

The Basics of Waterfowl Hunting in Wisconsin

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Photo by: Trenton Rohrer

Attention: This document is not to be used as a replacement for the [Migratory Game Bird Regulations](#) and should be used as a reference not as the law.



Last updated: 8/03/18

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Intro-DUCK-tion:

So, you decided to try waterfowl hunting or learn something new about waterfowl and the hunting opportunities it provides? The Wisconsin DNR is excited that you want to research and learn more about this unique resource and this document serves as tool, to increase your knowledge about waterfowl and waterfowl hunting in Wisconsin. Common questions from long-time and new hunters are addressed and serve as a means to help you bag your first duck or goose, teach you new techniques and provide you with additional resources to locate new hunting areas Wisconsin provides some the best and most diverse waterfowl hunting opportunities in the Mississippi Flyway and is one of the few states considered a “production” state within the Flyway. As a “production” state, Wisconsin’s breeding population of waterfowl can influence the total number of birds seen during fall migration. Local birds, those produced in Wisconsin, as well as migrants from the Dakotas, Canada, and Alaska use the abundant resources available to them as they migrate through Wisconsin. Over 5 million acres of wetlands and 15,000 lakes, including places like the Mississippi River and Great Lakes draw in large concentrations of waterfowl and provide endless opportunities to hunters and nature viewers alike.



Photo by: Bryan Peterson

The goal of this document is to highlight some of the tools and applications that you may not be aware that the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) provides. For example, public lands, advanced shotgunning courses, or general habitat and management.



Waterfowl hunting has a long tradition in Wisconsin and is discussed, as this history of waterfowl hunting provides insight as to why some people are so passionate about this resource and sport. It is a unique type of hunting where comradery is one of the most important aspects of the experience. It’s an experience that waterfowl hunters often say they enjoy even if they come home empty handed. You may come home duck-less, however, most of the time you’ll have a smile on your face.

Links to additional documents and websites are provided throughout this summary; click the link and you will be taken to that site/resource.

The Wisconsin DNR hopes you find this document helpful and wish you the best of luck during your hunting experiences in Wisconsin.

Licenses:

Before you even decide to pick up a shotgun and go hunting you need to buy a few licenses and stamps at minimum. You can do this either online at GOWILD or at a DNR service center (<http://dnr.wi.gov/Contact/SSbyRegion.html>).

What will you need to buy? (See REGULATIONS for more)

Small game license:

Cost:	In state: \$18	Out of State or Non-Resident 5 day:
		\$85 or \$55

Allows you to hunt: waterfowl, upland game birds, squirrels, rabbits, coyotes, foxes, etc.

State Duck Stamp:

Cost: \$7 In-state or out of state

Purpose of state duck stamp? *Two-thirds of this money is used for in-state waterfowl habitat and/or wetland restoration. The other one-third goes to Canada (mostly Manitoba) for waterfowl habitat and/or wetland restoration.*

Why Canada? Manitoba, like Wisconsin, produces many of the birds that Wisconsin hunters see and harvest. Making sure quality breeding habitat is available throughout the Mississippi Flyway is key to a good fall flight. [READ MORE](#)



Caleb Metrich of Lake Tomahawk

If you would like a physical stamp you can go to a DNR service center or go to [Online Order Form](#) to purchase it.

Harvest Information Program (HIP) certification:

Cost: \$0

What is HIP? *HIP is part of a national program to monitor hunter numbers and harvest, anyone hunting migratory game birds (ducks, geese, woodcock, mourning dove, snipe, rails, gallinules [moorhens] and coots. It is Federally required to obtain HIP certification prior to hunting any of those species. HIP certification places you on a federal list of hunters who may receive a federal hunting or wing survey.*

Federal Duck Stamp:

Cost: \$25

You can also obtain this at a US Post Office. Otherwise a physical stamp will be sent in the mail.

Purpose of state duck stamp? *Since 1934, the federal duck stamp has been required to hunt waterfowl in the United States. Ninety-eight cents of every duck stamp dollar goes directly into the [Migratory Bird Conservation Fund](#) to purchase vital wetland and wildlife habitat or acquire conservation easements for inclusion in the National Wildlife Refuge System.*



Photo by: USFWS

Goose Permit:

Cost: \$3

Allows you to pursue Canada geese, Snow Geese, Ross' geese, Greater White-fronted geese, and Brant.

A History of Waterfowl Hunting:

Like much of the United States, Wisconsin contributed to the age of over exploitation. Until the 1900's any animal in the state could be and often was hunted and sold on the open market. Harvest for profit, also known as "market hunting," nearly caused the extinction of many wildlife species we now cherish. During the market hunting days, it didn't matter when you hunted, where you hunted, or what you hunted with. Weapons such as punt guns were used to take as many birds as possible in one shot. These weapons were mounted to the front of a sneak boat and the gunner

would fire a shot into the middle of unsuspecting flocks. In 1900 the Lacey Act was first signed, this act gave the federal government authority to prohibit illegal take, possession, transportation, or the selling of wildlife and created civil and criminal penalties for individuals that violate those rules and regulations. The Lacey act was one of the first conservation laws enacted by the United States federal government. Then in 1916 the Migratory Bird Treaty was signed by the United States and Canada, followed by countries like Mexico, Japan and Russia. In 1918, by the signing of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act; this act provides for the regulation of migratory bird hunting.

Other legislation that has helped support current record setting duck populations include the Migratory Bird Hunting & Conservation Stamp Act passed in 1934, which funds habitat protection; the Pittman -Robertson Act passed in 1937, provides funds to state or wildlife management; and the Endangered Species Act signed in 1973, which provides protection to species under the risk of extinction. Additional legislation includes the Clean Water Act and "Swamp Busters", both of which have saved critical waterfowl breeding habitat across the country.

Waterfowl management has long been guided by the Waterfowl Breeding Population and Habitat Survey which is conducted each spring. This survey has been conducted annually since 1955 and biologists now fly approximately 80,000 miles of transects each year counting waterfowl and wetlands. The survey encompasses over 2 million square miles and covers the major breeding areas of waterfowl in North America. Wisconsin contributes to this survey by conducting a similar survey and providing the data to the US Fish and Wildlife Service. The Wisconsin survey has been conducted since 1973 and is flown each spring using protocols similar to the Waterfowl Breeding Population and Habitat Survey.

Waterfowl hunting has quite the history in Wisconsin, but is less talked about than deer hunting. For example, there are numerous duck hunting clubs dating back to the early 1900's and are still operating today, each with their own traditions. There are the "Honey Holes", which are not forgotten by the family and friends that have hunted them for years. There are also stories that can be passed

SPORTS

7-7



1912 Gills Landing . The ducks were packed in wooden barrels and shipped by rail to Milwaukee and Chicago markets. They were not cleaned or dressed prior to shipping and there wasn't any refrigeration for the two to three day journey. First man on left and owner of boat is Charles Lawrence. Photo and caption provided by Bob Lawrence.



