

## STANDARDIZATION OF DUCK SEASONS IN SOUTH-WESTERN AUSTRALIA

A REPORT TO W.A.W.A. BIRD COMMITTEE

JULY 1979

1. SEASON SPECIFICATIONS

Following the April 1979 meeting of W.A.W.A. Bird Committee, informal discussions were held with Mr R.C. Burking, Research Co-ordinator of the W.A. Field and Game Association, concerning proposals to "standardize" duck-season specifications. It was suggested to Mr Burking that, in future, seasons might be determined on the following basis. The specifications were not put forward as rigid recommendations, rather as a basis for discussion. They were as follows:

	FULL SEASON	RESTRICTED SEASON	NO SEASON
OPENING DATE	2nd weekend in January	2nd weekend in January	-
OPENING DAY	Saturday	Sunday	-
OPENING TIME	6.00 PM	6.00 AM	-
SEASON LENGTH	2 months (approx)	4 weeks	
BAG LIMIT	10 birds of any game species	5 birds of any game species	-

It was also suggested that, during years of "No Seasons", the taking of selected species (e.g. Mountain Duck or Wood Duck) might be permitted on private property only. However the species composition of bags for Full and Restricted Seasons would not be split. A full explanation of these recommendations is attached (Appendix A).

The determination of seasons (i.e. whether the season would be "Full", "Restricted" or "Nil") would continue to be based on an assessment of rainfall pattern, wetland condition and waterfowl numbers and breeding. While the assessment of bird numbers and breeding success has always been, and will continue to be, a fairly subjective process, assessment of wetland condition - the primary factor affecting breeding activity and success - will become an objective process by mid-1980, following completion of the Department's wetland depth-gauging programme.

Mr Burking pursued these proposals with the Executive and members of the W.A. Field and Game Association and the Association presented a written submission to the Department at a meeting on 25th June. Copies of the submission and a covering letter indicating the unanimity of the Executive's view are attached (Appendix B).

The Association's submission on season specifications differs from the proposals outlined above in only two respects. The Association proposes that season lengths be 10 weeks for a Full Season and 5 weeks for a Restricted Season instead of 8 weeks and 4 weeks respectively.

The proposal for a 10 week Full Season is considered to be biologically acceptable and is therefore supported. It is recommended, however, that Restricted Seasons be confined to 4 weeks in order to restrict the "take" to a minimum.

In its submission, the Association also made suggestions on the "interpretation" of seasons. In essence the Association urges the annual collection of objective data on wetland condition (principally water depth, area and salinity), and on waterfowl "useability", to form the basis of a "Rating" system. The Association believes that, ultimately, it should be possible to define Normal, Restricted and Nil Seasons in terms of "Rating" values. "In the short term however....," the Association considers that "...the traditional methods of rainfall and bird populations assessment continue but related to the complex system. As the programme of wetland complex data acquisition expands..." (the Department's wetland depth-gauging programme referred to above) "...it should be possible to introduce a form of the scheme outlined" (see page 3 of Field and Game Association's submission).

## 2. CARCASS IDENTIFICATION

Problems of carcass identification were also discussed with the Field and Game Association's Research Coordinator. It was proposed that a regulation similar to the following would be introduced to ensure that carcasses may be positively identified to species:

- (1) Subject to subsection (2), no person shall possess or transport a duck unless at least one fully-feathered wing is attached to the bird.
- (2) The wing and plumage thereon may be removed from a duck
  - (a) when the bird is prepared for immediate cooking,
  - (b) after the bird is taken to the residence of its owner for preservation."

3/...

Adherence to this regulation would permit Wildlife Officers carrying out bag checks to positively identify all duck carcasses. In the past, Wildlife Officers have frequently been unable to check on some shooters' bags before the birds have been plucked, gutted, and had head, wings and feet removed. Species identification is then impossible for all practical purposes.

At the June 25 meeting Field and Game representatives indicated verbally that the Association supports the above proposal.

J.A.K. LANE  
Research Officer

July, 1979.

EXPLANATION OF RECOMMENDED DUCK-SEASON SPECIFICATIONS1. OPENING DATE:

It is recommended that, when declared, both Full and Restricted Seasons commence each year on the Second Weekend of January. This date is considered to be a suitable compromise between two competing factors:

- i) the need to ensure that a shooting season does not commence until breeding is completed, and
- ii) the desirability of commencing a shooting season as early as possible in summer to ensure that adequate water area is available for birds to seek refuge from hunters.

