How to Waterfowl Hunt

Oregon supports diverse waterfowl populations, from sea ducks in coastal saltwater to puddle ducks in the alkali basins of southeast Oregon. You might think you need lots of gear (decoys, boats, a trained dog) to hunt ducks and geese here, but you don’t. All of these things are nice but not necessary. All you really need is a hunting license/tag, shotgun, shells and some basic identification skills.

License requirements
To hunt waterfowl, a person needs a valid hunting license, free Harvest Information Program (HIP) validation, resident waterfowl validation (if 14 years and older), and federal waterfowl stamp (if 16 years and older). A sea duck permit is needed to hunt Harlequin, scoter, long-tailed and eider ducks. A Northwest Oregon Goose Permit, obtained after passing a special identification test showing you can distinguish between certain types of geese, is required to hunt geese in the northwest portion of Oregon during the regular fall season. (The regulation is intended to keep hunters from shooting dusky Canada geese, a sensitive population that winters in northwest Oregon.) See the Oregon Game Bird Regulations for details.

When to hunt
Check the current Oregon Game Bird Regulations for details but generally fall duck and goose seasons open on the same day in October and run through middle to late January, with some closed days in between. An additional short, Canada goose-only season occurs in September in most areas.

Generally, waterfowl hunting is best when weather conditions are poor. Wind and rain will force birds to move off standing water to seek shelter and to fly lower, making your shot easier.

Where to hunt
Check out ODFW’s Hunting Access Map online (http://www.dfw.state.or.us/resources/hunting/map/index.asp) to find out where you can go waterfowl hunting. Several state wildlife areas and federal refuges were created to provide habitat for waterfowl and these usually allow hunting. Some private lands are also open to public hunting access, thanks to special ODFW programs. You can also try knocking on doors of landowners where you see ducks or geese and asking for permission to hunt. Remember you are responsible for knowing boundaries and regulations for your hunting area and you must get permission to hunt on private lands. Most wildlife areas and refuges require that hunters possess only federally-approved, nontoxic shot and obtain daily hunting permits.

Hunting techniques
There are three general ways to hunt waterfowl—hunting over decoys, jump-shooting, and pass-shooting. Jump-shooting is sneaking within shotgun range of feeding or resting waterfowl. The birds are than flushed (e.g. they start flying up) and the hunter selects one as a target. This technique can be very productive when visiting a number of small ponds or by walking along a small meandering stream or irrigation canal.

When pass shooting, hunters try to position themselves in areas where ducks or geese are flying over as they go to and from feeding and resting areas. This can be
a good technique under some circumstances, such as very windy days when birds are forced to fly low. On fair weather days, most birds fly too high and are out of shotgun range, making this technique less desirable than jump-shooting or hunting over decoys.

**Hunting over decoys** is the classic way to hunt waterfowl. Hunters place decoys in a spot likely to be used by waterfowl, hide near the decoys, and try to entice passing birds to within shotgun range (by using calls, for example). Don’t think you need lots of decoys and an elaborate blind to hide in to use this method. Many waterfowl hunters, particularly on smaller water bodies, use as few as six decoys, hide in nearby available vegetation, and may not attempt to call the birds at all. Set up with the wind at your back, this way the birds will approach the decoys in front of you.

Hunting over decoys has its advantages. As the birds are “working” the decoys (circling them to determine if it is safe to land) hunters can identify what type of species the bird is. Also, birds will often try to land with the decoys, which brings them well within shotgun range. See “Decoying Waterfowl” section for tips on how to set decoys.

**Equipment**

Hunters usually wear drab or camouflage clothing because waterfowl have excellent eyesight. Hip boots and chest waders, though not necessary, are ideal for retrieving birds that have fallen in water. Retrieving dogs can also be beneficial for locating and retrieving ducks which fall in water or heavy vegetation. Use any shotgun you like; 12 and 20 gauge are the most popular. Realize your gun will be exposed to mud, water and other elements. Also, state and federal law mandates that non-toxic shot be used for all waterfowl hunting. Steel is the most popular and least expensive of the non-toxic shot available for hunting.

**Protect yourself**

Just like people, birds sometimes get the flu and usually this is no cause for concern. The highly contagious HPAI H5N1 type of bird flu that has caused worldwide concern has never been detected in North America. Still, it is recommended that hunters take the following routine hygiene precautions when dressing waterfowl and other game:

- Wear rubber or latex gloves when handling and cleaning game birds.
- Do not eat, drink, smoke or touch your face when handling birds.
- Keep the game bird and its juices away from other foods.
- Thoroughly clean knives and any other equipment or surfaces that touch birds. Use a solution of one third cup of chlorine bleach per one gallon of water.
- Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds after handling birds (or with alcohol-based hand products if your hands are not visibly soiled).
- Cook all game meat thoroughly (up to at least 165° F) to kill disease organisms and parasites. Use a food thermometer to ensure the inside of the bird has reached at least 165° F.

**Dressing your bird**

Remember wildlife laws require that you leave one wing or the head of the bird attached during transport. Leave one of these on it until you get your bird home.

- Pluck feathers on lower breast and abdomen
- Cut through the belly skin at base of breast.

- Bend bird backwards and remove all entrails.
- Pluck feathers or remove feathery cape.
- Dry bird and keep it cool until you get it home; then refrigerate until cooking.

