

'An absurdity': duck hunting allowed despite statewide lockdown

Hayley Elg Ballarat Courier 2 June 21

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A rescuer with an injured duck, that was later euthanised due to its injuries. Photos: Animals Australia

An apparent case of animal cruelty has appeared at the beginning of the state's duck shooting season, as questions are raised about why it was even able to go ahead in a statewide lockdown.

Wildlife rescuer Gary Ward, from Ballarat, has been attending wetlands across the state since the duck shooting season opened last week.

He, along with a group of volunteer wildlife rescuers and volunteer vets, have been given exemptions to preempt wildlife rescues - to watch on as shooters target wildlife and then find and tend to the birds that have been shot, injured and left to die.

At the opening of the season last Wednesday Mr Ward was located at Lake Buloke, near Donald. Along with rescuers, there were about 45 shooters that morning.

There was quite a lot of shooting for an hour or so and most shooters killed about one bird each. After they dissipated, rescuers found a number of fatally injured and wounded ducks.

But truly shocking scenes unfolded closer to Ballarat that morning - at Little Lake Lonsdale, near Stawell.

The first morning of the shooting season, one volunteer witnessed and recorded a terrible case of animal cruelty.

A shooter shot a duck and had his dog retrieve it and then appeared to attempt to feed pieces of the duck, which was still alive, to his dog. He was then seen smashing the duck against a tree in an attempt to kill it.

WARNING, DISTURBING FOOTAGE BELOW:

Coalition Against Duck Shooting founder, Laurie Levy, said a concerned volunteer captured the footage, which he described as one of the worst cases of deliberate cruelty he had seen in his 35 years attending wetlands during the shooting season.

A report has been made about the incident and he hopes the Game Management Authority will take steps towards prosecuting the man.

The statewide lockdown was announced on the second day of the season, though it was given the green light to continue as 'exercise'.

Shooters are able to participate for two hours each day as long as they travel no further than five kilometres from their homes.

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As a result, rescuers - who are all volunteers - are continuing to scour wetlands and swamps in an effort to triage birds.

While Andy Meddick is clear that he will always be an advocate for banning recreational duck shooting in Victoria for a vast number of reasons, the biggest is how "inherently cruel" it is - as evidenced by the incident last week.

"It was a hallmark of last season. Every single day we were having animal cruelty videos sent through [to my office] and some were breaking the law."

The Animal Justice Party MP said that to allow the season to proceed during a lockdown situation was "just absurd".

"I don't think anyone with a modicum of common sense would think that going out on a wetland and shooting innocent water birds would be considered a form of exercise."



A hunter with a duck at little Lake Buloke

He said his office had been contacted by an array of people questioning why it was allowed, when businesses were forced to shut doors and funerals had strict restrictions on only 10 people being able to attend.

"People are asking me why they aren't allowed to open their business and bring their staff in so they can earn a living, yet people are allowed to go out on a wetland and kill animals. People think this is just an absurdity.

"These are things that have all been raised with me - this dichotomy of what's going on, and no one seems to be able to understand. Everyone feels that it should have just been very clear cut - it's a lockdown, so no duck shooting."

Mr Meddick said the season being able to proceed had created a lot of confusion and was taking resources away from more important tasks.

"I think things would have been made a lot easier for everybody - for wildlife rescuers, for the shooters themselves but also for the Game Management Authority and Victoria Police - if the determination had been made that only essential services and workers could be out during the lockdown.

"If duck shooting had simply been eliminated as a legitimate form of exercise I don't think we'd be having a problem."

PREVIOUS COVERAGE: [Why some want the duck shooting season banned](#)

Kerrie Allen, spokesperson for the Regional Victorians Opposed to Duck Shooting also questioned why shooting native birds was acceptable during a statewide lockdown, when other activities, such as golf, were not.

"Now we have lawless guys with guns around the state and bands of rescuers having to follow them. It's unnecessary and dangerous when an ugly variant of a fast spreading virus is breathing down our necks."



Andy Meddick

"Victoria is a basket case right now and is it any wonder? Time for accountability. That starts with saying no - like other states have - to a group of folks who like to shoot birds for fun."

Duck shooting seasons have been banned on animal cruelty grounds in New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia.

A GMA report about [hunters' knowledge](#), released last year, revealed only 20 per cent of duck and quail shooters understood how to correctly identify game species, while only 13 per cent knew how to dispatch a downed bird.

The Victorian duck hunting season opened on May 26 and will close on June 14. With bird numbers low this year, the GMA called a shorter season of 20 days. Each shooter is able to collect five game ducks per day.

As part of a coordinated approach with Victoria Police, 19 GMA authorised officers are patrolling wetlands across Victoria to ensure compliance with hunting and public safety laws.

GMA chief executive, Graeme Ford, said authorised officers patrolled 75 wetlands, including at Connewarre, Kerang, Stawell and across Gippsland during the first five days of the season.

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GMA chief executive, Graeme Ford

"Data will continue to be collated and analysed on hunter compliance, hunter effort, public safety issues and game duck harvest levels for the remainder of the season."

Mr Meddick has been lobbying the government to ensure the duck shooting season is not extended after the lockdown.

This week the GMA confirmed to *The Courier* that it would not.

"...As it enters a time when ducks are under pressure due to cold weather, natural food shortages and when they commence breeding, including pair bonding, nest building and egg laying".

While fishing, hunting and horse riding are accepted reasons for exercise, they must not be done from a closed pier or jetty, at a horse yard or other type of clubhouse.

Complaints regarding breaches of restrictions by businesses and community members are regularly reported through the Police Assistance Line on 13 14 44.

The complaints are then assessed and allocated to the appropriate agency for enforcement based on jurisdiction and location.