

Let our wildlife live

Ban Duck Shooting in Victoria

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Wildlife and Regional Community Groups Hope New Billboard Will Help Communities be Heard

Kerrie Allen

Australian Wildlife Society and Regional Victorians Opposed To Duck Shooting (RVOTDS) have installed a new billboard in Gippsland, Victoria, to help get their message across as holiday-makers travel from Melbourne to Gippsland over the Summer period.

RVOTDS spokesperson, Kerrie Allen, said “Many people travelling from Melbourne to Gippsland over the holidays are not aware that, between March and June each year (duck-hunting season), the stunning waterways around Gippsland turn into warzones. Birds are killed and permanently wounded, non-feathered families are traumatised, tourists are put off visiting areas of impact, and businesses are affected. It is time the Victorian Government listened to the majority of Victorians who oppose this outdated minority activity that causes so much damage to more than just our native birdlife.”

The President of the Australian Wildlife Society, Suzanne Medway AM, said “the eight so-called game species that can be shot during duck shooting season are protected native waterbirds for nine months of the year. The game

duck such as the pacific black duck (*Anas superciliosa*), grey teal (*Anas gracilis*), hardhead (*Aythya australis*), Australian shelduck (*Tadorna tadornoides*), pink-eared duck (*Malacorhynchus membranaceus*), wood duck (*Chenonetta jubata*), blue-winged shoveler (*Anas rhynchos*), and chestnut teal (*Anas castanea*) are an integral part of Australia’s ecosystem. There is no scientific or environmental reason for allowing these beautiful waterbirds to be shot.”

Shooters, using shotguns, inflict horrific injuries to these gentle and defenceless waterbirds. When a shooter fires, pellets spread, and birds are often shot through their wings, eyes, feet, or body. These include swans (which mate for life), avocets, herons, and many other species, including Australia’s rare and threatened freckled duck (*Stictonetta naevosa*). These birds are precious and unique to Australia.

“Duck shooting is not a sport. It is a cowardly, violent, and anti-social act. Sport is an even competition between humans such as football, hockey, tennis, athletics, etc. Waterbirds cannot defend themselves, let alone fight back against shooters armed with powerful weapons, dogs, whistles, and decoys. The Australian Wildlife Society believes that duck shooting is a one-sided cowardly activity” Suzanne said.

Each year, the state labour Government services a small minority of duck shooters by declaring a duck season. The Andrew’s Government continues to declare a season despite the prolonged drought. The latest Government report shows even drought-breaking rains have not helped bird numbers which are on a significant long-term decline.

The Victorian Premier even goes so far as to artificially fill certain wetlands to attract birds for shooters.

We wish to express our anger that the Government still allows this brutal slaughter of native waterbirds to continue, especially because of the extreme cruelty involved.

This year, a coalition of forty-three business, union, environmental, and wildlife groups called for recreational duck shooting to be abolished, however the Government has not yet responded.

Australia’s native waterbirds have declined seventy percent since the 1980s. With a changing climate and drought predicted to intensify, it is imperative we protect our native birdlife from recreational hunters. Hundreds of thousands of our native waterbirds are reported ‘harvested’ each year in Victoria by shooters, even in ‘restricted’ seasons. These numbers do not include birds that are shot and left behind, including protected species found each year by members of the public.

Duck shooting is also a matter of safety, social, and economic impact to Victorians, particularly regional areas. More people live around the waterways now than they did in the 1950s and more people are interested in boating, kayaking, birdwatching, and bushwalking – which are hampered by unmonitored shooters in close proximity.

Then there is the issue of animal cruelty. As ballistic trajectory experts

have warned, at least one in four birds shot will not be killed outright, even by the best shooters, but only wounded, flapping away to die slow painful deaths. This is obviously unacceptable in a modern society.

It is time to follow the lead of other progressive states who have banned recreational duck shooting and allow rural Victoria to benefit from nature-based tourism such as the booming birdwatching business.



An injured pink-eared duck (*Malacorhynchus membranaceus*). Image: Coalition Against Duck Shooting



A freckled duck (*Stictonetta naevosa*) at Serendip Sanctuary. Image: Eleanor Dilley

Other state Governments have banned recreational duck shooting such as Western Australia (1990), New South Wales (1995), and Queensland (2006). However, duck shooting persists in Victoria, Tasmania, and the Northern Territory.

Every October for over thirty-seven years, expert independent researchers have surveyed wetlands and waterbirds across eastern Australia. These surveys

have built up one of the country's most important long-term data sets on the health and biodiversity of our river and wetland environments. Up to two thousand wetlands and rivers are surveyed, observing up to fifty different waterbird species, including threatened species. Sadly, data shows a continued long-term decline in total waterbird abundance and breeding. The 37th (2019) survey showed significant

long-term declines in all major indices and the 'wetland area index' was the lowest ever recorded since the surveys began. Sadly the 38th (2020) survey, just recently completed, shows even fewer birds than the last survey.

As an ongoing and preventable wildlife conservation matter, the Australian Wildlife Society and RVOTDS call for duck shooting in Victoria, and other states, to be banned, and ask that nature-based wetland tourism is introduced to help regional towns.

RVOTDS is a not-for-profit community group which incorporated in April 2018. Its mission is to not only be a voice for native waterbirds, but the growing number of residents and businesses in rural areas adversely impacted by recreational bird shooting nearby. For further information, please visit regionalvictoriansotds.com



A Pacific black duck (*Anas superciliosa*) at Jells Park, Victoria. Image: Eleanor Dilley

Take Action

There are many ways in which you can help to protect Australia's native wildlife, including our precious waterbirds:

1. Volunteer your time – RVOTDS rely on volunteers to help with a variety of wildlife conservation activities to help protect Australia's native waterbirds. If you would like to help, please visit their website (regionalvictoriansOTDS.com) and complete their volunteer application form;
2. Stay informed – sign up to receive the RVOTDS newsletter or become a member of the Australian Wildlife Society to keep up-to-date with the collective work being promoted state-wide and nationally;
3. Send a letter to your Ministers – help advocate for the protection of Australia's native and threatened birdlife by visiting RVOTDS's website and signing their template letter, or create and send a respectful letter of your own; and
4. Donate – if you do not have the time to volunteer or write a letter but would still like to provide support in some way, why not donate to help the organisation of your choice achieve wildlife conservation action.