

# Dove decoys may enhance the hunting experience



BRAD TRUMBO

UPLAND PURSUITS



Brad Trumbo/Contributed Photo

**A brace of America's most popular upland bird, the mourning dove.**

My decoy spread, offset slightly to my left, lit up like little gray beacons as the morning sun cast its golden glow.

A light breeze kicked up, spurred by the sun rays piercing the cool air of early fall. Aside from the emerald foliage of the occasional tree, the Palouse was decorated in the usual varied tones of beige, canary and bronze.

Camo-clad, sitting along a forgotten fencerow, I waited for the first flight to descend upon the grain field and gathering of imposter fowl. A robust doe whitetail with her speckled fawn leisurely fed from a grassy draw bottom.

Suddenly, movement to my right revealed a few gray birds swooping in, head-on to the decoys. With a smooth swing of grandpa's old pump gun, the morning hunt was underway.

Pop quiz — what am I hunting? OK, you read the headline and know it's doves, but that scene could

easily play out for waterfowl with a tweak to the decoy setup and a little water in the picture. No waterfowl hunter would dream of sheltering in a layout blind without a few decoys out front, but decoys for doves?

Pass-shooting doves is an American sporting tradition, and the mourning dove is the most widespread and abundant game bird in North America. Every year hunters harvest more than 20 million birds nationwide. A typical hunt might be characterized by old five-gallon buckets for seats placed in the shade of a tree alongside or separating grain fields and water sources.

Tucked in the shadows, friends and family enjoy

quiet small talk as early autumn heat wavers up from the parched landscape. No fancy gear or even camo required. Action can be fast and furious, but also slow when birds are sparse or keeping their distance. That's where decoys enter the scene.

Doves tend to follow trees or obvious terrain features when moving among food and water sources. At these sources, doves perch on exposed tree branches or anything else with overhead visibility to survey for predators before descending to feed or drink.

Decoys can be set to attract doves to a location advantageous to the hunter, influencing their flight path and encouraging more

**MORE INFORMATION**

Mourning dove season opens Sept. 1 statewide in Oregon, and continues through Oct. 30. The daily bag limit is 15 doves, and the possession limit is 45.

birds to fly within shooting distance. With a few simple considerations, your decoy spread can do more than keep you company on the hunt.

Identifying your shooting position is the foundation of setting decoying. Decoys should be placed 10 to 20 yards from your shooting position to ensure the shooter remains hidden from approaching birds. Offset the decoys from your shooting position at about 10 o'clock for the right-handed shooter, and two o'clock for the left-handed shooter. The goal is to encourage crossing shots rather than lure the birds in head-on to the shooter.

Next to location, setting visible decoys is crucial. Tree cover can be sparse in the shrub-steppe and harvested fields. A wire or T-shaped bar about 10 feet high to elevate decoys can easily be constructed at home with PVC, pipe or rebar. A few decoys sitting side-by-side mimics doves perching on a powerline, which typically attracts others. If hunting your own land or an area

where you can set up something semi-permanent, the T-bar or wire span can be left and used year after year. Options with more mobility, like telescopic T-bars for easy packing into public land, can be found online.

Another option is to make an actual tree perch that can be cut and pruned to an ideal structure for decoy attachment, and placed near food, water, and even gravel sources. Doves will also use them naturally, which may provide an advantage.

When placing decoys on the ground, set them 20 to 30 feet from the elevated decoys and pair them up with a few feet between pairs, generally facing into the wind.

Dove pairs often travel together, and pairing decoys on the ground gives the spread a more natural appearance. This does not mean placing each pair perfectly side-by-side, but set in relative proximity to one another to give the decoys the look of feeding together.

Nonmobile (static) decoys work well on their own, but

another option is to include a spinning-wing decoy to animate your spread. Doves approach an animated, spinning-wing decoy head-on most often, which can aid in setting up that textbook crossing shot. Later in the season as doves become wary, the additional movement of the spinning-wing decoy is more convincing to the cynical eye of our most frequently hunted bird species.

When you get right down to it, mourning doves offer one of the most versatile wingshooting opportunities of all upland birds, and decoying doves can be done simply, with minimal gear. If you have never used decoys, doves offer an easy, affordable opportunity to get started. Static decoys are easy to find and can lure birds even without being elevated. Whether trying something new or simply honing your decoying skills this fall, setting decoys for doves can enhance your wingshooting experience.

*Brad Trumbo is a fish and wildlife biologist and outdoor writer in Waitsburg, Washington. For tips and tales of outdoor pursuits and conservation, visit www.bradtrumbo.com.*

## Family:

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"They have embraced it," Jodi said. "It's fun for us, and fulfilling knowing that they enjoy doing it and want to do it."

Josie is back at WSU, where she is a member of the Kappa Delta Sorority.

She recently received a \$10,000 scholarship from Kappa Delta, and combined with her other scholarships, her school bill

is taken care of for the year.

"She had a 4.0 GPA last year," Jodi said. "We are very proud of her. Not only is she rodeoing, but she worked this past year and her grades were outstanding. That is a confidence booster for her."

Mom and daughter will be back on the rodeo trail next week. They are up in slack Tuesday, Aug. 24, in breakaway roping at the Horse Heaven Roundup in Kennewick, and will be in the night performance Aug. 28 in Ellensburg in breakaway roping.

## Award:

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Justin Boots created the John Justin Standard of the West program in the late 1980s to recognize the hundreds of thousands of hours of work that volunteer rodeo committee members donate to put on rodeos. Each year, Justin Boots recognizes 125 outstanding volunteers from PRCA rodeos around the country.

PRCA rodeos vote on the indi-

vidual to receive the PRCA's John Justin Committeeman of the Year Award, whose dedication represents the deeds of those volunteers.

"Dennis has been with us since the beginning, other than a year or two," Bothum said. "He is invaluable. This wouldn't happen without him. He's one of the guys who helped get the money for the football field, and was instrumental in getting EOTEC built. It's not just the rodeo, but the community."

Barnett said the award should go to all the volunteers.

"We have 200 wonderful people

who take on tasks we don't have to worry about," he said. "To put on one of the top 20 rodeos in the nation, it truly is a reflection of everybody. That's what it's all about, giving back."

The award came with a special pair of Justin boots that have Committeeman of the Year on them.

"There are some snazzy boots that will never be worn," Barnett said. "I have been on the rodeo board for a long time, and you have not seen me in cowboy garb. I am an overweight accountant. Cowboys boots don't fit the Barnett feet very well."

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