



First HUNT

Participant Handbook

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WATERFOWL

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Welcome to Duck Hunting!

If you are reading this, you have probably decided to try duck or goose hunting. Good for you! Waterfowl hunting is extremely rewarding, it provides memories to last a lifetime, and it's critical to waterfowl conservation.

We all have reasons why we hunt. For some, it's the thrill of hearing whistling wings as birds zoom over the decoys — hopefully close enough for a shot. For others, it's about watching the sunrise with family and friends in a beautiful field, marsh or lake. Then there's those who most enjoy the tasty duck dinner that celebrates the end of a successful hunt.

Savor and explore this new journey. Throughout North America, there's an amazing variety of ducks and geese, and hunting is sure to increase your appreciation of their beauty and cunning. That's why, at Delta Waterfowl, we believe hunters are the best kind of conservationists — they love the ducks and geese they pursue, and in turn feel a responsibility to ensure waterfowl are abundant forever. Be proud of that as you go forward as a new hunter!

Remember, it will take some time to build your skills as a waterfowler. Be patient. Use this instructional resource as a starting point, and above all else, be safe and have fun.

Here's wishing you many safe and unforgettable experiences pursuing your new passion: The grand tradition of waterfowl hunting.

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SAFETY FIRST

There are many waterfowling skills to learn and master, but none are more important than safety. Hunting is one of the safest forms of outdoor recreation — if you keep a clear head and approach it with respect. It's vital that all duck hunters, at all times, adhere to the following list of safety tips:

CONTROL YOUR MUZZLE

UNLOAD ANY UNATTENDED SHOTGUN

BE WEATHER WISE

PLAN AHEAD AND BE PREPARED

BOAT SAFELY

TRAIN YOUR DOG

STICK CLOSE TO YOUR MENTOR

KNOW YOUR SHOTGUN AND AMMUNITION

OBEY THE LAW



CONTROL YOUR MUZZLE ▶ Waterfowl hunting often takes place with friends in close proximity to each other, whether in a boat, blind, layout field blinds or a pit. It is extremely important that you never intentionally or unintentionally point your gun's barrel at someone else. Whether the gun is loaded or unloaded, this rule still applies. Before the hunt takes place, it's also important to establish safe zones of fire for each hunter and stick to them throughout the hunt.

UNLOAD ANY UNATTENDED SHOTGUN ▶ If your shotgun is loaded, it must be in your hands. If you need to step away from your shotgun, then it's critical that you unload it and leave the action open so everyone can see it's unloaded. Alternatively, you may place the shotgun in a gun case. A loaded gun is only safe when it's in your hands, because an unattended firearm could be knocked over by someone else or a dog. Never rely solely on your shotgun's safety mechanism.

BE WEATHER WISE ▶ Often, the best waterfowl hunting is in the worst weather — wind, snow or bitter cold — but these conditions can lead to dangerous situations. Wind, snow and rain can put you at risk of hypothermia, so dress appropriately during extreme weather. Snow or fog can be disorienting, and high winds may lead to big waves that can swamp or capsize an undersized duck boat. So, know your own limits and the limits of your gear. If conditions deteriorate beyond your capabilities, stay home. No duck is worth injury or worse.

PLAN AHEAD AND BE PREPARED ▶ Always take the time to look over your equipment before you head out. Having a fully charged cellphone, appropriate clothing, a flashlight, waders and safety equipment are top priorities. A GPS unit, compass, map and game plan for the hunt are tools for getting safely to and from the hunting location, even in tough conditions. On the way in, take note of your route so you can find your way back. If you're unfamiliar with the area, avoid navigating in the dark. Always be sure that someone knows where you are hunting and when you expect to be back.

BOAT SAFELY ▶ When hunting waterfowl over water in the fall or winter, the water can be cold and potentially dangerous. Always wear an approved, properly fit life jacket; ensure your boat motor works; and never overload your boat. If you're boating in water over your head, don't wear waders, because it's unlikely you will get them off if you capsize — put them on when you get to your hunting location. If your boat isn't designed for gunning open water, find a stable place for it in the cattails or pull it up on solid ground, as shooting off an unstable boat is unsafe. You'll likely operate your duck boat before sunrise or after sunset, so check that your boat lights are in good working order. Finally, be sure of your route at all times.





Become familiar with your shotgun, including the location of the safety, how to operate the action and what types of shotshells it is designed to fire.

