

'Terrible tragedy unfolding': Threatened species gunned down during duck season

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WARNING - GRAPHIC CONTENT: Protected birds threatened with extinction have been [gunned down by shooters as Victoria](#) begins its controversial duck season.

Photos supplied by the state's peak rescue charity Wildlife Victoria show a number of ducks left dead or dying since the season began on Wednesday.

Among the dead are blue-winged shovelers and a hardhead, species which the state government has this year explicitly warned are ["listed as threatened due to declining populations"](#).



Wildlife Victoria have catalogued the deaths non target species including a blue-winged shoveler, an Australasian coot and a hardhead. Source: Supplied

Wildlife Victoria's CEO Lisa Palma warned she is seeing evidence of a "terrible tragedy unfolding".

She is leading a triage mission to care for injured ducks left at Lake Bael Bael in Kerang, near the NSW border.

“Duck shooting is horrendous given the ever diminishing state of our water bird population and the fact that many of the shooters can’t differentiate between one species over another,” she said.

“Surely the ducks that we have witnessed coming through Wildlife Victoria’s triage facility are evidence enough to confirm the fact that duck hunting is indiscriminate, cruel and senseless.”

Duck season 'out of step with community'

Under Victorian Government guidelines, shooters have a “bag limit” of four ducks a day and must make “all reasonable efforts to immediately recover” those they have shot.

Despite this regulation, [Wildlife Victoria vet Dr Natasha Bassett](#) has examined a number of dead and injured birds retrieved at Kerang.



Shooting is underway at Kerang where duck season is underway. Source: Supplied

As a medical professional, she is frustrated having to administer treatment to preventable injuries, inflicted by a practice she describes as “out of step with community standards”.

“It’s disappointing the government hasn’t done the right thing and ended this across the state,” she told Yahoo News Australia.

“These are species protected throughout much of the year and then left to be shot with not enough oversight.”

Authorities investigating death of protected species

Duck hunters must score 85 per cent on a waterfowl identification test before they are granted a license, and must correctly identify all non-game species.

Those who ignore guidelines face penalties including official warnings, infringement notices, prosecutions and licence cancellations, however Game Management Association (GMA) is yet to confirm how many hunters they have sanctioned.

They advised Yahoo News Australia they are aware of an incident involving a threatened species recovered during the 2022 season.

"The GMA has identified a person who is alleged to have shot a threatened species. Enquiries regarding the matter are ongoing," a GMA spokesperson said in a statement.

"Illegal hunting and irresponsible behaviour will not be tolerated."

Amid ongoing concern from wildlife lovers that hunters are continuing to leave birds dead and dying in the water, the Victorian Government has initiated a duck wounding reduction action program.

Known as the Sustainable Hunting Action Plan (SHAP), it will aim to educate hunters about how to reduce wounding of birds.

GMA confirmed they are already running a communications campaign called Respect: Reduce Wounding to tackle the issue.

Victoria Government stands firm on duck season

As the world faces a biodiversity crisis, many conservationists believe Victoria's duck season should end.



Wildlife Victoria have administered treatment to ducks with gunshot injuries at Kerang.
Source: Supplied

With numbers of duck shooters believed to be declining, pressure has been growing on the Andrews Labor Government to phase out the annual slaughter.

In previous years, [sources within the party indicated there is a growing appetite to see the practice ended](#), or at least reformed.

Some shooters maintain the practice is [a tradition passed down between generations](#) which allows them to supply wild meat to their families.

GMA apply a number of restrictions on shooters each year based on data and surveys, and could impose further limitations on shooters to protect concentrations of rare or threatened species.