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POSITION STATEMENT ON MOURNING DOVE HUNTING IN MICHIGAN - 2025

Michigan Audubon has strongly supported Michigan's protection of the Mourning Dove (*Zenaida macroura*) as a songbird since 1905. Founded in 1904, Michigan Audubon—the state's oldest conservation organization—advocated just one year later for the ban on hunting Mourning Doves in Michigan.

In the early 2000s, a bill to legalize dove hunting in Michigan was overwhelmingly rejected by voters, with more than 1.3 million votes cast against it, representing 69% of the public vote. This decisive outcome reflects Michigan's long-standing public sentiment against dove hunting. Michigan Audubon remains steadfast in its commitment to bird conservation and continues to oppose any effort to remove protections for this native species.

Identification and Environmental Risks: Mourning Doves can be easily misidentified in flight, creating significant risk for many other birds. If classified as a game species, hunting seasons would overlap with fall migration, when hawks, falcons, flickers, and numerous songbirds are on the move. Many species of similar size share habitats and behaviors with Mourning Doves—such as perching on wires or foraging in open fields—increasing the likelihood of accidental shootings of protected birds.

Population and Ecological Role: There is no scientific basis for classifying Mourning Doves as requiring population control. They are not overpopulated, nor do they cause agricultural or property damage. In fact, they are often called “the farmer's friend” for their role in consuming weed seeds and waste grain, helping reduce rodent attraction and contributing positively to Michigan's agricultural ecosystems.

Reproductive and Ethical Concerns: Mourning Dove nesting season overlaps with fall hunting periods, meaning hunting could orphan chicks still dependent on parental care. Early hunting seasons in northern states have resulted in parent birds being shot while feeding late broods. Furthermore, because Mourning Doves often mate for life, hunting one bird can destroy an entire breeding pair. Observations have shown surviving doves mourning or tending to their fallen mates, underscoring the ethical implications of such hunting practices.

Unsuitability as a Game Species: The Mourning Dove is not a practical or responsible game species. The edible meat yield is less than one ounce per bird, providing negligible sustenance. Their frequent perching on phone and power lines also presents serious safety hazards and risks damage to infrastructure.

Environmental Contamination from Ammunition: Dove hunting would contribute to lead contamination in the environment. Because Mourning Doves have erratic flight patterns, hunters typically use five to eight shells per bird, resulting in high concentrations of lead shot left behind. This residue is ingested by doves and other ground-feeding species, and when it enters

waterways, it can poison eagles, loons, and waterfowl. Doves not retrieved after being shot are often scavenged by raptors or mammals, spreading lead toxicity further through the food chain.

Public Enjoyment and Conservation Legacy: The Mourning Dove is one of Michigan's most beloved backyard birds, admired for its gentle demeanor and distinctive cooing song. Michiganders have long enjoyed the beauty and serenity this bird brings to our lives and landscapes.

Conclusion: Michigan Audubon supports the continuation of the Mourning Dove's protected status. Preserving these protections upholds Michigan's legacy of ethical wildlife stewardship, safeguards a cherished native species, and ensures that future generations may continue to enjoy the presence of Mourning Doves in our communities.



Nesting Mourning Dove | Photo Mike Boyce



Mourning Dove | Photo Ken Slade