

RESTORE MICHIGAN'S MOURNING DOVE SHOOTING BAN

Stop the Target Practice of Traditional Backyard Songbirds

The Committee to Restore the Dove Shooting Ban seeks to restore Michigan's 100-year ban on the shooting of mourning doves. The committee submitted 73% more signatures than the 159,000 required by law for certification, illustrating the overwhelming support for the referendum campaign by the voters of Michigan. Committee members include the Michigan Audubon Society, the Detroit Audubon Society, the Michigan Humane Society and the Humane Society of the United States.

On June 2, 2005, the Board of State Canvassers officially approved and certified the Committee's petition signatures, stopping the shooting of mourning doves until the November 2006 election as stipulated by Article II, Section 9 of the Michigan Constitution, which states that, *"No law as to which the power of referendum properly has been invoked shall be effective thereafter unless approved by a majority of the electors voting thereon at the next general election."*

Mourning doves have been continuously protected in Michigan for 100 years; they should not be shot for target practice. Banned since 1905, the shooting of doves is not a tradition in Michigan. Doves would essentially be shot for what dove-shooting proponents term as "fun" or target practice.

Hunting doves is unnecessary and serves no wildlife management purpose. There is no reason to open a shooting season on doves. Mourning doves – also known as the farmer's friend - are ground-feeding birds that eat pest weed seeds; they pose no threat to agricultural crops, homes, or anything of value to people. Other northern states also have long-standing policies of protecting doves. There are no management problems within those states and no one has suggested that doves are overpopulated.

Mourning doves have significant economic value as live songbirds. Doves are beloved backyard birds and are an important part of the multi-billion dollar bird watching and feeding industry in Michigan. As a backyard songbird, scientific research studies show the mourning dove as "the second most-frequently reported bird at feeders." More Michigan residents participate in wild bird watching and spend more doing it than any other outdoor activity – including all forms of hunting combined.

Doves are not a viable human food source. As small birds, even if shot properly, doves have very little "edible" flesh on them. During the 60-day shooting season of September and October, doves are actually at their lightest body weight for the entire year. However, doves are an important source of food for protected birds of prey such as eagles, falcons, hawks, and owls.

Shooting doves is known to produce orphaned young. Doves are scientifically known to still be nesting during the 60-day shooting season of September and October. Doves mate for life because both parents are required to successfully fledge squabs. The killing of one parent is known to cause unnecessary suffering of dependent young who will die in the nest of starvation.

There is an unacceptably high wounding rate for dove hunting. Scientific research studies confirm an average wounding rate of 30 percent in hunted areas — meaning that nearly one in three birds is wounded and not retrieved after being shot. In Michigan, where there is no tradition of dove hunting and where few Michigan hunters have had the experience of shooting at doves, we can expect an even higher wounding rate. If shooters kill 300,000 mourning doves a year, we can expect they will wound and fail to retrieve nearly 100,000 others.

There are plenty of other species for the sporting community to pursue and shoot in the state. More than 115 species are considered game species in Michigan. Not counting unprotected birds, 40 of these game species are birds. Turkeys, pheasants, geese, ducks, woodcock, rails, snipe, and dozens of other bird species give recreational hunters more than ample shooting opportunities at all times of the year in Michigan. In fact, hunting seasons are longer and bag limits are larger than ever for many species.

Shooting at doves produces mistaken identity kills, including American kestrels, Sharp-shinned hawks and several other federally protected species. Many "non-target" avian species are often unavoidably and mistakenly shot by mourning dove hunters.

Dove shooting will contribute to the discharge of enormous amounts of toxic lead shot in the environment. For every dove shot and bagged, hunters discharge an average of 8 shots according to a long-term study conducted by the U.S. Geological Survey and the Fish and Wildlife Service. Densities of greater than 860,000 pellets per hectare have been reported in dove fields, which are usually crop-growing soils. Cumulative lead deposits pose a significant risk to ground-feeding mourning doves and to other wildlife that directly and indirectly ingest toxic shot, including birds of prey and other animals who scavenge on downed birds.

For more information and a complete list of organizations working to restore Michigan's dove shooting ban, visit the Committee to Restore the Dove Shooting Ban website at www.StopShootingDoves.org.