TRAIN YOUR DOG ▶ A trained retriever adds a tremendous amount of enjoyment and success to a waterfowl hunt. However, an out-of-control dog can be dangerous. It can tip a canoe, or bump into shotguns and people. Obedience training is the foundation of a good waterfowl dog, and dogs that haven't been trained shouldn't be taken hunting. Consult local training clubs, books and online training resources including at deltawaterfowl.org, to ensure your dog is safely under control.

STICK CLOSE TO YOUR MENTOR ▶ Control and good guidance are the keys for an enjoyable waterfowl hunting experience. Stay within an arm's length of your mentor to allow him or her to help coach you through a safe and successful hunt.

KNOW YOUR SHOTGUN AND AMMUNITION ▶ Become familiar with your firearm. Most importantly, locate your gun's safety.

Make sure the gun works properly. Check that the barrel and chamber are free from obstruction.

If you pull the trigger of a loaded gun and it fails to fire, keep it pointed in a safe direction and wait for at least one minute before removing the shotshell.



In rare situations, a shotshell may actually fire up to a minute later — often called a “hang fire”. Open the action away from you and ensure the barrel is free of obstructions before reloading. When a shell gets wet, it can fail to fully ignite and fire, instead plugging your barrel with the shot charge.

Most hunters shoot either a 20-gauge or 12-gauge, with 12 being the most common. Always check to make sure you’re using the right gauge and length of shotshell (2¾-inch, 3-inch or 3½-inch).

We strongly suggest that new hunters load only one shell at a time when starting out. Load more shells, up to three, as you gain experience.

OBEY THE LAW ▶ You’re not only obligated by law to obey all waterfowl regulations, many are designed to keep you safe. It’s critical that you read and understand the waterfowl hunting regulations for your state or province, as everything from hunting season dates to species-specific bag limits vary by location. Fortunately the regulations are readily available from your state or provincial game department’s website and anywhere hunting licenses are sold, including sporting goods stores.

INFORMATION TO SHARE WITH YOUR MENTOR

There is key information we recommend sharing with your mentor prior to the hunt:

- ▶ Medical information (allergies, medication, special conditions)
- ▶ Your experience level
- ▶ Any special equipment, food or clothing that you need
- ▶ Home/work contact information for your spouse, legal guardian or parent

Ask your mentor to lay out the rules of the hunt beforehand. Listen closely to the instructions of your mentor at all times.

Finding a Mentor

At Delta Waterfowl, we feel the best introduction to waterfowl hunting is through an experienced mentor to quickly guide you through a safe and enjoyable hunt. For hunting families, the connection is obvious. Mothers or fathers who hunt can create wonderful opportunities for their children. The majority of people in North America, however, do not have this family connection to hunting. If that includes you, try the following sources to help you find an ideal mentor:

PEOPLE YOU ALREADY KNOW ▶ Make a list. Do any of your relatives hunt? Perhaps you have friends who already hunt. How about teachers or coaches?

LOCAL DELTA WATERFOWL CHAPTERS OR SPORTSMEN'S CLUBS ▶ Delta Waterfowl chapters are spread across the United States and Canada, and many hold youth or adult mentored waterfowl hunts. Simply visit deltawaterfowl.org/find-your-chapter to find a chapter in your area, and give the chapter chairperson a call. Even if the chapter doesn't host mentored events, someone from the committee may wish to take you hunting. If there isn't a local Delta chapter in your area, you can consult other local hunting organizations or clubs.

HUNTER SAFETY INSTRUCTORS ▶ Contact your local hunter safety instructor. He or she has already shown a passion for training hunters and shooting sports enthusiasts. Perhaps he or she would host you, or has knowledge of potential mentorship opportunities.

STATE OR PROVINCIAL GAME AND FISH AGENCIES ▶ Many state or provincial game and fish agencies have their own mentorship programs. Talk to the person in charge of hunter recruitment or education about mentorship opportunities.



Basic Waterfowling Gear

One look at a massive waterfowl hunting catalog can intimidate even the most curious prospect. While most waterfowl hunters spend their lifetimes accumulating equipment, the list of essential hunting gear is actually quite short. It varies depending on whether you are hunting over water or dry crop fields.

No matter the hunting scenario, a shotgun, non-toxic shot (required by law in every state and province), duck or goose calls, decoys, and a camouflage coat and hat typically make the list. Water hunting scenarios usually involve the addition of either waders or hip boots — more demanding water hunting situations might require the use of a boat.