Photo by: USFWS

down from generation to generation, stories about historic events such as [Armistice Day](#), as well as those told by the great writers like Gordon MacQuarrie and Aldo Leopold. These stories are what connect and bind waterfowl hunters from different generations and provide a link to future generations of waterfowl hunters.

WDNR Sponsored Opportunities:

The Wisconsin DNR provides many opportunities for you to start your duck hunting career, bring a new hunter, young or old, into the sport, or hone your personal shotgunning abilities. See what might interest you below.

WINGSHOOTING (Advanced shotgun course):



These workshops are designed to help bird hunters improve their hunting skills by learning to: improve their wing shooting technique using the proven "swing through" method, estimate range to target "on the fly", and choose the best choke and (cost efficient) ammo combinations for your gun.

By learning these skills, participants will: improve their hunting experience, reduce the number of wounded or lost game, enhance positive hunter ethics, and foster a better appreciation of wildlife resources.

For more information see [WINGSHOOTING!](#)

Learn to hunt:

Learn to hunt are an educational program that help first time hunters experience a high-quality hunt with the aid of experienced hunting mentors. This program is led by skilled hunting volunteer mentors with the aid of local DNR wildlife biologists and/or conservation wardens. What is truly unique about this program is that these hunts can take place outside the normal hunting season. That means mentors are available to help teach and guide novice hunters, while there is less competition with other hunters in the field. These programs are usually put on by a group or organization in conjunction with the WDNR. For more information see the [LEARN TO HUNT](#) page.



Youth Hunt Weekend:

Every year 1-2 weeks before the regular duck season opens the Wisconsin DNR allows youth hunters to have the first opportunity at waterfowl hunting. Youth hunts provide an opportunity for young men and women to hunt when there is less pressure, but youth must be 15 years of age or less and assisted by an adult chaperone age 18 or older. The youth are the future of conservation and nothing is more important than getting them involved in hunting early. For more information see [YOUTH HUNT!](#)

Hunting Ethics:

Nationally, about five percent of the population hunts and roughly the same percentage actively opposes hunting. The rest of the population is predominantly neutral, but their opinion can be swayed by hunter behavior. What we can do as hunters though is hunt ethically. While you might think that you are an ethical hunter who respects the game they pursue, it often takes more than you think. Hunting with fair chase in mind, pursuing game responsibly or hunting legally all are things to keep in mind when considering hunting ethics. Hunting ethically will not only allow you to enjoy your hunts more but also could keep you and others out of harm's way. It is important to respect all those who use and enjoy the resource. Understand that, it is your job to respect other hunters, landowners and non-hunters during your trips in the field.



If you hunt ethically then, you will have shown respect for the game you pursue. By doing this you make sure you did everything possible to harvest the animal as quickly and humanely as possible is important. Knowing what you are shooting at will also help you improve as a waterfowler and avoid violations. Spending time in the marsh is the best way to help with waterfowl identification, however, you can also improve your identification with the [DUCKS AT A DISTANCE: Waterfowl Identification Guide](#) or [DELTA Waterfowl: Waterfowl Identification Guide](#). Knowing what ducks look like at different ranges will help you identify your capabilities and limitations as a hunter.

Always remember **T-A-B-K** from hunter safety.

Following other laws like use of **non-toxic shot** protects many species from death or adverse effects from lead poisoning and is better for your health as well. Things like picking up trash (food wrappers, water bottles, empty shells) and leaving where you hunt looking unchanged from when you found it, is also an important key to hunting ethically. We, as hunters, are in this together and the best way for everyone to return home safe and happy is to hunt ethically.

TAB-K = RULES OF FIREARM SAFETY

T = TREAT EVERY FIREARM AS IF IT WAS LOADED.

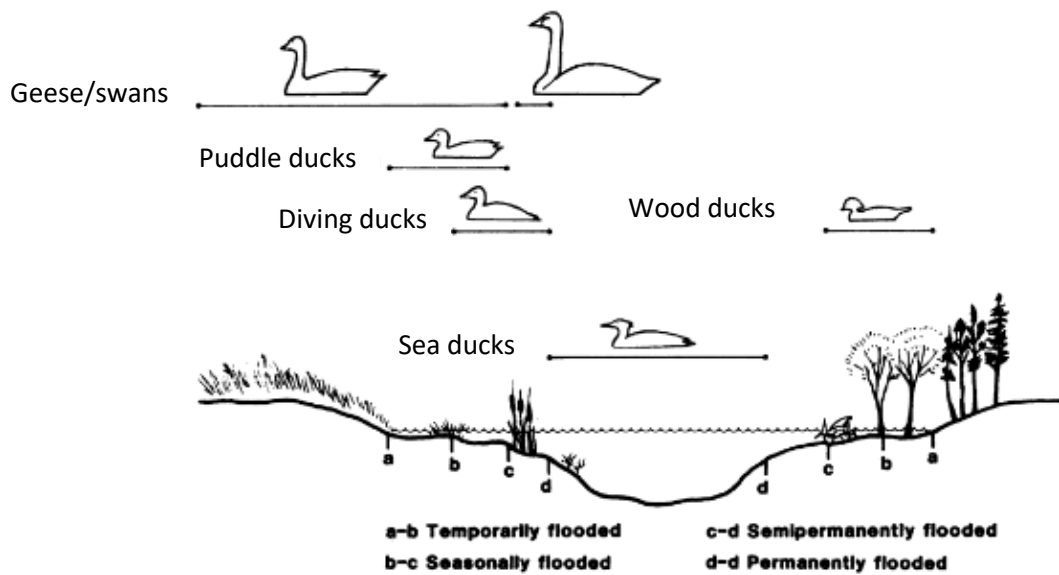
A = ALWAYS POINT THE MUZZLE IN A SAFE DIRECTION.

B = BE SURE OF YOUR TARGET; AND WHAT IS IN FRONT OF, AND BEYOND THE TARGET.

K = KEEP YOUR FINGER OUTSIDE THE TRIGGER GUARD UNTIL YOU ARE READY TO SHOOT.

Types of Waterfowl:

The reason Wisconsin is a breeding location, stop-over destination and wintering area for many waterfowl is due to the availability of numerous types of habitats that the different “tribes” (groups) of waterfowl use. These “tribes” of waterfowl utilize waterbodies in different ways so that they do not have to compete with one another directly for resources ¹ (see below picture). They also can distribute their impact on resources not only on a spatial scale but on a temporal scale as well, meaning the timing of their arrival and departure.



Puddle Ducks:

Feeding: These birds tend to tip feed and feed from the water surface to about 12 inches below it. They feed on wetland vegetation, invertebrates, and with some feeding on waste grains in agricultural fields.

Habitat: Characterized by their small water nature these birds tend to be found in shallow marshes, rivers, and bays of lakes. This tribe also will be the most likely to be found in the fall in agricultural fields feeding on waste grains.

