

Dove decoys enhance the hunt

Mourning doves are the most widespread and abundant game bird in America



BRAD TRUMBO
UPLAND PURSUITS

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 sunrays 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 white-tail 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



Brad Trumbo/Contributed Photo

A dove decoy spread set on the edge of a cut pea field.



Brad Trumbo/Contributed Photo

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

also slow when birds are sparse or keeping their distance. That's

where decoys enter the scene. Doves tend to follow trees or

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.

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 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

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Backpacking in the backcountry



TOM CLAYCOMB
BASE CAMP

I know that I'm totally blessed. I get to hunt and fish all of the time. But my most fun trip of the year is when I go backpacking with my daughter. It's just her and me with no distractions. No Facebook, no Instagram, no TV, no leaky pipes, no yard to mow ... you get the drift. No interruptions.

But I about died on this last trip. It probably wouldn't have been so painful if there weren't 30,000 forest fires burning, causing us to suck down half smoke/half oxygen every breath. Plus I overloaded my pack with everything including the proverbial kitchen sink. But we still had a blast.

Next time I'll write a Backpacking 101 article and cover what gear you need to carry, but this week we'll just talk about the recent trip and the fun we had. Kolby had an appointment with her college adviser and then she was going to run home and we'd take off. Of course she rushed home and I was still working on articles and had a four-part series I had to get submitted to a new website so we got off a minute later than planned.

We soon arrived at the trailhead and started strapping everything to our packs. I'm still old school and use an old frame Kelty pack I've had



Tom Claycomb/Contributed Photo

The author took way too much stuff on this trip.

since 1998 or 1999. I did just order Kolby a Sierra Designs Flex Capacitor internal frame pack, which is lightweight, but it didn't arrive until the day we got home.

We threw on our packs and hit the trail a little later than I wanted. We wouldn't hit our camping spot until well after

dark but the only other option was to camp at the trailhead which meant we'd have to unpack our gear, throw up a camp and then tear it down the next morning, repack etc. etc. Plus, we'd done that one year and got woken up at 1:30 a.m. by a bear rubbing the tent. It's never fun hiking in the

dark. If you stumble off a trail in the dark with a heavy pack, you'll go tumbling off the side of the mountain down into the river below. One year on this trail my buddy rolled two horses and a mule down into the river and barely got them out alive.

We finally hit our spot, unloaded, slapped up our tents and hit the sack. I was beat. This trip we'd taken our Alps Mountaineering Taurus 2 tents. They're a hair heavy for backpacking but they're nice in that they're larger and have awnings on each side that you can store your gear under.

The next morning I woke up and had to go drown some of my new flies from flydealfies.com (I had a bunch). I fished for a while and then ran back to camp and whipped up a hot cup of coffee and some oatmeal for us and woke up the little sleepy head.

Nothing is better than a cup of coffee in the morning up in the mountains, is there? Even if it's just a motel pack from the last business trip. We'd grabbed a couple of coffee creamers at the last gas station and dined like kings and queens. Well, at least by hobo standards!

Some rotten little field vermin had climbed the tree and gotten into our food bag and gobbled on a few items. But I set traps and caught two mice per night the rest of the trip.

We strung up our flyrods and took off down the river. The water was lower than it normally is in August. Which is good because it congregates the

fish in the holes which helps fishing.

We were having a great time fishing and then disaster struck. We passed through a spot that was loaded with huckleberries and raspberries. Kolby slid to a screeching halt and it was all out war on the berries. No hurry. We were going to be back here for four days. Normally we'll half fill a water bottle with huckleberries to make a fruit-flavored drink but this time we only had our Aquamira filtered water bottles to store them in.

I finally got her pried away from the berry patches and back on track.

I lose track of what day we caught what. We didn't catch as many fish as normal but still caught enough. Somewhere in the mix Kolby hung a really big cutthroat. I mean he was big! I saw him slash the water and he had a big girth. I bet he was 17 to 18 inches. She had on a light tippet and he soon snapped her off.

Like I said above, it was smoky and late afternoons the smoke would really roll down the canyon and cloud things up. You could hardly make out the far ridge. Kolby would ask me every night if I thought we needed to get outta there. We'd end up staying only to wonder again the next night. You don't want a forest fire racing over the top of the mountains while you're sleeping.

Well, our time finally came to an end. We loaded our packs and hit the trail. Great trip.