

DOC National Office
18 Manners Street
Wellington 6011
PO Box 10,420
Wellington 6143
Ref: OIAD-4996

7 April 2025

Tēnā koe

Thank you for your request to the Department of Conservation (DOC), received on 10 March 2025, in which you asked:

- 1. Could you please confirm it is the Minister of Conservation who declares open season for game bird shooting (which commences first weekend of May)? If so, when does this occur?*
- 2. Please provide the estimated number of birds shot during the 2022, 2023, and 2024 game bird shooting seasons.*
- 3. How many reports of protected species being shot during game bird shooting season have been recorded over the past five years (May 2019 to present)?*
- 4. What measures is the Department of Conservation taking to ensure protected species are not being shot during game bird shooting season?*
- 5. Are protected bird populations being monitored before and after game bird shooting season to measure whether their numbers are being depleted by hunters?*
- 6. International studies have indicated that up to 33% of birds shot may be left to die without being retrieved, a violation of the Animal Welfare Act 1999, which mandates animals are protected from unnecessary pain and distress. What steps is the Department of Conservation taking to ensure that all birds shot during the game bird shooting season are retrieved and not left to suffer or die from injuries?*
- 7. Given the significant number of animals at risk of being left to die after being shot, injured, and not retrieved, does the Department of Conservation plan to investigate this issue or conduct an inquiry into the matter?*
- 8. During the game bird shooting season, is it the Department of Conservation's responsibility to ensure that hunters are complying with the Animal Welfare Act 1999? If not, who is responsible for overseeing this?*

We have considered your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA).

Your questions and our responses are listed below:

1. *Could you please confirm it is the Minister of Conservation who declares open season for game bird shooting (which commences first weekend of May)? If so, when does this occur?*

The Minister for Hunting and Fishing approves Open Season for Game Notices – recommended to the Minister by the twelve Fish and Game Councils via the New Zealand Fish and Game Council – annually, with approval usually given some time in February. Accordingly, the Minister of Conservation does not have responsibility for declaring the open season.

2. *Please provide the estimated number of birds shot during the 2022, 2023, and 2024 game bird shooting seasons.*

This information is not held by DOC and we are therefore refusing your request under section 18(g) of the OIA. We considered transferring this part of your request to the New Zealand Fish and Game Council, however we understand you have already received the information it holds.

3. *How many reports of protected species being shot during game bird shooting season have been recorded over the past five years (May 2019 to present)?*

We do not have centralised records of this type of information. Responding to this question would require an extensive search through very large volumes of records, to first identify reports of protected species being shot, and then compare them to game bird shooting season. We must therefore refuse this part of your request under section 18(f) of the OIA. I have borne in mind section 18B of the Official Information Act but concluded that use of this provision would not assist in this case.

We considered transferring this part of your request to the Fish and Game New Zealand, however we understand you have already received the information they hold.

4. *What measures is the Department of Conservation taking to ensure protected species are not being shot during game bird shooting season?*

DOC investigates reports of unlawful killing of protected species at any time of year (not only during the Open Season for Game) and, where appropriate, takes enforcement action.

5. *Are protected bird populations being monitored before and after game bird shooting season to measure whether their numbers are being depleted by hunters?*

Most native bird populations have their population estimates updated by scientists about once every five years. It would not be feasible to undertake population counts annually, or more frequently than annually. Furthermore, even in the absence of recreational game bird hunting,

population numbers of all species (including game birds) are often lower at the end of winter owing to natural mortality.

6. *International studies have indicated that up to 33% of birds shot may be left to die without being retrieved, a violation of the Animal Welfare Act 1999, which mandates animals are protected from unnecessary pain and distress. What steps is the Department of Conservation taking to ensure that all birds shot during the game bird shooting season are retrieved and not left to suffer or die from injuries?*

DOC does not currently have any specific initiatives under way in this area. Ensuring that shot game is retrieved – in accordance with game bird hunting regulations – is the responsibility of Fish and Game Council enforcement officials. Section 30B of the Animal Welfare Act 1999 means the Act does not apply to game birds hunted in accordance with the Wildlife Act 1953 and regulations made under that Act.

7. *Given the significant number of animals at risk of being left to die after being shot, injured, and not retrieved, does the Department of Conservation plan to investigate this issue or conduct an inquiry into the matter?*

DOC has no plans in this regard. It is the responsibility of Fish and Game Councils to ensure compliance with game bird hunting regulations.

8. *During the game bird shooting season, is it the Department of Conservation's responsibility to ensure that hunters are complying with the Animal Welfare Act 1999? If not, who is responsible for overseeing this?*

It is the responsibility of Fish and Game Councils to ensure compliance with game bird hunting regulations. As noted above, section 30B of the Animal Welfare Act 1999 means the Act does not apply to game birds hunted in accordance with game bird hunting conditions.

Please note that this letter (with your personal details removed) may be published on the Department's website.

Nāku noa, nā



Sam Thomas
Director Policy