Flocking: Tend to be in small groups but can number in the hundreds.

Flight/take off: These birds take off vertically, and propel themselves with thrusts from their wings and tail to get in the air as quickly as possible. They tend to hover when landing.



Photo by: USFWS

¹ Batt, Bruce, Alan Afton, Michael Anderson, C. Davison Ankney, Douglas Johnson, John Kadlec, and Gary Krapu. *Ecology and Management of Breeding Waterfowl*. University of Minnesota Press Minneapolis and London, 1992, pp. 6-18

Color Markings: In general, males (i.e., drakes or bulls) of this group will stand out because in most of the puddle duck species, males are much more colorful than females (hens). With considerable iridescence in the wing and body. These birds can be a hunter’s favorite as they are regarded for their excellent table fair and for their striking colors.

Species of Puddle ducks commonly found in Wisconsin

<u>MALLARD</u>	<u>BLUE-WINGED TEAL</u>
<u>WOOD DUCK</u>	<u>AMERICAN GREEN-WINGED TEAL</u>
<u>GADWALL</u>	<u>NORTHERN SHOVELER</u>
<u>AMERICAN WIDGEON</u>	<u>AMERICAN BLACK DUCK</u>
<u>NORTHERN PINTAIL</u>	

Diving ducks:

Feeding: These birds feed by diving and on average feed 4 meters below the water’s surface. They feed primarily on mollusks, shellfish, aquatic plants, aquatic invertebrates, and have been known to feed on fish.

Habitat: They tend to be on larger bodies of water.

Flocking: These birds tend to be in larger groups during fall migration and can be found in groups of 10-20, but are sometimes found in “rafts” of hundreds or thousands.

Flight/take off: Diving ducks tend to take off horizontally, by running across the surface of the water to gain speed and then lifting off.

Color markings: In general, males (i.e., drakes or bulls) of this group will stand out because in most of the diving duck species, males are much more colorful than females (hens). Typically, their color patterns consist of black, brown and white in the wing and body. Wing speculums of these birds usually lack vibrant colors but drakes still tend to have more color than females shown in their head and body plumage.



Photo by: USFWS

Species of Diving ducks commonly found in Wisconsin

<u>RINGED-NECKED DUCK</u>	<u>LESSER SCAUP</u>
<u>GREATER SCAUP</u>	<u>CANVASBACK</u>
<u>REDHEAD</u>	<u>RUDDY DUCK</u>
<u>HOODED MERGANSER</u>	

Sea Ducks:

Feeding: Sea ducks feed by diving down in the water column and have been known to feed 120 meters deep. They tend to feed on mollusks, shellfish, aquatic plants, aquatic invertebrates, and some feed primarily on fish.

Habitat: They tend to be on very large open bodies of water.

Flocking: Most often found in huge numbers, these birds can be found in groups in the thousands at a given location.

Flight/take off: Sea ducks also tend to take off horizontally, by running across the surface of the water to gain speed and then lifting off.

Color markings: In general, males (i.e., drakes or bulls) of this group will stand out because in most of the diving duck species, males are much more colorful than females (hens). Typically, their color patterns consist of black, brown and white in the wing and body. Wing speculums of these birds usually lack vibrant colors but drakes still tend to have more color than females shown in their head and body plumage.

Species of Sea ducks commonly found in Wisconsin

COMMON GOLDEN-EYE	LONG-TAILED DUCK
BUFFLEHEAD	BLACK SCOTER
SURF SCOTER	WHITE-WINGED SCOTER
COMMON MERGANSER	RED-BREASTED MERGANSER

Geese:

Feeding: These birds tend to tip feed in water, foraging from the water surface to about 24 inches deep. Geese tend to feed on wetland vegetation, invertebrates, and waste grains from agricultural fields.

Habitat: Characterized by their ability to use a wide variety of habitats from the frozen tundra to downtown Chicago. Canada geese in particular have shown that can survive just about anywhere so long as there is something to eat and access to water. The other geese have been less apt to transition into the more urban setting

Flight/take off: Because of their size, geese must take flight horizontally on water They propel themselves by running across the surface of the water to gain speed before lifting off, but tend to jump vertically when taking off from land.

Color Markings: Males and females of individual goose species are similar in appearance and coloration, but each species has their unique coloration

Species of Geese found in Wisconsin

CANADA GOOSE	SNOW/BLUE/ROSS' GEESE
GREATER WHITE FRONTED GOOSE	ATLANTIC BRANT-UNCOMMON

General Waterfowl Hunting Techniques:

There are many ways, or techniques, to hunt waterfowl. What works for you, might not work for another person, or might work during the earlier parts of the season, but not during late season.” You have the choice in how, when, and where you will hunt, along with what species of waterfowl you pursue. Useful tools for someone getting into waterfowl hunting or someone wanting to learn more are available in books, magazines, online waterfowl hunting forums, YouTube, and other social media platforms. These resources can be used for variety of things, including learning about hunting techniques, purchasing waterfowl hunting gear, and finding new places to hunt. The number one thing we recommend doing before hunting is going out to **SCOUT!** The average number of ducks taken by those who say they scout is three times the number of the people who say they don’t scout². Scouting also allows you to be more flexible, so that if one spot is taken you have another option.



Photo by: Trenton Rohrer

Pass Shooting:

Probably one of the most time intensive techniques, because pass shooting will take a lot of time to find where the ducks are flying to and from rather than just where the ducks are spending their time feeding or resting. Most of the action will occur during the early or late parts of the day when the birds are more active, and traveling between feeding and roosting sites. Scouting is key to being a successful pass shooter. After you find the birds travel corridor and know their patterns your next step should be finding places where land or emergent vegetation extends out into open water where you can find cover, could give you the opportunity to shoot, but seeing the birds and what they are doing will be important.

Jump Shooting:

If you like long walks and seeing new areas this kind of hunting is for you. Jump shooting allows you to chase the birds, instead of having them come to you. This allows you to get a few birds when things are slow. Rather than having birds come to you, you will need to go to the birds. Jump shooting allows you to sneak up on birds while they are feed or rest and they are typically shot when flushed. Following or floating down creeks, rivers or walking the edges of ponds and lakes could set you up for success. Safety should also be a consideration you and other hunters may be



Photo by: Trenton Rohrer

² Bradshaw, L., Petchenik, J., Holsman, R., (2018) Participation in Waterfowl Hunting and Opinions of Hunting Regulations. DNR publication, Bureau of Environmental Analysis & Sustainability.

moving around, it might be best to use this technique with good lighting conditions to know your target and beyond, as well as identifying hazards. With this technique, you should also be sure you have the ability to retrieve the duck by hand or have a trusty canine companion to bring you your bird back.

