

AMERICAN BLACK DUCK

CHANGES IN HUNTING REGULATIONS 2017-18

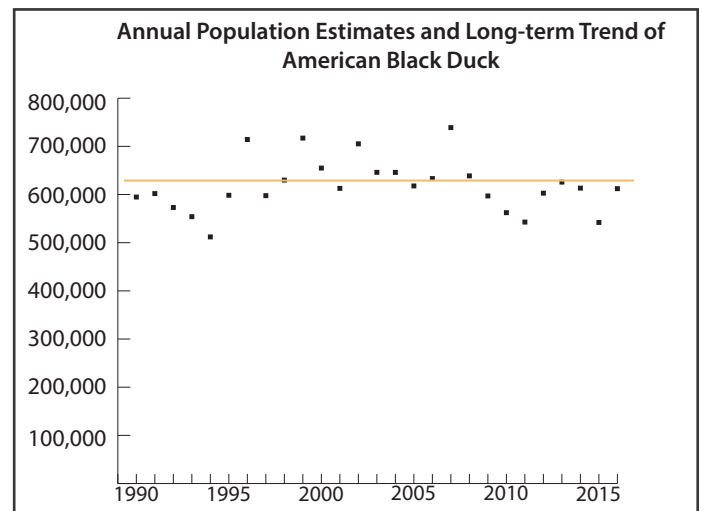
After more than 30 years of 1-bird daily bag limits for black ducks, duck hunters in the U.S. will have an opportunity for a 2-black duck daily bag limit in 2017. Why the change after all these years? Three developments led to this shift.



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American black duck.

- 1 Both eastern Canada and eastern U.S. have seen the number of duck hunters decline since the 1980s, as well as the harvest of black ducks. Since the late 1990s, the combined black duck harvest in the two countries has dropped from more than 300,000 birds per year to less than 200,000. However, during the same time span the black duck population size has been stable.
- 2 Wildlife managers have much better biological information on black ducks than they had during the first 20 years of restrictive black duck bag limits. Surveys of the breeding black duck population have been conducted annually in eastern Canada and northeastern U.S. since the 1990s, long enough to provide reliable information on the population trend and year-to-year fluctuations. The most up-to-date survey results indicate that the population is currently stable. In addition, an ongoing black duck banding program, coupled with band reporting from hunters, has provided annual estimates of harvest and survival rates. This information has enabled managers to evaluate the effect of harvest on survival rates of black ducks and, more generally, examine how harvest affects their population.
- 3 The much-improved biological data now available due to these on-going monitoring programs has enabled U.S. and Canadian biologists to construct a black duck population model that is now the basis for an International Black Duck Harvest Strategy. The Harvest Strategy, adopted in 2012, prescribes annual black duck hunting regulations in the two countries. The three objectives of the Harvest Strategy are: (1) Maintain a sustainable black duck population; (2) Maintain a robust black duck hunting tradition; and (3) Maintain the historical and relatively equal proportion of the black duck harvest between Canada and the U.S.



The yellow line shows the relatively stable population estimates of black ducks over a 26 year period.

These developments allowed U.S. and Canadian biologists to gain better insight into one of the most debated questions in waterfowl management over the past half century: “What effect does hunting have on the population?” If annual survival rates are lower in years when harvest rates are high, and increase when harvest rates decline, then this would suggest that harvest has a negative effect on annual survival and to some extent

the population size. On the

other hand, if there is no apparent relationship between harvest rates and survival rates, this suggests that harvest has a limited effect on population size. The most recent results from the black duck population model indicate that at the current levels of hunting, harvest is not affecting annual black duck survival at the population level. Accordingly, the Harvest Strategy allows for more liberal black duck hunting regulations in 2017. If liberalization of the hunting regulations causes black duck survival to decrease and the population to decline, those signals will be detected through the annual monitoring programs and the appropriate regulation changes can be made to ensure that black duck harvest is sustainable over the long term.



Kyle Wintersteen

Black ducks are among the most prized species for duck hunters in the east.

