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## **After the Hunt – Cleaning and Handling Dove**

Four species of dove are legal to hunt in Kansas. These species are mourning dove, Eurasian collared dove, ringed turtle-dove, and white-winged dove. Mourning doves are one of the most popular game birds in North America, being hunted in 39 of the continental states, with an annual harvest more than all other bird species combined. Fall migration generally begins in the middle of August but can vary depending on the weather conditions. Dove can be found in a variety of landscapes, but they are mostly found in grassland, crop land, and shrub land. A combination of seeds including both native and cultivated crop seed makes up a dove's diet. In Kansas, most dove have migrated south by October, however some will stay in Kansas throughout the fall and winter. Kansas is among the top five states for dove harvest.

Morning and White-winged dove season in Kansas opens Sept. 1<sup>st</sup> this year and goes through Nov. 29<sup>th</sup>. If you are lucky enough to get a few dove while hunting, it is important to know how to properly care for and handle dove and other wild game to ensure the safety of the meat as it is harvested and taken from the field to the dinner table. While dove hunting is fun and dove is a nutritious meat, if it is not handled correctly when it is harvested it could become contaminated with bacteria which can lead to people who consume the meat getting sick. To reduce this risk, it is important to remember the following tips during hunting, storage, and preparing the food. As well as making sure to follow all the game regulations for hunting, transporting, and storage of wild game. Below are a few recommendations on cleaning and handling dove from Karen Blakeslee with the K-State Rapid Response Center.

### **Be prepared for the hunt!**

- Bring a sharp hunting knife, a whetstone or steel, light rope or nylon cord, plastic bags, clean cloth or paper towels, and a cooler filled with ice.

### **Field care and transport**

- Wear latex gloves while cleaning wild game.
- Do NOT harvest and eat sick or abnormal birds.
- Field dress the birds right away
- Birds may be plucked or skinned in the field

- Remove intestines and crop right away, as the grain in the crop may ferment if not removed.
- Wipe out the cavity with a clean cloth or paper towel, do not use grass or snow, this may contaminate the bird.
- Do not cross contaminate. Wash hands, knife, and cutting board with hot soapy water and wash thoroughly.
- Store birds in a plastic bag on ice to keep them clean and cold. Keep birds under 40°F. If cooler is not available, put the birds in the back seat in the shade.
- Do not transport birds in the trunk of a vehicle, this does not allow heat to escape from the birds.

### **Safe Processing**

- For immediate use, birds should be stored in the refrigerator at 40°F or less and used within 3 days. For long-term storage, the whole cleaned carcass may be frozen at 0°F or lower. Freezing the meat while it is fresh and in top condition will enhance the quality of the meat.
- Freeze game meat using moisture/vapor-proof wrap such as heavily waxed freezer wrap, laminated freezer wrap, or freezer-weight polyethylene bags. Wrap tightly, pressing out as much air as possible. Label the packages with the date and content. Be sure to use the packages within a year.

### **Safe Preparation**

- After freezing, thaw the birds in the refrigerator or microwave. If microwaving, be sure to cook immediately after thawing.
- Fully cook game birds to an internal temperature of at least 165°F.
- Game birds may be prepared like chicken.

Currently, Kansas is participating in a nationwide mourning dove banding study and asks hunters to check in doves they find with leg bands to the Bird Banding Lab at 1-800-327-BAND or [www.pwrc.usgs.gov](http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov).

Dove season in Kansas goes until Nov. 29. Remember stay safe and have fun while hunting!

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