Hunting over Decoys:

The majority of waterfowl shot each year are shot over decoys or with the aid of decoys on land or in water. The most important thing is studying how ducks sit on the water and how they interact to learn how to set up your decoys. Many decoying theories and systems (See [Decoy Tactics](#)) have been developed and you have to match your decoying technique to the place you hunt, the way you hunt, and the birds you hunt. Leaving spots open for the birds to land could help to get birds in range or in an area where you can make a good clean shot. Remember live ducks move and adding movement on calm days can also help your success, that can be done through the use of motorized decoys or by tools

Open Water hunting:

Only a few lakes and parts of the Mississippi River are permitted for open water hunting, it is important before setting out be sure to know what lakes do and don't allow open water hunting. Also, be aware of other recreators who may be using the same body of water. The reason open water hunting is restricted to only a few lakes and water bodies is to provide refuge for ducks to stay on that body of water. By not allowing open water hunting on every lake it provides a refuge area where ducks can avoid hunting pressure. Open water hunting is a way for hunters to hunt where some ducks would rather be. Diving species of ducks such as canvasbacks and scaup tend to be found in areas of deeper water, rather than near shore or near rooted emergent vegetation where most hunters are confined.

Rules and Regulations:

While pursuing migratory game birds, it is *illegal* to:

a) Hunt with decoys that are:

- Placed beyond 200 ft. from the cover in which the hunter is located.
- Placed in the water prior to one hour before the opening of waterfowl shooting hours.
- Left in the water more than 20 minutes after the close of waterfowl shooting hours.
- Left in the water unattended.

Note: you may leave decoys unattended on dry land.

- Live, regardless of distance from the hunter.

Note: all live, tame or captive ducks and geese shall be removed for a period of 10 consecutive days prior to hunting and confined within an enclosure which substantially reduces the audibility of their calls and totally conceals such birds from the sight of migratory wild waterfowl.

Rules and Regulations:

3) Open Water Hunting

No person may hunt waterfowl in open water from or with the aid of any blind including any boat, canoe, raft, contrivance or similar device except from:

a) Mississippi River

Blinds in any of the waters of the Mississippi River and adjoining waters west of the BNSF railway provided that they are securely anchored and located not more than 100 ft. from any shoreline including islands. Blinds in open water in the Lake Pepin and Grant county* portions of the Mississippi River are permitted regardless of the distance from shore provided the blinds are securely anchored and removed daily at the close of shooting hours.

b) Great Lakes Area and Big Green Lake

Blinds in open waters of Lake Superior, Lake Michigan, Green Bay and Big Green Lake in Green Lake county, if located more than 500 ft. from any lake or bay shoreline. Blinds do not have to be anchored in these areas but must be removed daily at the close of shooting hours.

c) Other Large Lakes

Blinds in open waters of the following lakes, if located more than 1,000 ft. from any shoreline, including islands, provided blinds are securely anchored and removed daily at the close of shooting hours:

d) Other Bodies of Water

If either of the following applies:

- a part of the boat, blind or similar device located within 3 feet of any shoreline including islands;
- a part of the boat, blind, or similar device located within 3 feet of a naturally occurring, un-manipulated growth of vegetation rooted to the navigable waterway's bed or shoreline. The vegetation shall be of sufficient height and density to conceal at least 50% of the hunter and the boat, blind or similar device when viewed from at least one direction beyond the vegetation providing the concealment. For this rule, "vegetation" now includes stumps and trees.

Note: To determine if the vegetation provides the minimum 50% concealment, the viewing shall occur from a height approximately the same as height of the boat, blind, or similar device being used by the hunter.

This type of hunting is usually done by connecting more than one decoy to a single strand of rope or line referred to as "long lines" with traditional single line rigged decoys. Open water hunting would be defined as hunting from a blind/boat that does not follow the Wisconsin concealment rule like jerk cords.



Photo by: Taylor Finger

Other Important tools:

Shot Size Selection:

Since non-toxic shot became a requirement, there has been extensive testing and publications on shot lethality. Below is the lethality table developed by Tom Roster, which is considered the gold standard of lethality tables.

TOM ROSTER'S 2016 NONTOXIC SHOT LETHALITY TABLE[®]							
Proven Nontoxic Loads For Waterfowl, Doves, & Upland Game Birds¹ <i>Vel. Range Tested: 1,225 – 1,700 FPS</i>	Observed Hunters' Typical Shooting Range During Activity (Yards)	Most Effective Nontoxic Shot Size(s) For Birds Listed Under ACTIVITY At The Distances Listed In The Second Column	Minimum Load Weight (Ounces)	Minimum Pellet Hits Needed on Lethal Areas for Clean Kills	Minimum Pattern Count Needed at Any Distance for Clean Kills (# of Pellets in 30" Circle)	Most Effective Choke(s) at Distance (Given in Lead Shot Choke Designations)	NOTE: The pellets in the steel shot loads listed in this table were traditional, highly spherical ball-shaped pellets of ~ 7.86 g/cc density and 90-95 DPH hardness. The HEVI-Shot pellets were of 12.0 g/cc density and are harder than traditional steel pellets.
ACTIVITY							
Large Geese At Long Range Giant, Western, Atlantic and Interior Canadas	50-65 50-70	Steel BBB to T HEVI-Shot 2 to B	1-1/4 1-1/2	1-2 1-2	50-55 50-55	Improved Modified Improved Modified, Full	
Large Geese Over Decoys	35-50 35-50	Steel BB to BBB HEVI-Shot 2 to B	1-1/4 1-1/2	1-2 1-2	50-55 50-55	Improved Cylinder, Modified Improved Cylinder, Modified	
Medium/Small Geese Long Range Snow, White-fronted, Lesser Canadas	50-65 50-65	Steel BB to BBB HEVI-Shot 2	1-1/4 1-1/2	1-2 1-2	60-65 60-65	Improved Modified Improved Modified, Full	
Medium/Small Geese Over Decoys	35-50 35-50	Steel 2 to BB HEVI-Shot 4 to 2	1-1/8 1-1/4	1-2 1-2	60-65 60-65	Light Modified, Modified Improved Cylinder, Modified	
Large Ducks At Long Range Mallard, Black, Pintail, Goldeneye, Gadwall	45-65 45-65	Steel 2 to 1 HEVI-Shot 4	1-1/8 1-1/4	1-2 1-2	85-90 85-90	Improved Modified, Full Improved Modified, Full	
Large Ducks Over Decoys	20-45 20-45	Steel 6 to 2 HEVI-Shot 6 to 4	3/4 - 1 1-1/8	1-2 1-2	85-90 85-90	I.C. (20-35 Yds), Mod. (35-45 Yds) I.C. (20-35 Yds), Mod. (35-45 Yds)	
Medium Ducks Over Decoys Wigeon, Scaup, Shoveler	20-45 20-45	Steel 6 to 3 HEVI-Shot 6 to 4	1 1-1/8	1-2 1-2	115-120 115-120	I.C. (20-35 Yds), Mod. (35-45 Yds) I.C. (20-35 Yds), Mod. (35-45 Yds)	
Small Ducks Over Decoys Teal, Ruddy, Bufflehead	20-45 20-45	Steel 6 to 4 HEVI-Shot 6	1 1-1/8	1-2 1-2	135-145 135-145	Mod. (20-35 Yds), Full (35-45 Yds) Mod. (20-35 Yds), Full (35-45 Yds)	
Swatter Load For Wounded Birds	20-30	Steel 7 to 6	1	1	175	Improved Modified, Full	