Though some annual variation in timing of breeding undoubtedly occurs, this variation is not considered to be sufficiently large or important to warrant annual adjustments to the opening date. Furthermore, variations in timing from one year to the next tend to be offset by variations in timing from one area of the south-west to another. Thus, there will always be some areas where breeding continues into late January, and other areas where breeding ceases by early December.

The phase of the moon, and some shooters' (a small minority) preference for night-shooting, are not considered to be factors of over-riding importance in determining the opening date of a season. Recommended opening dates and January moon-phases for years 1980 to 1990 are provided in Table 1. Full Moon and opening weekend coincide in one year only - 1982.

Opening dates in other states of Australia are not varied from year to year.

2. OPENING DAY:

It is recommended that Full Seasons commence on the Saturday of the second weekend in January. Shooters are generally in favour of a Saturday opening as this permits two days shooting on the opening weekend. There appear to be no sound biological or social reasons why a Saturday opening should not be adopted for Full Seasons.

A Sunday opening is recommended for Restricted Seasons in order to reduce the number of ducks taken on opening weekend. This is the sole justification. Though no data are available, it is generally believed that a substantial proportion of shooters shoot on opening weekend only. Halving the duration of the opening weekend is therefore considered to be an effective and acceptable method of significantly reducing the overall kill for the season.

In all other states of Australia, duck seasons open each year on a Saturday.

### 3. OPENING TIME:

It is recommended that Full Seasons open at 6.00 PM on the Saturday. Opening at this time enables all shooters to reach the shooting-site of their choice for the season-opening (many shooters travel hundreds of kilometres to reach their favourite site). A 6.00 PM opening also provides approximately 1 hour to 1½ hours of shooting before sunset (See Table 2 for sunrise and sunset times for selected localities in the South-West and Eucla Land Divisions), giving shooters adequate opportunity to fill their bags before nightfall.

A 6.00 AM opening is recommended for Restricted Seasons. Opening at this time on the Sunday provides adequate opportunity for all shooters to reach the site of their choice, take their "bag", and return to their places of origin by Sunday evening. A 6.00 AM opening (as opposed to an earlier opening time) also ensures that there is sufficient light for species recognition.

The one important biological factor to be considered in determining opening times is heat-stress. Midday temperatures in the south-west of W.A. in January frequently exceed 35°C. For this reason opening times have always been early morning or late afternoon. It is recommended that this policy continue.

Opening times and days for other states of Australia are as follows: NSW, SA, TAS - one hour before sunrise Saturday; VIC - 7 AM Saturday; QLD - midnight Friday (0001 hrs Saturday).

### 4. SEASON LENGTH:

It is recommended that a Full Season be of approximately 2 months duration. Seasons would thereby close before the end of March (see Table 1). Seasons of this length would provide ample opportunity for shooters to pursue their sport whilst ensuring that shooting ceases prior to wetlands reaching their extreme condition of late autumn, and well before pairing of ducks for the following breeding season.

It is recommended that Restricted Seasons be of 4 weeks (4½ weekends) duration. It is considered that a reduction in season length from 2 months to 4 weeks will assist in reducing the number of ducks taken in a season, whilst still providing adequate opportunity (considering the circumstances under which a Restricted Season would be declared) for shooters to pursue their sport and to justify the cost of a license. (4½ weekends x 10 ducks/weekend = 45 ducks; 29 days x 5 ducks/day = 145 ducks).

It should be noted that, in practice, halving the length of the season is most unlikely, in itself, to halve the number of ducks taken in a season, since shooters tend to modify the intensity of their shooting activities according to the time available. Thus, in an 8-week season a shooter might shoot every second weekend whereas in a 4-week season he may decide to shoot every weekend. Though no data are available, it is probable that a reduction in season length from 8 weeks to 4 would, in itself, reduce the "take" by no more than 25%.

Season length in W.A. has varied between 3 weeks and 16 weeks since 1967. Seasons in the eastern states are 9-10 weeks duration each year, except for Queensland which has seasons of 12 weeks duration.

#### 5. BAG LIMIT:

It is recommended that the Bag Limit in a Full Season be 10 birds of any game species. This is considered to be a reasonable limit during average or better-than-average years, from both the biological and social viewpoints. Opening Day bag-check data collected since 1973 indicate that almost 90% of shooters are either unable or unwilling to fill their bags in seasons with 10 bird limits. The actual percentages of shooters sampled who took 9 or less birds on Opening Day in 1973-74, 1974-75 and 1975-76 were 89%, 86% and 87% respectively.

