

FACT SHEET

Regulations for the recovery of game birds and game bird meat - Wildlife (Game) Regulations 2012

For responsible hunters, recovering and using the game they have harvested is standard practice and is all part of the experience of sourcing, harvesting and consuming wild game.

However, irresponsible hunters who make no attempt to retrieve the game ducks they have hunted results in game wastage and poor animal welfare outcomes.

To ensure game birds are not wasted, the Wildlife (Game) Regulations 2012 include regulations that require hunters to immediately recover downed game birds after they are shot and to salvage at least the breast meat from harvested birds.

Recovery of game birds

The Wildlife (Game) Regulations 2012 (the regulations) require hunters to make all reasonable efforts to immediately recover a downed game bird. This applies to all ducks, Stubble Quail and introduced game birds (e.g. pheasants, partridges and quail).

A downed bird is one that has been brought down to the ground or water as a result of being shot or one that has been shot on the ground.

Once a bird is downed, a hunter must focus on that bird only and make all reasonable efforts to retrieve it immediately. You must not continue to shoot at other birds.

Immediate recovery is important to ensure the hunter remains focused on the downed game bird. This will minimise the loss of downed birds and ensure that any bird still alive on recovery can be immediately dispatched.

As per existing game laws, you must immediately kill any game that is still alive when recovered.

Game bird recovery strategies

To have a successful hunt and make recovery easier, you should develop recovery strategies.

Consider the following factors when developing an effective recovery strategy:

- Identify hunting sites or shooting zones where downed game can be readily recovered – avoid hunting in areas of heavy cover
- Don't assume that downed birds have been killed outright

- Once a bird is struck and downed, stop shooting and immediately recover the bird
- Know the hunting location and the characteristics of its associated habitat

Use equipment that will aid in the recovery of downed birds (this could include such things as a gundog, swatter loads, gun sling, boats).

Do not shoot at multiple birds

Under the regulations, once a bird is downed, you must stop shooting and immediately make all reasonable efforts to recover it.

If another bird presents itself following a downed bird, you must not take a shot. Apart from it being illegal, it will shift your focus away from retrieving the downed bird and will provide the downed bird an opportunity to escape if it is wounded. This situation may result in two wounded and lost birds instead of one successfully retrieved bird.

If a pair of birds present, they can both be taken (a "double") as long as one of the birds has not been downed. However, to minimise the possibility of wounding, it is recommended to focus on one bird only. If one bird is struck, reserve the second shot to immediately dispatch it if wounded.

Strategies to minimise wounding and improve recovery:

- Only fire at birds that are within your maximum shooting skill distance. For most people this is less than 30m. Shooting beyond your maximum shooting skill distance is a major cause of wounding.
- Shoot at side or trailing birds. Do not shoot at the lead bird or into the middle of a flock.
- Avoid downing birds in heavy cover.
- Always use appropriate and tested shotshell and choke combinations.
- It is recommended to reserve your second shot for the downed bird.
- Carry and use swatter loads (shot size 6 or 7), where safe, for dispatching downed birds.
- Retrieve any downed bird immediately.

For more information on reducing wounding and effective and efficient game bird hunting, download the *Be a better game bird hunter – Shotgunning Education Program (SEP) Handbook* at gma.vic.gov.au

Also consider attending a Game Bird Hunting Essentials Masterclass training day where you get hands-on experience and expert tuition from trainers. Check the Field and Game Australia or Sporting Shooters Association of Australia (Vic) websites for details.

Killing live birds on recovery

If you retrieve a downed bird that is still alive, it is your responsibility to immediately kill it on recovery. This should be done in a humane manner that first causes immediate loss of consciousness and then quickly causes death without the animal regaining consciousness.

An effective technique is to use swatter loads when it is safe to do so. Swatter loads are shotshell loads with small shot sizes that produce a rich, dense pattern which are effective at dispatching downed birds. Typical shooting range for swatter loads is 20–30 m, with the most effective steel shot size #7 or #6 at 1 oz/28 g.

Any live bird recovered to hand should be rendered unconscious with a single, heavy, committed blow to the back of the skull using a heavy, blunt object like a small club (e.g. a fishing 'priest') and then immediately killed using an acceptable secondary method.

Acceptable secondary methods include cervical

dislocation (separating the skull from the neck or top of the spine) or decapitation (cutting the head off). Suffocation or drowning are not considered acceptable methods for killing a bird.

This two-step process is considered acceptable when the first step ensures the bird is unconscious before it is killed.

The two-step process for killing a wounded bird is ideally achieved using two hands. This should be an important consideration for hunters when developing safe recovery and dispatch strategies in various situations. Attaching a sling to your gun can help free up your hands.

A small fishing 'priest' is an inexpensive item that can be bought online or from some fishing stores and can easily be carried in the field.