This table summarizes Tom Roster's analyses to date of the lethality data bases for certain of the 16 U.S. steel vs lead waterfowl & dove shooting tests published between 1968 & 2014 & one steel-only pheasant shooting test (1999) plus lethality data bases owned by ammunition companies for birds taken with nontoxic shotshell loads Roster tested for them & the CONSEP Org. Note: Steel #BBB (.190") & HEVI-Shot #2 (.150") have exhibited the best all-around performance for taking geese; steel #3 (.140") & HEVI-Shot #4 (.130") the best all-around performance for taking ducks; steel #2 & HEVI-Shot #4 (.130") the best all-around performance for taking ring-necked pheasants; & steel 7's (.100") the best all-around performance for taking doves.

¹ These findings are derived from testing 2 3/4" 28 gauge; 3" 20 ga.; 2 1/4", 3" & 3 1/2" 12 ga.; & 3 3/4" 10 ga. steel loads; plus 2 3/4" 28 ga.; 2 1/4" & 3" 20 ga.; and 2 1/4" & 3" 12 ga. HEVI-Shot loads.

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How to use: if you're hunting large ducks over decoys, your normal shooting range should be between 20-30 yards. You should start patterning (shooting gun at the center of a 30" circle target) using an Improved Cylinder choke shooting at 30 yds with a shot size of 2-6. Shoot once, and count the number of pellets you find with-in the 30" circle. If you have around 85-90 pellets you are good to go. If not, you may need to change shot size, brand of shell, or choke (modified if you need more pellets or skeet if you need less pellets).

Boats:

Boats are not needed to hunt waterfowl, but they do help. Canoes and kayaks are ideal for 1 or 2 persons on smaller water bodies and often allow a hunter or hunters to get to places larger boats or people on foot can't. Canoes and kayaks are a good way to pack in gear if you have more than you can carry. They are also a good way to retrieve birds if hunting in deep water or if you don't have a dog.



Larger boats or boats with motors are usually more stable and are better for hunting with larger groups or when hunting larger bodies of water. Larger boats allow a hunter to haul more equipment, and additional [boating information](#) and [boating regulations](#) can be found on the WDNR's website.

Safety should always be the number one priority whenever in any kind of watercraft so be sure to always wear your life vest.

<i>Rules and Regulations:</i>	
<p>No person may hunt waterfowl in open water from or with the aid of any blind including any boat, canoe, raft, contrivance or similar device except from:</p>	<p><u>4) Structures, Boats and Vehicles</u> While pursuing migratory game birds, it is <i>illegal</i> to:</p>
<p>d) Other Bodies of Water If either of the following applies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a part of the boat, blind or similar device located within 3 feet of any shoreline including islands; • a part of the boat, blind, or similar device located within 3 feet of a naturally occurring, un-manipulated growth of vegetation rooted to the navigable waterway's bed or shoreline. The vegetation shall be of sufficient height and density to conceal at least 50% of the hunter and the boat, blind or similar device when viewed from at least one direction beyond the vegetation providing the concealment. For this rule, "vegetation" now includes stumps and trees. <p>Note: To determine if the vegetation provides the minimum 50% concealment, the viewing shall occur from a height approximately the same as height of the boat, blind, or similar device being used by the hunter.</p>	<p>d) Moving Boats Hunt or shoot from any moving boat other than those propelled by paddle, oars or pole. Motorboats and sailboats must have their motors completely shut off and/or the sail furled and its progress ceased before loading or discharging a firearm.</p>
<p>Photo by: Trenton Rohrer</p>	

Aquatic Invasive species:

Aquatic invasive species are nonnative plants, animals and pathogens that harm the environment and economy. Migratory bird hunters are reminded to do their part to help protect our waters this hunting season by taking action to stop the spread of invasive species. When moving between hunting sites, hunters need to remove all plants, animals and mud from watercraft and gear (including dogs) and drain all water from equipment.



STOP AQUATIC HITCHHIKERS!™

Prevent the transport of nuisance species.
Clean all recreational equipment.
www.ProtectYourWaters.net

To prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species, all water users are required by law, before moving to a new waterbody, to:

- INSPECT watercraft, waders, equipment and gear
- REMOVE any attached aquatic plants, animals and mud
- DRAIN all water from boats, motors and equipment



Blinds:

Like boats, hunting blinds are not required to be successful but they can be helpful. Blinds can be useful when you plan to hunt a specific spot with the right conditions (wind or time of year), when cover is limited, or when trying to conceal a group of people. Blinds are used to conceal yourself and can be used keep out of the elements. Blinds can be as simple as woody vegetation stuck in the ground, the boat itself, or a built platform.

Established blinds built on state land or any bed of a navigable water way can only be placed 7 days prior to the waterfowl season and must be removed 7 days after the season closes. The blind must have the blind owner's name, address and DNR customer ID number printed in one square inch or larger print, and must be visible and legible at all times. Built blinds could be made from simple things like wood pallets and chicken wire or could be built to be a home away from home. For established blinds on public lands, ALL materials must be removed once the season ends.

Boat blinds are nice because they are mobile. Wherever your boat can go, your blind can go. This makes concealing your hunting party and equipment that much easier. No matter what size boat you have, you could configure a blind for it. This could be as simple as a piece of burlap over the top to a hard-sided naturally or synthetically brushed blind.



Over the last 10 years', field hunting has grown in popularity throughout the waterfowl hunting community in North America. Some species of waterfowl will congregate in agricultural fields, as the waste grain provides an energy rich food resource to migrating and wintering waterfowl. Layout blinds or natural concealment from fence lines or standing crops, can be used to keep your decoys and decoying birds within range, while in agricultural fields. You can add to your concealment when using a layout blind by using residual stubble or synthetic material to "brush" your blind, allowing you to conceal yourself in areas that provide little to no cover.

Duck and Goose Calls:

A duck call in the hands of the unskilled is one of conservation's greatest assets

-Nash Buckingham

Nothing will improve your calling more than practicing. Sitting in the marsh and listening to the birds themselves, will aid you in knowing what to sound like when calling. In the end, you can succeed with ought being a great caller, as long as you know where the ducks want to be. If you know where the ducks want to be, you likely won't need to call at all. Click here, for a for video demonstration on [how to call ducks](#).



