
THE MOURNING DOVE IN MICHIGAN

SCIENTIFIC NAME: *Zenaida macroura*.
(There are two subspecies of mourning dove that reside in Michigan, *carolinensis* and *marginella*.)

IDENTIFICATION

Male and female mourning doves look similar with grayish-brown backs, buff-colored undersides, black spots on the wings and behind the eye, and white feathers in the tail, which show during flight. Juveniles can be distinguished from adults by light buffing on the tips of the primary feathers, which persist until the first molt. By the age of 3 months, it is difficult for the casual observer to distinguish the difference between young and adult doves.

POPULATION

The mourning dove is one of the most abundant and widely distributed birds in the United States (Fig. 1). The current continent-wide population estimate is over 400 million in the fall migration.



Fig. 1. Breeding and wintering ranges of the mourning dove (adapted from Mirarchi and Baskett 1994).

Mourning doves are abundant in Michigan, especially south of a line from Bay City to Ludington. Conservative population surveys estimate that 4 million birds migrate from Michigan each fall. Michigan currently participates in two national surveys: the Dove Call-count Survey and the Breeding Bird Survey. Both surveys indicate no change in the Michigan dove population over the last 37 years (Dolton and Rau 2003).

HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Mourning doves are highly adaptable and use a variety of habitats including coniferous forests, deciduous forests, and residential, urban, and agricultural landscapes. Habitat needs include trees for nesting and roosting, a food source, and a source of water.

REPRODUCTION

In the Midwest, the mourning dove reproductive cycle begins with egg laying in late April/early May, and continues until fledging ends in early September. Doves build scant nests of twigs and grass within trees or shrubs 10 to 30 feet above ground. In wooded areas, elms and maples are preferred. In open areas, coniferous shelterbelts and windbreaks are preferred.

Mourning doves lay two white eggs per clutch and raise between two and five clutches per year. Both parents take part in incubation and brood-rearing activities. Young doves, or squabs, hatch featherless and grow rapidly, increasing their weight by 14 times within 15 days of age. Young can survive on their own 5 to 9 days after leaving the nest and most leave the nest area within 2 to 3 weeks of fledging. Research studies indicate that nest success is approximately 53 percent in the Eastern Management Unit. See Figure 2 for management unit boundaries.

MORTALITY

The natural mortality rate for mourning doves is high; approximately 6 out of 10 birds do not survive from one year to the next. Research indicates that mourning dove mortality is caused by a variety of factors including nesting failure, predators, disease, accidents, hunting, and weather extremes, which is four to five times higher than hunting mortality.

FOOD HABITS

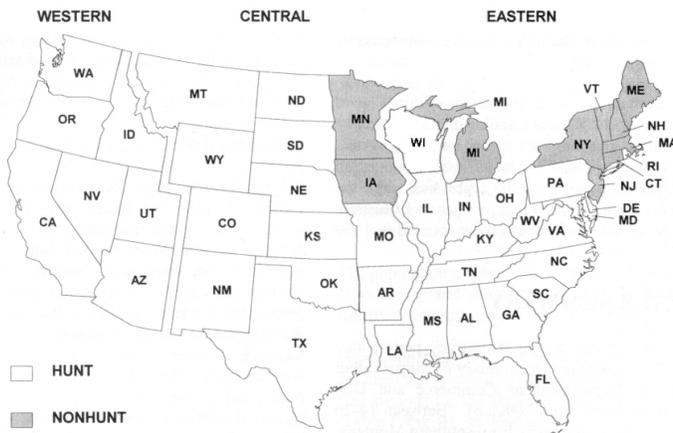
Ninety-nine percent of the mourning dove diet is comprised of weed seeds and grains. Preferred weed seeds include pigweed, foxtails, wild sunflower, and ragweed. Preferred grains include corn, sorghum, and millet. Insects make up a very small proportion of the dove diet. Doves travel an average of two to eight miles for food.

MIGRATION PATTERNS

Doves that breed in Michigan migrate to wintering grounds in Texas, Louisiana, and Mississippi or to wintering grounds in Alabama, Georgia, and Florida. Mourning doves that breed in other states and Canada migrate through Michigan. Some of these doves winter in Michigan and the remainder migrate to more southerly wintering areas.

STATUS

At the national level, the mourning dove is a migratory bird protected under the Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act. This Act allows managed hunting, based upon dove population surveys. States are responsible for establishing their own hunting seasons within the Federal framework. Currently states in the Eastern Management Unit may set seasons between September 1 and January 15 and they may run up to 70 hunting days with a daily limit of 12 doves or up to 60 hunting days with a daily limit of 15 doves.



Mourning doves are currently hunted in 40 states (Fig. 2). In the Midwest, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, and all states south have mourning dove hunting seasons. Nationwide, approximately 22.7 million doves are harvested annually. Mourning doves are not hunted in Michigan as determined by 2006 Michigan Ballot Proposal 3.

Fig. 2. Mourning dove management units with hunting and nonhunting states.

ADDITIONAL READING

Ecology and management of the mourning dove. Baskett, T.S., M. W. Sayre, R. E. Tomlinson, and R. E. Mirarchi, Editors. 1993. Stackpole Books. Harrisburg, PA.

Mourning dove population status, 2003. Dolton, D.D., and R.D. Rau. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Laurel, MD.

Mourning dove. *In* The birds of North America, No. 117. A. Poole and F. Gill, Editors. Philadelphia: The Academy of Natural Sciences; Washington, D.C.: The American Ornithologist's Union.