**Hunting safely**

Always know the location of your fellow hunters, including your dog, and follow these safety precautions when hunting:

- Keep your firearm’s muzzle pointed in a safe direction.
- Keep your finger outside of the trigger guard until ready to shoot.
- Treat every firearm as if it were loaded.
- Be sure of your target and what is in front of it and beyond it.
- Wear blaze orange.
The following recipes are taken from “Recipes from the Wild Side” an ODFW employee cookbook published in 1993. Look online or in a cookbook for more recipes. Remember to thoroughly cook your meat to at least 165° F, a temperature that will kill any bacteria in the meat.

**Great Roast Duck or Goose**

Stuff birds with the following dressing:

- 1 box seasoned stuffing mix
- 1 cup chopped onion
- 1 cup chopped celery
- 1 cup chopped chanterelle or other mushrooms
- 2 eggs
- ½ cup raisins
- ½ cup walnuts
- 1 cup milk

Saute onion, celery and mushrooms in the butter until soft. Mix well with stuffing mix. Add raisins and walnuts. Add milk and sufficient water to make stuffing very moist. Pack not too tightly into duck or goose. One box of stuffing should be enough for 4 to 5 mallards or 2 medium geese.

Place stuffed birds in covered roasting pan breast side up and pour in one or two cans of beef broth for moisture. Baste birds with your favorite sauce (both sweet and sour or orange marmalade are good). Roast large ducks and small geese at 325°F for 2 hours 15 min. Roast larger geese about 2 hours 45 min. Baste again a time or two during roasting process. May finish birds off uncovered for 10 min. to brown or crisp skin. Birds are done when leg tears away easily from body. This cooking method should tenderize even the toughest of waterfowl. Serve on bed of leaf lettuce on platter surrounded by grapes or orange slices.

*Contributed by Steve King*

**Mother’s Wild Duck Recipe**

Used continuously by family of Peter L. Barnhisel since the early 1920s; first in Klamath Falls and then Corvallis.

Shoot duck. Pick, clean and wash duck.

Liberally salt and pepper cavity. Stuff cavity with 2 chunks each of onion, celery, orange and a garlic clove, cut in half. The cavity should be firmly filled with these chunks. Rub duck skin with lemon juice, then olive oil, and lightly salt the skin. Bake at 480ºF for 20 to 35 minutes, depending on the size of the bird. Serve hot, one duck per person, with wild rice and a stuffed tomato or asparagus.

**Wild Duck Italian**

Fry together in olive oil:

- 4 duck breasts, cut up
- 3 cloves garlic, pressed
- 1 large onion, cut up
- ½ lb. mushrooms, sliced

Then add the following ingredients and simmer until tender and sauce is thick:

- 1 28 oz can tomato sauce
- ½ can water
- 1 tsp cinnamon

Serve over cooked spaghetti, fettuccine, or linguini. This sauce is good cooked in a crockpot all day.

*Contributed by Matt Hunter*

**Cantonese duck**

- 2 wild ducks
- Garlic salt
- Pepper
- 4 sprigs parsley
- 1 lemon, halved
- 6 slices bacon
- ½ cup beer
- ¼ cup dry mustard
- 2 Tbsp soy sauce
- 1 cup apricot preserves
- 1 Tbsp lemon juice
- 1 tsp grated orange peel
- ¼ cup melted butter

Sprinkle ducks inside and out with salt and pepper. Place 2 sprigs parsley and ½ lemon in cavity of each. Cover breasts with bacon and fasten with string. For Cantonese sauce, stir beer into dry mustard. Stir in remaining ingredients except butter and heat in double boiler over hot water. Place ducks breast up in baking pan. Roast in 350°F oven 15 min per pound, basting frequently with butter and once with Cantonese sauce. Carve ducks. Serve with rice and remaining Cantonese sauce.

**Hawaiian style duck**

- 1 4-lb duck, skinned, deboned and either quartered or cut up into bite-sized pieces
- ¼ cup salad oil
- 1 Tbsp cornstarch
- ½ tsp salt
- 1 tsp soy sauce
- ½ tsp onion salt
- ½ tsp ginger
- 1 ½ tsp curry powder
- 1 cup chicken broth
- 1 cup pineapple cubes
- 1 cup pineapple juice
- 2/3 cup water
- 1 bunch onions, cut into 1” pieces

Brown duck in oil. In casserole dish, put rest of ingredients except onions. Add browned meat. Place in oven at 300°F for 2 hours. Sprinkle the onion pieces on top and bake 10 minutes more. Serves 4. Great with rice or noodles.
Decoying Waterfowl

Proper decoy placement is essential for hunting success. In general, decoys should be no farther than 40 yards away from the blind. This will help you to judge distance and make good shots on approaching birds. Decoys should be distributed to allow one or two landing zones close to the blind. Remember, if it is windy birds always will land coming into the wind.

Field set

When hunting on large ponds, or rivers with currents, be sure your decoy lines are not worn, are securely tied and have weights attached that are heavy enough to hold the decoy.

Water set 1

When duck hunting, many species will respond well to mallard decoys. However, having groups of decoys of other species in your spread can improve your success.

Water set 2

Water set 3

http://www.dfw.state.or.us