Photo by: Trenton Rohrer

Quick how to duck call and what to "say" into the call:

Basic quack: whit, dwit, or kwit (quit)

Greeting call: 5 quacks in a row

Feeding call: ticka, ticka, ticka, or dugga, dugga, dugga in a long strung out string



Photo by: Taylor Finger

Dogs:

Not only a family friend, a dog is a useful tool in a field or marsh. Dogs are used to locate and retrieve downed birds while hunting. Even a dog with no formal training is better at finding birds than a human, if a downed bird is downed in thick vegetated cover. With time and effort your companion could turn into a real asset. There are many areas to train you dog throughout the state of Wisconsin; some of these facilities are focused more towards upland game birds, but practice of any kind will make your dog a better hunter in the field. You can

find a training area near you at the [DOG TRAINING](#) website.

Where to Go:

Wisconsin has 5 million acres of wetlands and 15,000 lakes, including the Mississippi River, Lake Superior and Lake Michigan, Wisconsin also has the largest freshwater cattail marsh in the country, Horicon Marsh. With so many areas that provide public hunting opportunity, there is bound to be a place to hunt near you. Here are several websites from the WDNR and USFWS that you may find useful in your search for a public hunting spot.

[WDNR PUBLIC LANDS MAPPING SYSTEM](#)

[USFWS MAP](#)

The opportunities don't end at just end at public land though. Through a little work of knocking on doors and plat book research you may also be able to obtain permission to hunt on private land. It is important that while on private land that you do not own that you follow the owner's directions and respect their land especially cleaning up after yourself of all shells and trash that may have accumulated after the hunt. There is much more private ground than public ground in Wisconsin, so keeping private lands open to hunting through good stewardship is critical.

Public/Private land signage:

Always be sure to look up property based rules before heading to a new area. Obey signage and always be aware of your surroundings.

		<p><u>Public or Private: Are You Trespassing?</u></p> <p>Navigability determines whether a waterway is public or private. Navigable lakes, rivers and streams are considered public waterways.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A river or stream is navigable if it has a bed or bank and it is possible to float a canoe or other small craft on it at some time of the year, even if only during spring floods; • Since navigable waterways are open to the public, they may be used for fishing, hunting, boating, swimming or other recreational activities provided public access is available or you have permission of the landowner to cross their property to reach the waterway; • Once on a navigable waterway, <i>you may walk, fish, hunt, swim or boat in any navigable lake, stream or impoundment as long as you remain in the water (i.e., your feet must remain wet);</i> • The public may only use the exposed shore area of a stream located below the ordinary high-water mark without the permission of the riparian land owner when it is necessary to exit the water to bypass an obstruction; and • It is not legal to enter uplands or exposed shore areas to hunt or retrieve game without permission of the landowner.
Private Land	Land owner permission required	
State Leased Private Land	Huntible- be sure of boundaries	
Voluntary Public Access	Huntible- be sure of property boundaries	
WDNR Property	Huntible- be sure of property boundaries	
WDNR Refuge/closed area	Not Huntible	
USFWS Waterfowl production area/ National Wildlife Refuge	Huntible- be sure of property boundaries	
National Wildlife Refuge closed area	Not Huntible	



Photo by: Luke Fara

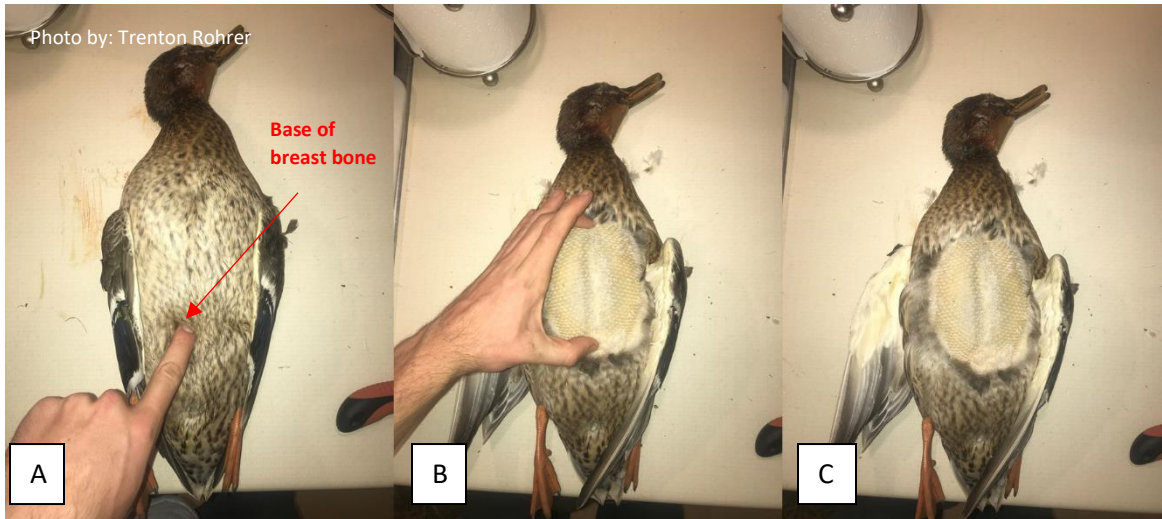


Photo by: Trenton Rohrer

Waterfowl processing:

Once you have harvested a bird, and have returned to your permanent place of residence your next step should be to enjoy a meal from what you harvested. Below are step by step directions on how you can debone and breast out a bird. There are various ways to clean waterfowl beyond breasting out a bird. You can also remove the legs, separately from the breast meat, or leave the breast and legs connected, which is referred to as the “whole bird”. If you would like to learn how to end up with a whole bird see this video for instructions on [how to field dress a duck](#).

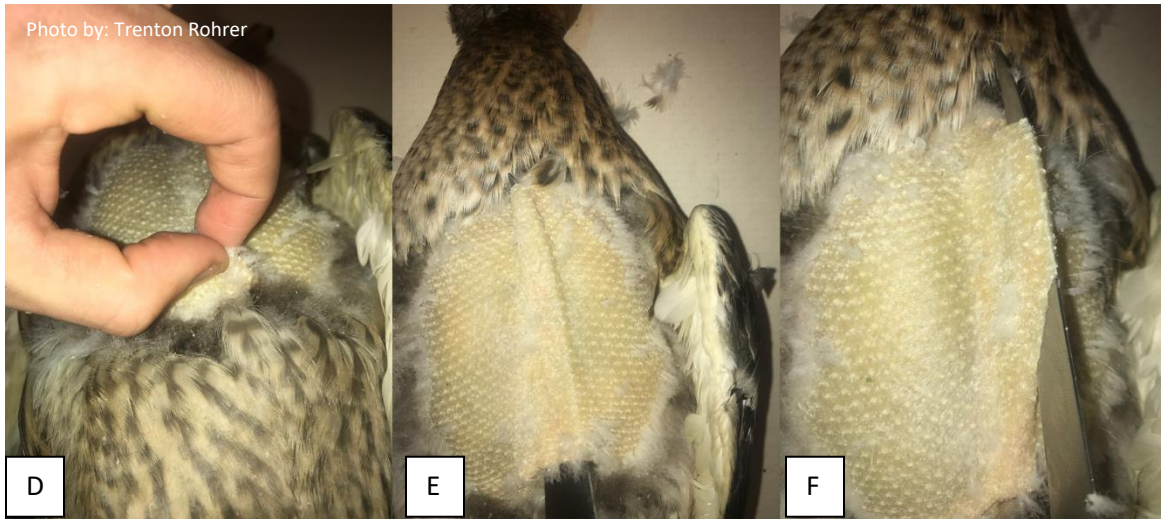
Step 1.