When field hunting, vegetation, trees or rock piles are sometimes available for concealment. When these natural “blinds” are not available, a man-made hunting blind is often needed for concealment. While expensive layout blinds are available, a simple blanket or homemade blind constructed of burlap can function nicely.

Essential waterfowling gear includes a shotgun, non-toxic shotshells, and a camouflage coat and hat.



How to Gain Hunting Access

In some regions of North America, public hunting opportunities abound. In others, privately owned land is all that is available for waterfowl hunting. Here are a few ways to find hunting properties in your area:

PUBLIC LAND ► No matter where you live, there are several ways to locate publically owned land for hunting waterfowl. Check state or provincial wildlife agency websites, smartphone apps, public or privately published reference guides and local sporting goods stores. You are likely to locate at least one hunting area within a reasonable driving distance of your home.

PRIVATE PROPERTY ▶ Accessing privately owned property can be a bit tricky. However, by following a few simple strategies, you might gain access to good hunting ground before you know it.

Start by creating a list of people you know who already hunt or own land. Then, contact them to see if they have waterfowl hunting opportunities on their land or if they have friends or family who do. Through scouting and old-fashioned ingenuity, you can also find previously unknown local landowners with ducks frequenting their properties. Respectfully ask for permission, and if you get a “no” or two, don’t get discouraged — keep trying!

When landowners grant you hunting permission, consider the following strategies for maintaining a positive relationship with them:

- ▶ Provide the landowner with your name, address, phone number and what vehicle you’ll be driving.
- ▶ Have a clear understanding with the landowner about how many people you may bring with you. Always honor that number.
- ▶ Don’t assume that you can hunt a property all of the time. Find out if you must ask each time you hunt.
- ▶ Ask landowners how they would like you to access their properties (for example: by truck, ATV or on foot).
- ▶ Determine where the property starts and ends. Never cross onto adjacent access-restricted properties.
- ▶ Stay in touch. Send a thank-you note after your hunt or after the hunting season. Contact the landowner during the off-season, and if your schedule allows, ask if there are any projects you can help with around the farm or property.



DURING THE HUNT

How to Utilize Your Mentor

Once you've located your mentor, here are some tips to ensure the time spent together is a quality experience:

HAVE A SAFETY DISCUSSION ▶ Discuss proper gun and hunter safety prior to hunting. It's always a good idea to be on the same page as your mentor.

ARRANGE FOR A SHOOTING DAY ▶ Shooting clay targets before you hunt is a great way to sharpen skills and practice safe shotgun handling. Clay targets can easily be thrown to mimic actual waterfowl hunting scenarios.

BE RESPECTFUL ▶ Nothing shows respect and true appreciation more than simply showing up on time for your arranged hunt — even better, be early.

ASK WHAT YOU SHOULD BRING ▶ Even though your mentor will provide the bulk of equipment necessary for your hunt, make sure to ask what you should bring on your own. Even if you lack equipment, you can always offer to bring food.

TREAT YOUR MENTOR'S EQUIPMENT WITH CARE ▶ At the end of the hunt, return your mentor's equipment in the same condition you got it.

ASK QUESTIONS ▶ Participate in the total experience. When hunting, ask your mentor why the particular spot was chosen, why the decoys were placed as they were, why different calls are made at different times, and how to identify different waterfowl.

SAY THANK YOU ▶ Always remember that your mentor used his or her valuable time and money to take you hunting. Show your appreciation by sending a thank-you card or placing a phone call. The smallest gestures can have the greatest impact.





STAY ENGAGED

At the conclusion of your hunt, a tidal wave of new information and emotions are probably flowing through your mind. You likely have more questions to ask, perhaps some birds to clean, and equipment to care for. Your learning experience has just begun, so it's important to stay engaged with your mentor. Here are some useful suggestions:

REVIEW THE HUNT ▶ Take time to reflect on your hunt before rushing off. Talk about the highlights, discuss aspects of the hunt that you can build on for next time, and ask questions if you have them. Above all, savor the moment!

TAKE PHOTOS ▶ Capture moments of your hunt — before, during and after. Years down the road, photos will bring back many details of the experience.

GEAR MAINTENANCE ▶ Ask your mentor for guidance on how to properly care for and maintain your waterfowl hunting equipment. Learn how to clean and properly store your gun, waders and decoys.