Bag limits for other states of Australia are as follows: VIC, NSW - 20 birds on opening day (species limit of 10 birds in Victoria), 10 birds any other day; SA, QLD. - 12 birds per day; TAS - 10 birds per day (of which, no more than 2 shall be Mountain Duck). These limits are not varied from year to year.

It is recommended that the Bag Limit in a Restricted Season be 5 birds of any game species. Past experience suggests that bag limits of 4 or less birds are likely to be considered unreasonable by a substantial proportion of shooters and are therefore likely to be openly flouted (see Appendix C). A minimum bag limit of 5 birds is acceptable to the W.A. Field and Game Association, (Appendix B), and is therefore likely to be accepted, respected and adhered to by a substantial majority of shooters.

Interestingly, bag-check data indicates that a majority of shooters are unable or unwilling to take more than 5 birds on opening day. The percentages of shooters taking bags of 5 birds or less on opening days of 1973-74, 1974-75, 1975-76 and 1976-77 seasons were 73%, 61%, 67% and 71% respectively.

Opening day bag check data can also be used to determine the theoretical reductions in "take" which would have resulted had the bag-limit for the above seasons been reduced from 10 to 5 birds. Those reductions are as follows: 1973-74 : 25%, 1974-75 : 27% and 1975-76 : 26%.

Split-Bags (e.g. 10 birds of which at least 7 shall be Mountain Duck) are generally unpopular with shooters. They tend to be seen as bags of 10, with (in this case) 7 "good" birds taken out, rather than as bags of 3 "good birds", with 7 Mountain Duck "thrown in". The Executive of the W.A. Field and Game Association has considered the matter at length and has decided not to support the splitting of bags. Importantly, the Executive has also decided not to seek additional Mountain Duck over and above the recommended "any game species" bags of 10 birds and 5 birds. In view of the above, and considering the fact that there is no compelling biological reason to place additional shooting pressure on the Mountain Duck (or any other species), it is recommended that, in future, bags not be split.

J.A.K. LANE  
Research Officer

July, 1979.

TABLE 1

	OPENING DATE (Second weekend in January)	JANUARY MOON PHASES		CLOSING DATE (Sunday)	
		Full	New	4-week Season	8-week Season
1980	January 12 or 13	Jan 2	Jan 18	Feb 10	Mar 9
1981	January 10 or 11	Jan 20	Jan 6	Feb 8	Mar 8
1982	January 9 or 10	Jan 10	Jan 25	Feb 7	Mar 7
1983	Jan 8 or 9	Jan 29	Jan 14	Feb 6	Mar 6
1984	Jan 7 or 8	Jan 18	Jan 3	Feb 5	Mar 4
1985	Jan 12 or 13	Jan 7	Jan 21	Feb 10	Mar 10
1986	Jan 11 or 12	Jan 26	Jan 10	Feb 9	Mar 9
1987	Jan 10 or 11	Jan 15	Jan 29	Feb 8	Mar 8
1988	Jan 9 or 10	Jan 4	Jan 19	Feb 7	Mar 6
1989	Jan 7 or 8	Jan 22	Jan 8	Feb 5	Mar 5
1990	Jan 13 or 14	Jan 11	Jan 27	Feb 11	Mar 11

TABLE 1: Opening Dates, Closing Dates and Moon Data of 4-week and 8-week Duck Seasons commencing second weekend in January 1980-1990. (Sunday Opening - 4-week Seasons; Saturday Opening - 8-week Seasons).

Based on data supplied by Perth Observatory.