Find a flat surface with good lighting, place your duck on the cleaning surface with its' head facing away from you and feet towards you (a). You will need a bag for feathers and carcass, along with a sharp knife. First find the base of the keel, which is also where the breast bone (sternum) and keel meet, at the rear (caudal) of the bird (A). Once found, pluck feathers (you can choose to skip this step completely) from there to just beyond the wishbone (furcula) and out to where the first wing bone (humerus) attaches to the body (B and C). You can also instead press firmly with your thumbs in the empty space above the wishbone (where the crop would be on and upland bird) and peel the skin away from the breast meat. It typically reduces the washing process afterwards; less feathers. You may want to leave the skin and fat attached to the breast meat, which will determine how defeathered it needs to be.

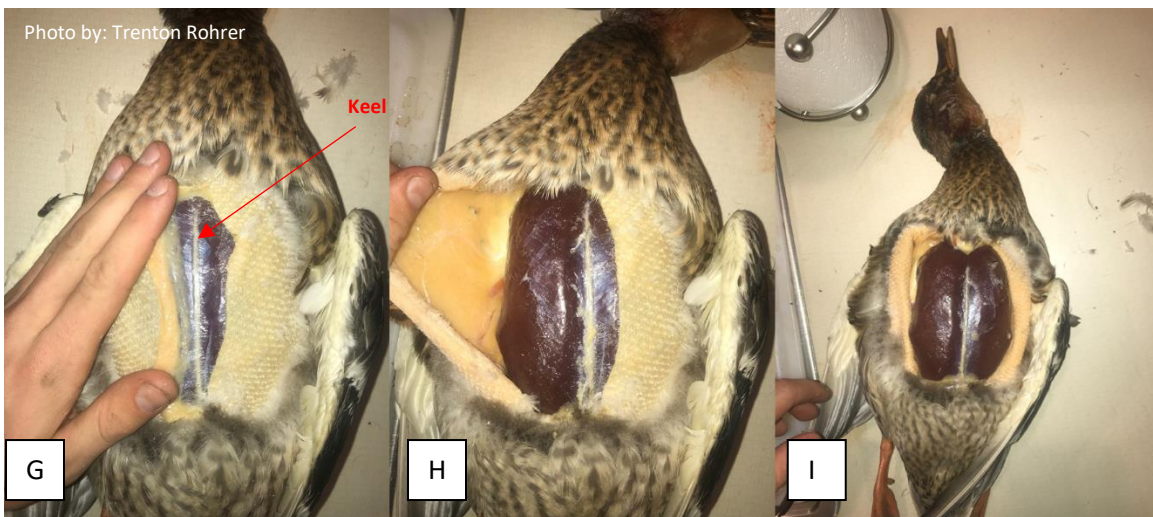
Earlier in the season many ducks will have pinfeathers (feathers that have not grown all the way out), which can be difficult to remove. One way to remove dealing with pin feathers is to remove the entire skin, leaving just the breast meat (no skin or fat). Later in the season, birds will no longer have as many pin feathers, making plucking that much easier. Because birds are easier to pluck later in the season, hunters tend to leave the skin and fat on the muscle during this time. If you decide to keep the skin and fat on, go to Step 4, if you wish to remove the skin and fat, then follow along from here.

Step 2.



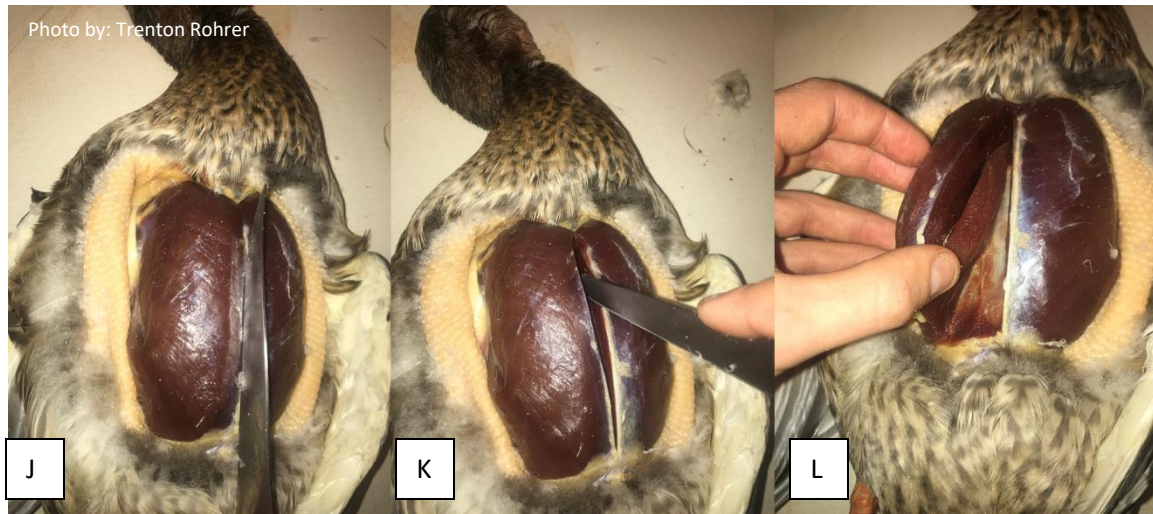
Now you are ready to make your first cut. Again, find the base of the keel and pinch the skin between your thumb and pointer finger (D). Then slide your knife under the skin, following the keel up to the furcula (E and F).

Step 3.



