



Waterfowl 101



Why Hunt Waterfowl in GA?

- Georgia is one of the 17 U.S. states and six Canadian Provinces that make up the Atlantic Flyway. A flyway is an ancient pathway that migratory birds follow from their breeding grounds to their wintering areas.
- Waterfowl hunting creates greater awareness of waterfowl related issues and conservations issues.
- “Hunting” waterfowl and the revenues generated through the purchase of specialty licenses and duck stamps support conservation efforts.
- Examples of waterfowl conservation projects include: population surveys, bird banding efforts, and habitat development.

Hunting Regulations

- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) creates regulations, dates and bag limits.
- Atlantic Flyway Council and GA DNR provide guidance and data to USFWS.
- Past data is used to determine future limits and regulations.
- Georgia DNR will propose dates within the USFWS framework that will maximize hunting opportunities. The DNR Board has the final approval of the season's dates.
- Bag limits can be species specific and count toward a total bag limit. Some species, Mallards for example have bag limits based on sex (This current bag limit is under review and could possibly be changed for future seasons). Georgia's total bag limit is six birds per day.

What Permits or Licenses do Hunters Need?

- A valid Georgia Hunting License
- A Georgia Migratory Bird License
 - With the purchase of a sportsman's license, the Georgia Migratory Bird License is included.
- A Federal Duck Stamp
 - The Federal Duck Stamp must be signed, in ink, across the face of the stamp and attached to the hunter's license.
- Purchase these at www.duckstamp.com or www.gooutdoors.com.

Gender and Species Identification



Photo Credit: Joe Berry

Study Before You Go

- Bag limits and regulations are based on species and gender.
- Proper identification of sex and species is critical.
- Identification criteria changes depending on the species.
- Study, Study, Study and use your resources found online, in the library, amongst friends and offered by DNR and other agencies .

More Useful Resources

- flyways.us/duck-identification-resources/at-a-distance.
- <https://www.audubon.org/bird-guide>
- <http://www.ducks.org/hunting/waterfowl-id/>
- <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/search>
- Peterson Field Guides
- Sibley Guides

Habitat

- Waterfowl are wetlands dependent. These wetlands can range in size and scope from seasonal wetlands to open ocean, with everything from beaver ponds, marshes and reservoirs in between. Key to the habitats of all waterfowl is the food source that is available to them in these various environments.
- Dabbling/puddle ducks usually feed on seeds and submerged leafy vegetation, in the case of Wood Ducks and Mallards even feeding on acorns. They prefer shallow water.
- Diving ducks usually feed on fish, mollusks, aquatic plants and roots, often diving to considerable depths to feed or escape danger. Diving ducks are found on larger, deeper lakes, rivers and coastal bays. Redheads, Ringneck and Canvasbacks are all examples of diving ducks.

Duck Patterns of Movement

- Waterfowl, like most all animals, follow a typical daily pattern/routine, coming off the roost at or near sunrise and moving to a feeding area. After feeding, the birds will move to a safe, sheltered area where they will loaf and spend time preening.
- Late afternoon, the birds may return to the feeding area and then return to the roost at sunset.
- It is important to note that the legal hunting hours for migratory birds is 1/2 hour before sunrise to sunset. Hunting ends at sunset. This is to protect the roost and promote an ethical harvest.

Preparing for Waterfowl Hunting



Scouting

- Get out there long before the season starts.
- Identify possible areas for hunting.
- Look for:
 - Proper habitat
 - Good food source
 - Early season birds (if so, try to see where they are flying)

Keep in Mind

- When you need to be set up by and how long that might take
 - the hunter will need to be in position well before sunrise with decoys set (if they are being used). Most birds will have moved from the roost to their feeding area by mid-morning.
- Wind direction
 - the ideal setup for the hunter is to have the wind coming from behind the hunter and the sun on their neck. This will be bringing the birds in to the hunter while the sun will aid in concealment.
- Stay flexible: an unsuccessful shooting day can also be an excellent scouting day.
- Safety is paramount, but fun is a close second.
- Bring some friends!