GERALDTON			MERREDIN			NORSEMAN		
	Rise	Set		Rise	Set		Rise	Set
Jan 10	5:32	19:24	Jan 10	5:11	19:15	Jan 10	4:55	19:03
20	5:40	19:22	20	5:20	19:13	20	5:04	19:01
30	5:49	19:18	30	5:29	19:09	30	5:14	18:56
Feb 10	5:58	19:12	Feb 10	5:39	19:01	Feb 10	5:24	18:48
20	6:06	19:03	20	5:48	18:52	20	5:33	18:38
Mar 1	6:12	18:53	Mar 1	5:56	18:41	Mar 1	5:41	18:27
10	6:18	18:43	10	6:02	18:30	10	5:48	18:16
PERTH			WAGIN			ESPERANCE		
	Rise	Set		Rise	Set		Rise	Set
Jan 10	5:20	19:26	Jan 10	5:10	19:23	Jan 10	4:51	19:06
20	5:29	19:24	20	5:20	19:21	20	5:00	19:04
30	5:38	19:19	30	5:29	19:17	30	5:10	18:59
Feb 10	5:48	19:11	Feb 10	5:40	19:08	Feb 10	5:21	18:50
20	5:57	19:02	20	5:49	18:58	20	5:30	18:40
Mar 1	6:05	18:51	Mar 1	5:58	18:46	Mar 1	5:39	18:28
10	6:12	18:40	10	6:05	18:34	10	5:47	18:16
AUGUSTA			ALBANY			EUCLA		
	Rise	Set		Rise	Set		Rise	Set
Jan 10	5:17	19:34	Jan 10	5:04	19:25	Jan 10	4:28	18:33
20	5:26	19:32	20	5:14	19:23	20	4:37	18:31
30	5:36	19:26	30	5:24	19:18	30	4:46	18:27
Feb 10	5:47	19:18	Feb 10	5:35	19:08	Feb 10	4:56	18:19
20	5:57	19:07	20	5:45	18:57	20	5:05	18:09
Mar 1	6:06	18:55	Mar 1	5:54	18:45	Mar 1	5:13	17:58
10	6:13	18:43	10	6:02	18:33	10	5:20	17:47

TABLE 2: Sunrise and sunset times for selected localities in the South-West and Eucla Land Divisions - January to March 1980. Based on data supplied by Perth Observatory.



THE WEST AUSTRALIAN APPENDIX B  
FIELD & GAME ASSOCIATION (Inc.)

G.P.O. BOX T171B, PERTH 6001  
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

MEMBERSHIPS AND AFFILIATIONS:

FIELD & GAME FEDERATION OF AUSTRALIA  
JOINT SHOOTING FOUNDATION OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA  
AUSTRALIAN CONSERVATION FOUNDATION  
CONSERVATION COUNCIL OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA  
WESTERN AUSTRALIAN CLAY TARGET ASSOCIATION  
WILDFOWLERS ASSOCIATION OF GREAT BRITAIN & IRELAND

June 25, 1979

Mr J. Lane B.Sc  
Research Officer  
WA Wildlife Research Centre  
Department of Fisheries & Fauna  
108 Adelaide Terrace  
PERTH 6000

Dear Sir,

Re: PROPOSALS FOR "STANDARDISATION OF DUCK SEASONS"

Further to your original request and other discussions by phone, I am pleased to advise that a set of proposals have been submitted by this Association in relation to the above.

You will note that the submission is in two sections (a) Interpretation of what type of season and (b) the suggestions for the two types of seasons i.e., normal and restricted.

It was felt that extending the season lengths by two weeks for the Normal, and one week for the Restricted, that the whole idea of standardisation could be accepted by the "shooter" (not necessarily Field and Game Association members).

The move towards some form of standardisation was welcomed by a large proportion of members and the executive committee of the Field and Game Association endorsed the proposals to the man. However lengthy discussion on season lengths decided on the proposals as set out in Section B of the submission.

This Association is grateful that the opportunity was extended to us to submit our ideas on the subject, and hope that when you present your ideas to the WAWA Bird Committee, that acceptance of the scheme will become a reality and that the annual "bun fight" will be reduced to a useful and informative discussion.

Yours faithfully

(H.C. Burking)  
RESEARCH CO-ORDINATOR

WEST AUSTRALIAN FIELD & GAME ASSOCIATION (INC)



PROPOSALS TO THE WEST AUSTRALIAN DEPARTMENT  
OF FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE

FOR

"THE STANDARDISATION OF OPEN DUCK SEASONS IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA"

SECTION A. INTERPRETATION OF SEASONS

SECTION B. SEASON RECOMMENDATIONS

COMPILED BY

R.C. BURKING, B.K. KNEEBONE AND D. WALKER  
RESEARCH SECTION

## WA FIELD AND GAME ASSOCIATION (INC)

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE STANDARDISATION OF OPEN DUCK SEASONS

#### SECTION A. INTERPRETATION OF SEASONS

Previous determinations of wetland water levels and waterfowl populations leading to the declaration of open duck seasons in Western Australia have been, by the very nature of the subject and its inherent extremes, subjective for the most part.