Bird Cleaning and Care

It's your ethical and legal responsibility to clean and properly care for any birds you bag. Ask your mentor to show you how it's done, but be sure to participate. Hands-on learning is hard to beat! Additional video instruction is available at deltawaterfowl.org.

Cooking

The final phase — cooking — is as important as any other hunting activity. Properly prepared ducks and geese taste great, and wild game dinners are a wonderful celebration of the hunt! Three excellent, simple recipes are listed on the next three pages, and more are available at deltawaterfowl.org/recipes.



Duck Wraps



INGREDIENTS

- Duck or goose breast (sliced open)
- Favorite seasoning
- Sliced bacon, cheese and onion
- Pickled jalapeño peppers (optional)
- Sliced cheese or spreadable cream cheese

TOOLS

- Toothpicks: 2 per bacon wrap
- Charcoal or gas grill
- Tongs
- Paper towels
- Plates and forks

Cut breast meat away from breastbone. Wash breast meat and pat dry. Slice breasts in half. Create a “gap” in each half-breast by slicing open parallel to cutting board. Coat liberally with any seasoning. Marinate if desired; use store bought teriyaki for ease. Place cheese, onion and jalapeño in breast gaps. Wrap each breast-half with bacon and secure with toothpick. Grill over very hot charcoal fire or gas grill until bacon is crisp. Serve immediately.

Duck Kabobs



INGREDIENTS

Duck breast
Marinade (Italian dressing or other)
Pepper, other desired seasonings
Onions and peppers
Pineapple (optional)
BBQ or teriyaki sauce

TOOLS

Charcoal or gas grill
Wood skewers
Tongs
Kabob skewers
Paper towels
Paper plates and forks

Cut meat into one-inch pieces. Marinate (Italian dressing, teriyaki, etc.) if time allows. Put pieces on kabob skewer, alternating meat and veggies or fruit, and cook over medium-hot fire. Grill kabobs on each side until bacon is done. Add barbecue or teriyaki sauce as desired.

Duck Sandwiches



INGREDIENTS

Duck breast (cut into thin slices)
Bacon (diced into small pieces)
Onion
Butter
Hamburger buns
Mayonnaise
Butter or oil
Swiss cheese (optional)
Eggs (optional)

TOOLS

Stove
Spatula
Tongs
Paper towels
Plates and forks
Frying pan

Cut breast meat into thin slices and slice onion. Put pan on grill or stovetop and get piping hot. Melt butter and cook onions thoroughly (or to preference). Set onions aside. Add breast slices to pan and fry until medium-rare. Do not overcook. Fry eggs over easy if desired. Build sandwich by adding mayo, onions, cheese and duck meat to bun. Place egg on top for great breakfast sandwich.

Delta's Top 10 Participant Tips

Cut out this list and keep it handy for a safe and enjoyable experience.

1 SAFETY FIRST

Always maintain control of your firearm. Whether the gun is loaded or unloaded, the muzzle never points at another person.

2 LISTEN TO YOUR MENTOR

Your mentor can teach you from years of experience, and is there to ensure a safe and enjoyable hunt.

3 ASK QUESTIONS

This is your chance to learn everything you've always wanted to know about duck hunting. Mentors love sharing their knowledge.

4 DRESS FOR THE WEATHER

Often, the best hunting is in the worst weather. Check the forecast and bring an appropriate number of layers. It's always easier to take clothing off.

5 SPEAK UP

If you get tired, hungry or thirsty, tell your mentor. He or she wants this to be a great experience for you.

6 TAKE PHOTOS

Hunting is about stories and memories. Don't be rushed. Take the time to capture the experience.

7 BE HELPFUL

One of the best ways to get invited back for another hunt is to help out. If you assist with decoy set ups, clean up empty shells and do whatever else you can, without being asked, you'll be a popular hunting partner.

8 RESPECT LANDOWNERS

Future access on private land depends on treating landowners with respect. Shut any gates, pick up garbage, and go back to say "thank you" after the hunt. It's the very least you can do.

9 RESPECT THE BIRDS

It is a waterfowl hunter's legacy, and responsibility, to appreciate the birds. Work hard to retrieve any bird you bring down, know your ethical shooting range, and above all, eat what you shoot.

10 RELAX AND HAVE FUN

It takes time to become a skilled waterfowler. Ducks are fast and often hard to decoy. Stick with it. It will come with time.

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