Confirm death in birds by checking for these signs in combination:

- The eyelids and eye membranes don't close when you touch the birds eyeball
- Totally limp body and neck; no movement; wings drooping
- The eyes will glaze rapidly after death
- No breathing or heartbeat

Salvage and recovery of game meat

Laws require hunters to keep at least one fully-feathered wing attached to the duck or duck breasts. If the breasts are removed separately, each breast must have a fully feathered wing attached. If the breasts are joined, then only one wing is required.

If a hunter decides not to keep and take home the whole game bird, they will be required to recover at least both breasts of the game bird they have harvested.

Hunters must remain in possession of the bird or duck breasts until immediately prior to cooking or until it is taken home.

Frequently asked questions

What constitutes 'all reasonable efforts to recover a downed game bird'?

Hunting circumstances, locations, environments and hunter equipment will differ and inform what constitutes reasonable efforts.

Any hunter that downs a bird needs to stop hunting and make an immediate effort to recover the bird on foot, in a boat or send a gundog to retrieve the bird unless it is unsafe to make the recovery.

Varying wetland environments, like vegetation and water depth, will play a factor in what is considered reasonable effort. For example, a shoreline hunter that downs a bird in deeper, off-shore water has fewer or no immediate recovery options when compared to a hunter with a gundog or boat that can more easily recover the bird from deep water. To make it easier to comply with the law and reduce losses and wounding, only hunt in areas where recovery is possible.

The number of hunters on a wetland and their proximity to each other (shotgun pellet injury risk), and visual obstacles (thick stands of vegetation or terrain) can also contribute to determining what is reasonable.

A hunter that continues to down birds in plain sight (with no risks associated with retrieval) and who makes no effort to retrieve those birds between shots, would be in obvious breach of the regulation.

Can I shoot another bird after I have downed the first one?

Not unless you have recovered the first bird. As a responsible hunter you must keep your eye on the bird you have struck to ensure it is recovered and dead.

What if the bird I've struck keeps flying away?

You are only required to recover downed birds. Downed birds are those that have been brought to the ground as a result of being shot or birds shot on the ground. Ground includes land, water and any vegetation or other thing on the land or water.

Can I keep the whole bird or can I only keep the breast meat?

Yes, you can still keep the whole bird. Keeping more than the breast meat is legal and is encouraged. Keeping the breast meat is the minimum that must be recovered.

Does the meat recovery regulation mean I must remove the breasts from my game birds in the field?

No. The regulation requires you to salvage **at least both breasts**. You can still take more or all of the bird home or to the place where you will be cooking it in the field.

Do I need to still retain a fully-feathered wing?

Yes. The existing law requires hunters to keep at least one fully-feathered wing attached to the duck or duck breasts. If you remove the breasts separately, then a fully-feathered wing must be attached to each breast.

Do the regulations apply to hunting Stubble Quail?

Yes. The regulations apply to all game birds (i.e. game ducks, Stubble Quail and introduced game birds, such as pheasants and partridges).

Won't I be giving away my cover and miss the opportunity to shoot other birds if I have to stop and immediately retrieve a game duck?

As a responsible hunter, your priority is to ensure the bird you have shot is dead and recovered (i.e. not lost). If you do not want to break cover, consider the use of a well-trained gundog as they allow you to remain in your hide and command your dog throughout the retrieve.

What happens if I don't immediately recover downed game?

You would be breaching the regulations requiring immediate recovery and could be fined or prosecuted.

Can I have a friend recover the downed bird?

Yes. If a friend with a Game Licence is closer to the downed bird it is acceptable to get them to recover it for you in order to ensure the bird is not lost and for any wounded bird to be dispatched as soon as possible. However, you cannot continue to hunt until that bird is in your possession (i.e. you have recovered the bird that you shot).

What if I unintentionally down multiple birds in a single shot?

Avoid shooting into a flock of birds as this increases the chances of wounding multiple birds. Always focus on shooting trailing, side or single birds.

If you do strike more than one bird, focus on recovering the easiest bird first and try to make a mental picture of where the other bird went down in order to search for it once you have recovered

and dispatched the first bird.

What is a reasonable time to search for a downed bird?

A reasonable effort should be made to recover downed birds. How long to search will be influenced by many factors, including personal safety and how easy or difficult it is to get access to the downed bird.

What are the penalties for not immediately recovering downed birds and salvaging at least the breast meat from harvested birds?

Both offences carry a maximum penalty of \$3,698. You could also lose your Game Licence and any equipment used in the commission of the offence.



Be a better hunter and take steps to prevent wounding. Simple actions make a big difference.

Visit gma.vic.gov.au

- R** Regularly practice
- E** Effective retrieval strategy
- D** Don't shoot beyond 30 metres
- U** Use decoys and calls
- C** Correct loads and chokes
- E** Every shot matters

WOUNDING