With the level of current knowledge of wetlands and waterfowl behaviour patterns there are severe limitations as to how objective such determinations can be but it may be possible to at least reduce the level of subjectivity by adopting a more systematic approach in assessing the host of variables.

The suggested approach involves the assessment of the recognised wetland complexes as single components of the total significant wetland areas in the South West.

In broad terms the object is to evaluate each wetland complex and establish its "Rating". The rating is then related to an "Index" which represents the benchmark, adopted for a common year. The ratio of the sum of total "ratings" to the sum of total "Indices" is then an indicator as to the condition of wetlands and waterfowl populations at that particular time of the year. When related to a table of Open Season "categories" the indicator then enables an Open Season to be adopted which will most accurately reflect the actual conditions prevailing.

The use of meteorological districts to assist in determining Open Seasons is seen as being less representative than the scheme as broadly outlined above. In the larger M.D.'s, rainfall figures may be a highly variable factor and the resulting generalisations in determining departures from normal are not as representative as they perhaps could be.

To relieve such generalisation it is seen essential to adopt as a basis for all future considerations, the wetland complex system.

The advantages of the complex system is further emphasised when one considers that future wetland studies will tend to polarise themselves around complexes as will data acquisition on many aspects of water levels, water quality and waterfowl distribution.

## SCHEME IMPLEMENTATION

In the determination of Open Seasons the scheme proposed should, in order to develop a rating, consider many factors for each complex. For most complexes, the basic data will not be immediately available but can be obtained over a period of time. Necessary data may be as follows:

Number of wetlands in complex

Total area of wetlands in complex

Maximum and minimum water depths

Evaporation rate

Total water area at a given depth (at, say, November 31)

"Useability" factor by waterfowl ("Waterfowl Days")

Salinity factors

etc.

Depth gauges would be of great value in the accurate determination of water levels if strategically sited. The ultimate aim should be to locate at least one in each wetland of each complex. The combination then of gauge readings and rainfall should then allow a reliable quantification.

To develop a complex "rating", a numerical system of point allocation is suggested for each contributing variable. This can not effectively be applied unless one year is selected as the benchmark against which all point allocations rely.

A weighting factor should also be introduced to account for the increase in the evaporation rate eastwards i.e. the factor when applied should work inversely to reduce the rating of complexes as one moves from the west coast inland.

The derivation of the final "rating" figure will thus be the result of a somewhat statistical exercise.

Once the rating on numerical value for each complex has been determined, the values are totalled as are the benchmark values for each complex. The two totals are then related to a Table representing Normal, Restricted or No Season. The larger the total complex rating the more "Normal" the season i.e.

Total Index or Sum of Benchmark Ratings  
= 15 000 (say)

<u>Season Table</u>	<u>Total Complex Ratings</u>
Normal	$\geq$ 10 500
Restricted	7 500 to 10 500
Nil	$<$ 7 500

Thus a year giving a total complex rating of 9000 is declared to be a "Restricted Season".

As has been previously suggested, surveys should be carried out at the time of maximum stress for wetlands and waterfowl (end of summer) to assess the effectiveness of each season evaluation and adjustments made to Complex Ratings if evidence dictates.

#### EXISTING COMPLEX SYSTEM

It is observed that some adjustments are required to differentiate some of the larger wetland complexes to assist in relieving some inherent generalisations that may otherwise take place.

The scheme briefly and broadly outlined in the preceding pages would also benefit by dividing the southern and western coastal complexes from all others not adjacent to the coastal regions in determining both benchmark indices and complex ratings. This is necessary as a variety of factors would otherwise provide a positive bias to the total complex ratings.

It is thus envisaged that two sets of benchmark indices and complex ratings would be employed to remove the weighting element that the coastal complexes would provide. It may then be apparent that, in the final allocation of "points" in the "Season Table" that a form of weighting be introduced to offset the perennial effect of better wetland conditions prevailing on the coastal complexes.

In the short term however, it is considered that the traditional methods of rainfall and bird populations assessment continue but related to the complex system.

As the program of wetland complex data acquisition expands it should be possible to introduce a form of the scheme outlined.