What Can I Hunt Waterfowl With?

- Shotguns 10 gauge or smaller.
- Federally approved nontoxic shot of size “F” or smaller.
 - The possession of lead shot, while in the process of hunting waterfowl is illegal.
- The effective range of the shotgun, choke pattern and ability of the hunter should be assessed and evaluated to ensure an ethical harvest and to reduce the chances of wounding loss. Shots taken at distances of greater than 40 yards should be discouraged.
- The use of a firearm that fires a single projectile (rifle) is a safety hazard due to the possibility of a ricochet and is illegal.

Special Equipment



- The only special equipment needed for an individual to experience waterfowl hunting at its most basic level is nontoxic shotshells and a pair of waders.
- As a waterfowl hunter progresses in experience and hunting opportunities, other specialized equipment may be added to their inventory, decoys, calls, boats, blinds, dogs, the sky is the limit.
- When hunting from a boat, two things are critical: establishing a known zone of fire and wearing a personal flotation device.

Decoys

- Decoys in the water bring ducks into what looks like a great spot to land.



Dogs

- Sometimes it is useful to have your best friend retrieve ducks out in the water.



Boats



- Boats are another tool to make the sport a little easier and more enjoyable.
- All boating activity must be done in keeping with state and federal guidelines for licensing, operation, and safety.

Calls



- Never hurts to literally call them over to you!
- This is an advanced skill.

Where Can I hunt?



Private Land

- Private land offers opportunities sometimes not found on public land. Do your habitat research before you go out.
- Permission must always be granted before hunting someone's property.
- Private leases are available for different uses throughout the year.

Public Land

- Public lands also provide waterfowl hunting opportunities. The thing to keep in mind about these areas is that they are all owned, managed and regulated by some entity and that a hunter who takes advantage of the hunting opportunities on public lands must abide by the regulating entity.
- DNR WMAs are public lands that provide waterfowl hunting opportunities. Certain WMAs have special requirements/regulations that control the timing, or the number of hunters allowed to participate in a scheduled hunt.
- If there are no special regulations listed for a WMA, then while waterfowl season is open, waterfowl may be hunted during small game season. Waterfowl is considered small game.
- Remember: while not abundant in Georgia, there are opportunities to hunt through a guided hunt.

Pittman Robertson Act

- Pittman Robertson Act is an excise tax on hunting and fishing equipment.
 - The excise tax is set by law at 11% of the wholesale price for long guns and ammunition and 10% for handguns. It is paid by manufacturers, producers, and importers and applies to all commercial sales and imports, whether their purpose is hunting, sport shooting, or personal defense. This tax is handled by the Department of the Treasury, which turns the funds over to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) for apportionments to states.
- This money goes toward Wildlife Restoration only.

How are Pittman-Robertson Funds Distributed?

- 1) \$8 million is dedicated to Enhanced [Hunter Education](#) programs, including the construction or maintenance of public target ranges.
- 2) \$3 million is set aside for projects that require cooperation among the states.
- 3) One-half of the excise tax collected on handguns is set aside for Basic Hunter Education programs.

The remainder of the trust fund is then divided in half with 50 percent apportioned to states based on the land area of the state in proportion to the total land area of the country. The remaining 50 percent is apportioned based on the number of individual paid hunting license holders in the state in proportion to the national total.

Wildlife and Sport Restoration Program

- The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program (WSFR) works with states, insular areas and the District of Columbia to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, their habitats, and the hunting, sport fishing and recreational boating opportunities they provide. Insuring they will be available for generations to come.
- The Division of Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program provides oversight and/or administrative support for grant programs.

How Can I Learn More?

- Contact your local DNR office or visit GoOutdoorsGeorgia.com
- Research online
- Contact conservation groups like Ducks Unlimited.