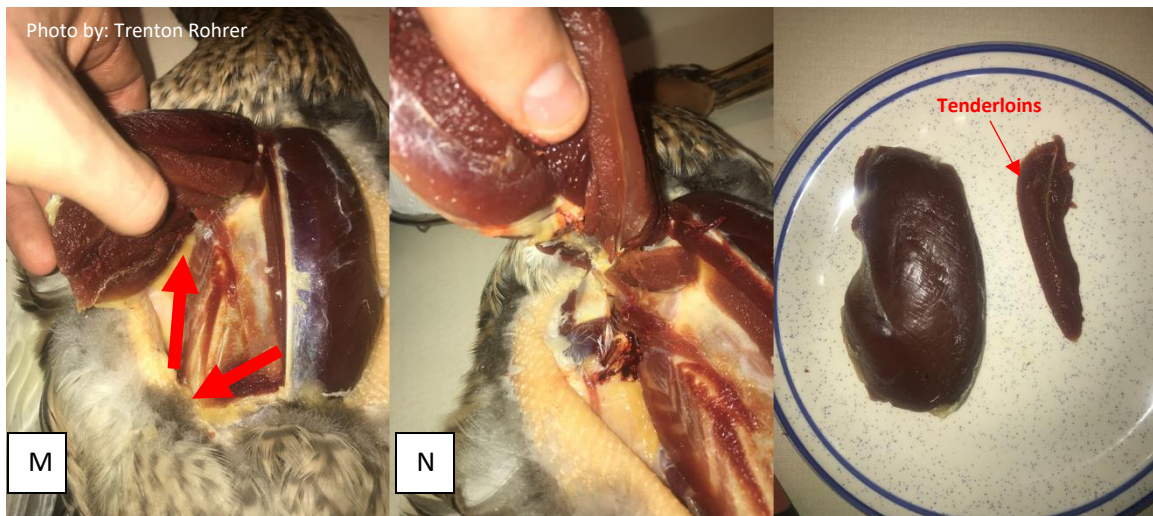
You will then be able to see the keel which separates the breasts (G). Continue to remove the skin from the bird by peeling the skin away from the breast towards the wing (Hand I). You may need to use a knife to do this or in some cases you can run your fingers underneath the skin.

Step 4.



Now take your knife, starting at the furcula and with your knives edge along the keel, cut down until you hit the sternum (breast bone) itself (J). From here you should cut along the keel, until you get to the base of the keel (where you started plucking) (K). Then turn your knife to begin cutting the breast meat away from the sternum (breast bone); this cut will be away from the keel and will remove the breast meat from the sternum (breast bone)(L).

Step 5.



Continue to cut along with the breast bone up to the bone until you get to the wishbone (M). finish by cutting along the wishbone (furcula) to remove the breast meat (N). You should then end up with the breast separate from the bone. There are two muscle groups in which you just cut away, the breast (pectoralis muscle) and the tenderloin (supracoracoideus muscle) which is a slightly lighter than the main breast meat. These two muscles can be loosely attached to one another but are easily separated.

Step 6.



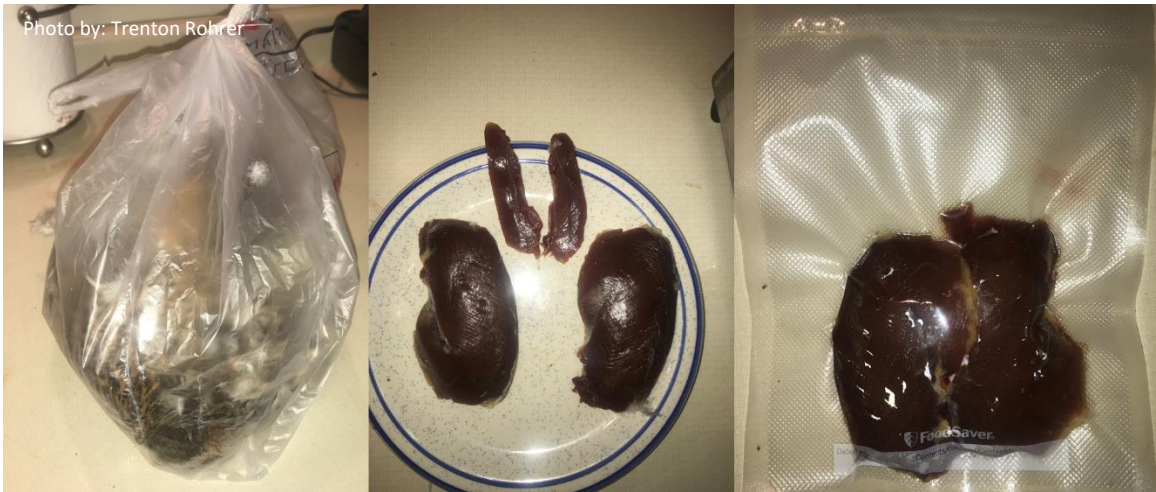
Repeat step 4 on the opposite breast.

Step 7.



Repeat step 5 on the opposite breast.

Step 8.



Bag the feathers and carcass and properly dispose of them. Be sure to clean the breast meat under cold running water before eating or freezing. To remove the remaining feathers or down from a breast with skin still attached use a flame (usually from a torch) to burn them off. This is also a good time to check the meat for pellets and remove them, to avoid an unscheduled dentist appointment (many nontoxic loads are very hard and can chip a tooth if bitten too hard). Be sure to properly store your meat for future meals.

Step 9

Remember to wash your hands and work space after cleaning your game, using disinfecting cleaning supplies or wipes.

The Wisconsin Duck Hunter:

To be a duck hunter is to be a conservationist.



Through the years, duck hunters have been a key part in many conservation accomplishments in Wisconsin, nationally, and continentally. For the last 18 years, Wisconsin has been ranked in the top 5 states for waterfowl hunters, with an average of 70,000 taking to the field each year. Federal stamps purchased by hunters in Wisconsin contributed about \$1,900,000 annually for waterfowl conservation during this period. Along with the federal stamp, Wisconsin waterfowl hunters were required to purchase a \$7 state waterfowl stamp, which contributes on average \$540,255 each year to additional waterfowl conservation. From 1978 to 2016, total revenue from state stamps was approximately \$16 million, meaning Wisconsin duck hunters were huge contributors to habitat protection and restoration for the state and Mississippi Flyway. This money is used in key areas, to protect breeding, stopover and wintering sites that waterfowl use.

Wisconsin as a contributing member of the Mississippi Flyway (with funds supported by hunters) contributes funding for critical waterfowl projects. For example, population monitoring and banding on Pool 19 on the Mississippi River in Illinois where 90% of all scaup are banded in the US along with canvasbacks and redheads and canvasback banding that occurs in Manitoba on the Delta Marsh which is a critical breeding and stopover sight. We also contribute money for banding/monitoring surveys that occur up on the tundra for Canada goose and snow goose on Akimiski Island and along the Hudson Bay coast.

To be a duck hunter in Wisconsin is to be a leader in conservation of waterfowl and wildlife that depend on waterfowl habitat whether it be wetlands or prairies. The money that you as a hunter spend on hunting supplies and licenses go back into habitat, which can impact the number of waterfowl you see each fall. We hope to see you in the marsh, fields and on the water enjoying waterfowl hunting this fall and in the future. By partaking in this unique past time, you carry on the rich waterfowl hunting traditions that have helped, and continue to help, conserve the habitats that support waterfowl and other wildlife across North America.



For More Information:

Please call or email

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How did we do?

Was this document helpful? Did we miss anything?

Please let us know, thanks!



Photo by: Wisconsin Wing-shooting Course