SECTION B. SEASONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Normal Season

Opening : 2nd weekend January  
Time : 6 pm Saturday

Duration : 10 weeks

Bag Limit : 10 birds - composition of any  
of game species

Restricted Season

Opening : 2nd weekend January  
Time : 6 am Sunday

Duration : 5 weeks

Bag Limit : 5 birds - any game species

GENERAL NOTES:

1. Opening date is fixed except exceptional conditions causing
  - (a) late breeding
  - (b) unseasonal rain prior to season causing major dispersal of birds.
2. Option of bag limit extension on Mountain D or Wood D on private and public wetlands
3. Split bag limits not recommended for M.D. or W.D.
  - (a) During season localities high in MD/WD populations will naturally have higher bags of MD/WD thus providing form of culling in areas most requiring.
  - (b) Bag limits for MD/WD during any season extension cannot be expected to be relatively high due to wariness of these birds developed during the season proper
4. Any alteration to 2nd week January opening (apart from exceptional circumstances) will only be  $\pm$  one week because all other reasons (social etc) are not worth considering.
5. Former four month season was held when less consideration was given to birds, less pressure from all other environmental factors existed and less was known about all the contributing factors required for a season to be evaluated.
6. If any season is granted it should be reasonable for the shooter i.e. he is reasonably satisfied - otherwise illegalities will occur and eventually lead to further restrictions on the shooter.



# DUCKS and the W.A. OPEN

By E. L. Rose

The Game Department gave the boys in the west an early morning start on duck season opening day — then asked them not to shoot while it was dark!

OFFICIALLY, the opening time and date for the West Australian Duck Season was one o'clock AM Sunday the fourteenth of January, 1979. The closure: February the eleventh subject to review, depending on rains.

The ridiculous opening hour was announced well in advance of the duck season and response from duck hunters everywhere in the State was unanimous. Utter dismay! Surely the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife weren't serious? Unfortunately, we soon discovered that they were.

Mr Kneebone, of the W.A. Field and Game Association, appealed against the incredible set time, but after a meeting of those in command at the Department, one AM still stood as official opening time. We all had to live with it.

With the purchase of one's duck licence, the Department supplied a booklet outlining the regulations and various items of interest.

On page seventeen it was mentioned that night shooting was generally discouraged. Makes you begin to worry a trifle regarding the intelligence of those in charge of regulating our hunting!

Our party was extremely fortunate in that we shot over a lake in the company of many other sensible people.

It came about that, on the Saturday night a ranger visited each and every camp site. Kingsley Miller did not have to use much persuasion to organise every shooter into conforming to an agreeable 4.30-5.00 open. Very decent bloke Kingsley; all the duck shooters on our particular lake, I'm sure, are most grateful for

Perth duck shooter, George D'Amico. That strange look on his face, incidently, is a smile.

his assistance.

Another meritorious decision on behalf of the Fisheries and Wildlife Department was the bag limit. The limit this year was ten birds on opening day. Now comes the good part — wait for it — seven of the ten had to be mountain ducks!

I have since made a number of phone calls to duck hunters who shot over other lakes throughout the State and the majority confirmed that very few "mounties" were seen on the day. The mountain ducks that did show up cruised at an altitude of around

"8000" feet. This may have been an exaggeration but you can get the message.

