

Challenged to come up with one prime bit of advice for dove season which starts Sept. 1, it didn't take long to settle on two simple words of wisdom: Don't miss. The spring and summer have been less than stellar for nesting doves across most of the state, and the word from biologists and guides is that, to boot, crops failed and many were late to make and some are still standing. That means hunting locations are limited and concentrations of birds likely will be more scattered, especially in eastern Oklahoma. So birds and shot opportunities likely will be less plentiful than in years past. By "scattered," longtime guide Gordie Montgomery said that where in some years you might see a couple of good hunting fields a couple of miles apart, this year it might be five or 10 or more miles to find another decent concentration of birds. "I'd say 60-70% of what people will be hunting is wheat stubble," Tulsa World Pro Tips contributor and longtime guide Jack Morris said. Even fields with soybeans seeded over the wheat stubble are attracting doves. Normally those soybeans would have grown too tall by now for those fields to attract doves. Things are that far behind. A lot of corn crops, if they weren't flooded, still are standing. "In general, I'd say the hunting will be good early and get better later as things get picked," Morris said. Fields typically managed for doves at the Wildlife Management Units at Keystone and Skiatook were hopelessly flooded out this year, said biologist Matt Mattioda, who oversees those areas. "Candy Creek is the only one that's fine, and we will mow and burn that next week," he said. The advice there is to call ahead to any WMA well before you go. Your old standby field might not be what it has been in the past. All of the state's WMAs and their directors are listed in the Oklahoma Hunting Guide regulations book and the biologists always are helpful with information about their managed fields. Mattioda also traps and bands doves as part of annual population surveys in the area, and he commented that it's going a little

slower than usual this season. "The other day, one of the sites had 17

birds in it, and six or seven of them were already banded this year,"

he said. Recaptures during banding can be an indication that birds are few. "This

is all anecdotal, but I couldn't say if the heavy rains affected the early

hatches or with the river going down and leaving a lot of bare ground

the doves have moved out to those areas," he said. "It's really hard to

tell." Montgomery, who unquestionably puts more effort into creating dove hunting fields than any

individual statewide, said any time we see a year with precipitation at record levels

and up to 15 inches above normal in many counties, it simply will not

be a banner year for dove reproduction. That doesn't mean hunting will be bad,

however. While this season might not be a barn-burner like some past years and

you might need to make every shot count, the birds will come and there

will be plenty, Montgomery said. "Once they're done nesting and they gather up, you'll

be surprised how many birds there are," he said. Kelly Bostian 918-581-8357 [kelly.bostian@tulsaworld.com](mailto:kelly.bostian@tulsaworld.com) Twitter

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