive years while the majority (77%) are only recaptured once in subsequent years (although many are recaptured in the same year i.e. in the year they were banded) indicating trapping doesn't put them off a free feed.
- A juvenile female is recovered on average 325 days after it was banded in the Bay of Plenty while an adult female can expect to live for 453 days after banding. If the females are banded in another part of the region, for example Gisborne, they can expect to live a little longer (juveniles = 476, adults = 504 days).
- Approximately 10% of banded adults and 16% of juvenile are recovered in the year they were banded.
- The oldest mallard recovery to date was 16 years after it was banded. This bird was an adult when banded so it was at least 17 years old. Three birds have been recovered 13 years after banding.

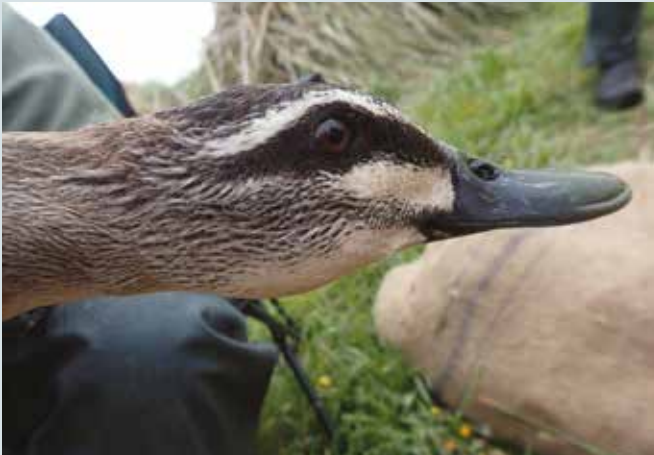
WHAT'S IN THE BAG?

When it comes to inspecting a hunter's bag of ducks, there's invariably some discussion around distinguishing grey ducks from mallard hens.

While every hunter can identify the greenheads, separating the grey ducks from the mallard hens gets a bit more tricky. In most areas the majority of ducks harvested display a

combination of features. This is most likely due to the high level of hybridisation, or interbreeding between the two species. In the field, Fish & Game staff differentiate them according to which characteristics of a species a duck displays most strongly. Apart from overall appearance – grey ducks are slightly smaller and have a darker plumage – there are several other main characteristics that we look at:

Grey Duck



Grey ducks have a pale head with a conspicuous dark facial stripe and grey bill.

Mallard Hen



Mallard hens have a more mottled face and an orange bill with a black saddle.



Grey ducks have olive coloured legs and feet.



Mallards have orange legs and feet.



Grey ducks have a green speculum with black borders and a thin white band on the trailing edge only.



Mallards have a blue speculum bordered with thin black and broader white bands front and back.

Hybrid 1 (Grey-like)



Head slightly mottled but conspicuous dark facial stripe. Olive/grey bill. More grey-like.



Legs and feet more olive than orange. Slightly more grey-like.



Wings have a greenish speculum with black borders and a thin white band on both edges. More grey like.

Hybrid 2 (Mallard-like)



Head mottled and no facial stripe. Olive bill. More mallard-like.



Legs and feet more orange than olive. More mallard-like.



Wings have a bluish speculum with black borders and broad white band on back edge only. Slightly more mallard like.

While this assessment is not absolutely definitive in terms of identifying genetic heritage, it is accurate enough to be useful for generally separating the grey ducks from the hen mallards.

POLICE JOIN FORCES WITH FISH & GAME RANGERS

In recent years many hunters may have noticed the trend for Fish & Game Rangers and Police Officers to join forces to check hunters – especially on Opening Weekend of the hunting season. There are a number of reasons for this; the joint approach is to encourage compliance with not only hunting regulations, but to educate and encourage compliance with the laws surrounding the use of firearms and ammunition that Police enforce. Boozing while you sit in a maimai and wait for ducks on a cold day may have been socially acceptable many years ago, but not any more. Over the years Fish & Game Rangers have seen some alarming examples of hunters under the influence. We certainly don't enjoy interacting with anyone intoxicated and in possession of a gun. Drinking alcohol while hunting is one of the fastest ways to lose your firearms licence, and if you're a keen hunter why would you want to throw away the rest of your hunting season? On the positive side, we've seen massive improvements over the issue and it's only a few who let the side down.

Other issues have arisen in recent years around firearms and ammunition security. We've come across instances of hunters who've left guns, and ammunition, in plain sight in vehicles – even unlocked! Don't give a thief an open invitation! There have also been cases of hunters found carrying loaded guns in vehicles on public roads. Quite apart from the obvious danger from this carelessness (yes, people have been accidentally shot in these circumstances), it's committing an offence. You can be prosecuted and for most folk, the potential loss of a firearms licence should provide the motivation to sort their act out fast.

Also timely is a reminder about the supervision of hunters who don't hold a firearms licence themselves, including junior or new hunters. The law clearly states that an unlicensed hunter can use a firearm under the direct supervision of a licensed firearms licence holder. This doesn't mean that both can shoot together at the same time! The firearms licence holder must

focus their full attention on supervising the unlicensed hunter, to ensure they are acting safely and carefully.

In particular, new hunters should be given guidance on shooting zones, and the need to always point guns in a safe direction, and take care when loading and unloading them. Old hands can do their bit to foster safe and careful firearms handling which is so critical to everyone's safe enjoyment of the sport.