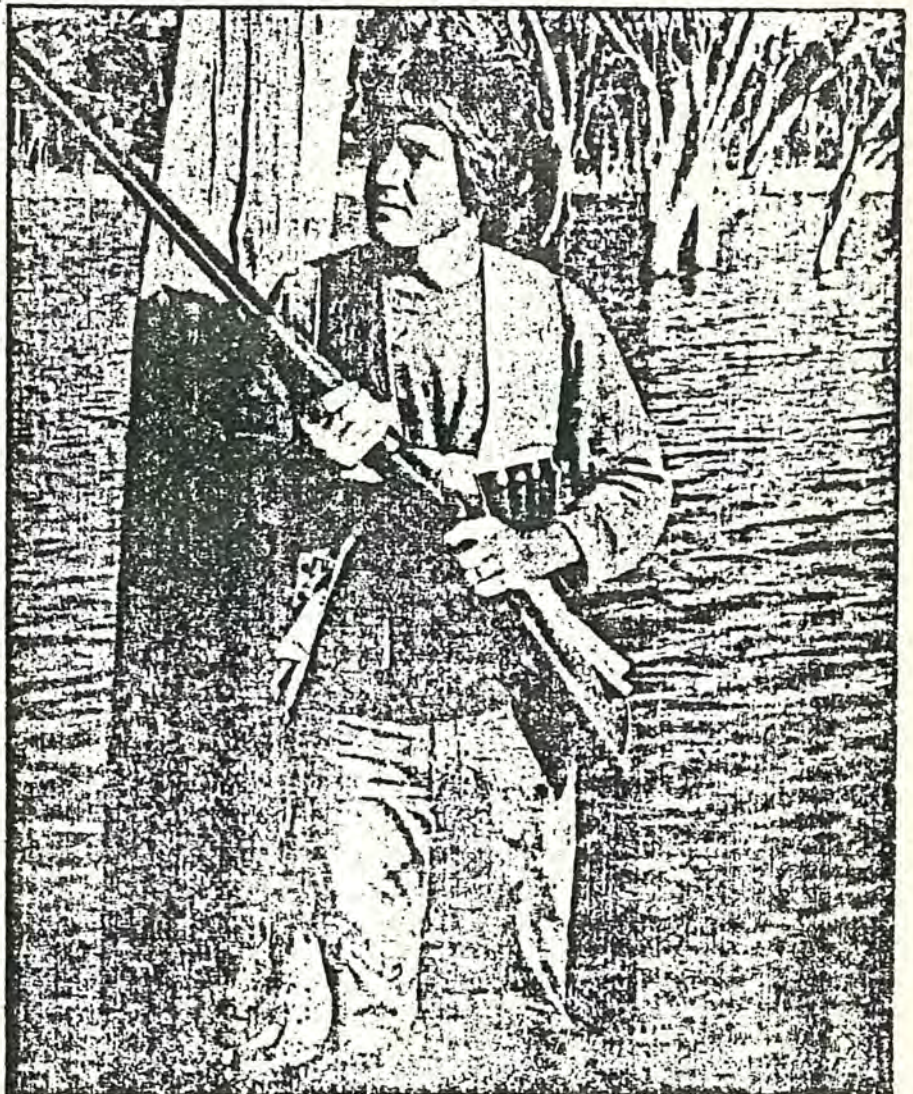
One reliable source of information tells me that one lake boasted a hoard of thirteen mountain ducks. One shooter miraculously clobbered one at an unheard of height.

Naturally, if the hunters had held out and waited for "mounties" to fill the bag they would more than likely still be at the lake, looking skyward. Commonsense prevailed, of course, and I understand the rules were bent a little in order to take home a reasonable bag of ducks.

On our chosen lake, the same applied. No hunter is going to pass up good eating birds, just to make up the correct number on a regulation like the one brought in for this year.

The overall feeling among duck hunters in W.A. this season is that of no confidence whatsoever in the

Typical scene when shooting WA ducks. Most areas lack the undergrowth of the eastern States. Rob Blakely keeps a watchful eye skyward.



powers that be. I for one, can't blame them.

All the obstructions from the Fisheries and Wildlife were far from mind as our group packed the three vehicles and started the four-hour drive to the public lake.

The long haul on the bitumen proved uneventful, but the sand track in to the actual lake got the best of the two conventional cars, and my four-wheel drive had to tow the offenders through.

Big flocks of ducks rose from the water as we drove the perimeter further around to the intended campsite. The outlook was promising to say the least. Plenty of water and plenty of ducks.

After setting up camp within one hundred metres of the water, my companions checked out suitable areas to shoot from the following morning. Most of the afternoon was spent lounging around camp watching flights of ducks pass safely overhead. On sundown, the passes became more frequent, as did the signs of frustration on the faces of my friends.

More vehicles arrived, laden with hunters and equipment, and they too began setting up their camps.

After dark, the ranger, Kingsley Miller arrived as I mentioned earlier and asked all those participating for their Duck Shooters' licence. When he had taken all the names and numbers he stayed for some time just talking.

After he had gone, I made the first move to hit the sack. All my gear was in readiness for the following day, and sleep came easily, so too did the dreams of hooligans in speed boats and two kilometres high.

At two forty-five nature called, so I slipped out of bed into the cold, damp air. Unusual for this time of the year. The bright full moon made the hour seem later, but we still had a long wait for first light.

Once out of bed, I couldn't help but dress and start the primus for a cuppa. The others woke and we then proceeded to make coffee to clear our heads.

Our party consisted of eight Perth hooters; all eager to have their first rack at ducks in 1979. John Baker (Browning semi-auto), Joe and Gabriel Galea (Beretta semi-autos), Dave Healey (Breda semi-auto), Ray Jagor and Harry and George Lamico (an assortment of side by side doubles). I was using my newly-acquired Miroku under and over.

At about four thirty all but John Baker and myself moved off into

darkness, heading for their pre-arranged positions.