So what can a hunter expect when spoken to by Fish & Game and Police Officers in a joint visit to a maimai? You will be required to unload your gun and place it in a safe position, and present your ammunition for inspection. If you are using a pump action or semi-auto shotgun the magazine capacity of your gun may also be checked. Fish & Game Rangers will check your hunting licence which must be carried with you, and inspect any birds you've shot, as well as any other matters around hunting rules and regulations. Police will ask to see firearms licences, check no one's drinking alcohol while in possession of a firearm, and focus on any other issues around guns and ammunition security. If everyone's doing the right thing, a visit doesn't take long, and generally includes a friendly chat about how the day's going and season prospects.

While many checks are carried out over Opening Weekend, Fish & Game Rangers carry out further checks throughout the season so hunters can expect to see a ranger at any time. It is worth saying that most hunters are careful and are doing the right things and this is great to see.

So here's wishing everyone great and safe hunting experiences...please just remember to carry your hunting and firearms licences with you, and check the rules and regulations in the Game Bird Hunting Guide and follow them. Take care out hunting and save the drinks for later when guns have been safely locked away.

FREE 2017 GAME BIRD HUNTING LICENCE

Hunters who returned bands over the past year went into a draw for a free game bird licence. The more bands a hunter returned the greater the chance he or she had of winning!

Ten names were drawn out of the hat and the successful hunters were:

Andy Gifford, Rotorua
Wayne Mackie, Rotorua
Ross Brown, Gisborne
Shae Crossan, Papamoa
Joshua Mower, Whakatane

Mark Ericksen, Napier
Jesse Davies, Te Puke
Tony Solly, Waipawa
Rhys Henry, Papamoa
Ross Hickford, Opotiki



'BANDING TOGETHER'

winners in hunting jacket draw

Hunting & Fishing New Zealand has named the five game bird hunters who've each won one of its \$199.99 Matuku camo hunting jackets for returning their duck band details.

To enter the Banding Together draw, hunters had to send in the duck band details from birds they'd harvested before August 31, 2016.

Hunting & Fishing New Zealand Marketing Manager Chris Cameron says: "We say a big thank you to the hunters who went to the trouble to return their band details.

"We know from our customer feedback that they'll be well pleased with their Hunting & Fishing NZ hunting jackets and all set for any weather come next hunting season."

Mr Cameron says that his company is pleased to be able to support projects such as Fish & Game's banding programmes, where the information gathered is clearly a key component in game bird management, "which of course, delivers benefits to hunters."

As hunters, and with stores right around the country, we are well aware of Fish & Game's mallard and other game bird research, "which in time will undoubtedly help the country's duck populations."

Eastern Region Senior Fish & Game officer Matthew McDougall says that Fish & Game is most grateful to Hunting & Fishing for getting behind the Banding Together initiative, which has provided hunters with some real incentive to send in their band details.

The banding helps Fish & Game determine productivity, population sizes, movement, and not least, survival rates for both adults and juveniles of both sexes.

THE FIVE WINNERS:

Christopher Bennett, Paeroa
Evan Hockly, Palmerston North
Carl Hyland, Waiuku
Anthony Kingi, Huntly
Trent Robertson, Pukekohe

Please return the details of any bands you recover (band number, where, when and how) to Eastern Fish & Game (refer to front cover for contact details) along with your name and address. This will not only benefit our monitoring programme but will ensure you're entered into any draw that might be running e.g. for a free licence.



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BUILT TO LAST. BUILT WITH THE SHOOTER IN MIND.

HOW TO RESTRICT YOUR MAGAZINE SIZE

New regulations in the Eastern Region (and all of the North Island except Northland and Taranaki Fish & Game Regions) restrict magazine capacity for all game bird hunting in the 2017 game season. Shotgun magazines are restricted to two shells. Therefore you can have one in the breech and two in the magazine, a total of three shells.

The magazine must be adjusted with a one piece filler which is incapable of removal without disassembling the gun. This can be done at home and only takes a few minutes. Below we have chosen a pump and a semi-to show you how:

For this exercise we have used a piece of 12mm diameter wood dowel. The length of dowel required will depend on the shell length you use but if you fit it for 3½” shells it will be good for the smaller shells too.

Pump: Remove the magazine (remove the barrel and then unscrew the magazine cylinder - ours took a bit of twisting as it hadn't been off before). Remove the spring and the follower (i.e. the bit that sits up against the shell). Place the dowel into the magazine cylinder and mark the dowel where it sticks out (Figure 1). Remove the dowel and then measure 6¼” (159mm) from this mark towards the end that was in the magazine. A 3½” shell is not 3½” it is in fact 3” when crimped, hence the 6” plus ¼” for the follower. This is where you cut the dowel. Round off the ends and slip the dowel inside the spring and replace the follower (Figure 2) then just reassemble the gun.



Figure 1. Mark the dowel where it sticks out of the magazine.



Figure 2. Place the dowel in the spring and return it to the magazine cylinder.

Semi-Auto: With the semi you can remove the spring and follower by undoing the magazine end cap (the non-breech end). Measure 159mm from the breech end (Figure 3). Then from this mark measure to the end of the magazine (Figure 4). This is the length of dowel required. As with the pump round the ends of the dowel and place it inside the spring and reassemble. Don't do this in the maimai as we have seen springs end up in the swamp.

If you are not sure about disassembling your magazine check your instruction booklet or see if it is on You Tube, or ask at your local sports store or a gunsmith. Note many new semi-auto shot guns come with a spacer to comply with American duck hunting regulations; check that this spacer complies with the 2 shell rule.



Figure 3, For the semi-auto measure 159mm from the breech end and place a mark



Figure 4. Measure from the mark to the end of the magazine or if there is an end stopper to this point. This is how long your dowel needs to be.