John preferred to wait longer, suggesting that daylight was further away than most realised. At four thirty, the strain overcame us both, and so we headed up the track towards the water. The full moon created an eerie appearance above us, and a foggy mist suddenly rolled in from the east as we reached the corner of the lake and began wading across a narrow channel.

The first muffled "boom" broke the silence; the shot coming from somewhere close by. This was the signal for the remaining hunters, stationed in and out of the water around the lake, to officially open the 1979 W.A. Duck Season.

My friend and I were caught half way across the channel, up to our backsides in water. We cursed the fog as ducks zipped past in a frenzy of panic.

Hastily, we sought positions on dry land a few metres from another shooter whom we had met the previous day. Ducks flashed past from all directions. After quite a few shots, John downed a black duck. It was still not yet light enough for good shooting, and the fog made sighting on a fast moving duck very difficult. Our companion nearby was warming his gun and already had three or four birds to his credit.

Two "mounties" flew over heading for open water; but I managed to get away a quick shot after them. And,

The end result of a sweet shot. Note the absence of cover in the background, as Rob Blakely recovers his prize.



Attempting a shot at a fast moving bird.

like a spluttering fighter plane, one bird faltered and began a slow glide to the dark water further out.

My elation turned to despair when, after having reached the area up to my chest in water, I still could not find the downed bird.

Stumbling back to the water's edge, I heard wings beating above as two teal zoomed out of the fog through the trees on my left. I wrenched off a shot and was amazed to see one plummet into the water, a mere three metres from the edge. At last! I had one in the bag.

Shotguns "boomed" continuously around the lake. Back under a tree after picking up my first duck, I joined John and resumed our shooting. We shot at many speeding birds during the minutes that followed, missing them all. We agreed that the fog and opening day nerves, combined to give us an excuse.

The, I saw two black duck heading our way through the tree tops. As luck would have it, they were due to cross an open patch of sky to my left. I eased the Miroku to my shoulder and followed their flight through the last few trees and, as they burst out into the clear, I was ready for them.

My gun roared and one duck folded and bounced twice as it

crashed to the water in the channel. John swore in disbelief as I ran to collect.

My friend and I missed several more birds before I nailed another with a fast, long shot. Unfortunately, John had started very badly. His Browning semi-auto had so far only brought down one duck. He was getting mighty frustrated and suggested that we move over to a smaller lake, two hundred metres to the west. I reluctantly agreed, thinking that things were going quite well to that stage; for me anyway.

We stood knee-deep in water, thirty metres from the shore of the small lake. It was here that the action really began to move. Ducks fell regularly to both our guns in the hour that followed.

This particular lake appeared to be duck hunter's dream. The water was clean and reasonably shallow for some distance towards the centre. Hundreds of standing, dead trees can be used for cover for the hunters.

I downed a teal with my last shot for the morning and turned to watch my mate drop three ducks with four shots. It seemed to be raining ducks. We both had full bags by this time, and so agreed that then was an opportune finale.

It was close on seven o'clock. We had been shooting for two hours. The fog had lifted and already the sun was making its presence felt.

Plenty of firepower here. Back row, from left: Joe Galea, "Goffer", John Baker. Front row: George D'amico, "Gabby" Galea, Rob Blakely.



Top  
Author's father, Clarry Rose. Proof that you don't need a high-priced shotgun to fill the bag. The ducks in his hand fell to a Balkal single barrel gun.



Top Right  
Author with a decent feed. The gun is a Model 700 Miroku under and over. Reloads used were a combination of 24gns Nobel's 62, IMI primers and wads, and 1 1/8 oz of number 6 shot.



Shooting continued elsewhere, but John and I headed back to camp to await the arrival of the others.

At around eight o'clock most of the guns had gone quiet, and it was then that our companions started drifting back into camp. The bulldust came thick and fast during the group task of plucking and cleaning the ducks.

Reports from other camps on the lake showed a wide range of success, all over. Few mountain ducks were shot, although I would be interested to find out how the hunter on the other end of our lake fared on those high-flying birds. He was obviously using a 10 gauge, or something similar.

Later that week, back in Perth, I rang a few people to check on how shooters, statewide, had managed on opening day. Generally, hunters were successful in bagging a reasonable feed. However, I did hear a report of one man who drove to the Narrogin area in the south west of the State and failed to find any water worth shooting over. This, I should imagine, was a fairly isolated case.

For us, the Open turned out to be more than any of our party could have hoped for. I certainly know where I'm going for next year's Opening Day.