**To what extent should Mallard Hens be protected in New Zealand?**

A Hen Mallard is a female species of duck which are mainly brown speckled plumage and is a aimed game animal in the shooting season, which also ends up on restaurant menus as a great dish. I was inspired to do this topic from the love I have of shooting ducks as a sport and getting a ring from Fish and Game about the issue of the decreasing Mallard population. In this report I will be writing about for and against prospective of what extent should Mallard hens be protected in New Zealand. As well of questions that tie into the Mallard Hens being ‘should semi-automatic shot guns be banned in New Zealand? Also for and against prospective of what extent are other environment factors affecting the Mallards.

Many different sources have in some way provided me with information that shows to some extent Mallard hens should be protected in New Zealand. Bay of Plenty times (<http://www.bay-of-plenty-times/rural/news/article.ifm>) said fish and game has slashed the number of ducks hunters can shoot in the eastern region when the season opens this Saturday morning. Senior officer Mathew McDougall said plummeting duck shooting population meant hunters can only bag 6 per person as opposed to 10. It was going to be encouraged to go after males he said. We are trying to save a few hens to go through into the breeding season.

So one of the messages we are pushing is for hunters to what we call ‘go for green’ head of males. In the email I received from David Klee from (fish and game) it was noted in the Auckland/Waikato region, seeing lots of game birds and spending time with family and friends while shooting, scored much higher than other variables. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly shooting lots of game birds scored near the bottom, just in front of pulling the trigger, which tells me from this source some hunters like to see the mallard duck population increasing instead of decreasing with hammering the bulk of the mallards and the breeding hens. Also another source that is for protecting hens is SAFE(<http://safe.org.nz/campains/duck-shooting>) which say duck hunting is banned in 3 Australian States due to the extreme suffering it causes, and SAFE will continue its fight until this blood sport is illegal in New Zealand as well. My final bit of information that is to some extent wanting to help hen mallards from the fish and game email I received from David Klee said hunters were asked about the harvest regulation changer, the majority of hunters (53.8%) supported the reduction in bag limit from 10 to 6.

During my research I also found sources that were against protecting mallard hens. One of them was an interview source. “I am against protecting that mallard to any extent because I go out for opening morning weekend only to shoot ducks, also the price of a duck licence is $95 is not cheap and the price of ammo is getting dearer. Therefore my thought is when I go out to shoot on the pond which usually doesn’t see many ducks anyway especially add the hours I sit alone on the pond waiting for a duck to fly in. My stance is I will shoot whatever comes in regardless of gender”.

My second source to some extent is against protecting mallards is the source (<http://www.3news.co.nz/Hunters-excited-for-bumper-duck-season/tabid/423/articleID>) Where Mr Currie says the start of the seasons looking good, particularly in the Canterbury region when bird numbers are the highest they’ve been in a decade due to good breeding weather over summer. Game bird hunting season is a really good opportunity for families and friends to get out there and go hunting and bring home a feed for the table. Another point that relates to what extent should mallard hens be protected in New Zealand is should semi-automatic shot guns be highly restricted and or banned in New Zealand. Source one leading towards changing legislations with semi-automatic shot guns in New Zealand is fish and game ([www.fishandgame.co.nz](http://www.fishandgame.co.nz)) which so far has made a law on semi-automatic shot guns with having a 3 shot firing limit during the shooting season when shooting mallard ducks.

Source two, the NZ Herald ([www.nzherald.co.nz](http://www.nzherald.co.nz)) say 30% of shot ducks are left crippled and are believed to be mainly semi-automatic shot guns being able to fire more shots at the ducks and being able to hit them at a distance that is not getting a clean kill, Mr Klee said.

David Klee said we are trying stock to take some pressure off our mallard stock and get hunters to be a bit more thoughtful about when they pull the trigger. Another source that links to the question of the semi-automatic shot guns in New Zealand is (<http://boards.straightdope.com/sdmb/archive/index.php/t-36550.html>) which states that pump and semi-automatic shot guns are heavily restricted, but not impossible to get a license for in Australia which could be the same for New Zealand not banning the semi-automatic shot guns but having higher restrictions in place during duck season.

I also found a source against having restrictions on semi-automatic shot guns found on the Fish and Game ([www.fishandgame.co.nz](http://www.fishandgame.co.nz)) which stated hunters had mixed emotions about plugging semi-automatic shot guns for a short amount of time during the duck shooting season. They don’t want semi-automatic shot guns banned in New Zealand because when shooting pests hunters want as many of shots they can fit up the chambers to have the best chance of taking a kill. Hunters also stated that they like the idea of a single barrel shot gun and not a double barrel shot gun.

My third point that relates to what extent should mallard hens be protected in New Zealand is what extent are other environmental factors decreasing the mallard duck population. My first source Fish and Game ([www.fishandgame.co.nz](http://www.fishandgame.co.nz)) believe to some extent Hawkes, stoats and ferrets were affecting the mallard population. Why couldn’t we should those during the duck shooting season? We are shooting ducks when they are breeding. Why? Surely we are slaughtering next seasons hunting.

The concerns of declining mallard population throughout New Zealand, some hunters in the North Island were advocating for more restrictions on the use of decoys, mags shotguns and pond feeding. Southland council thought that the mallard population or resource needed some protection in the form of shorter seasons or other regulations. Also Bay of Plenty times ([www.bay-of-plenty-times/rural/news/article.cfm?c](http://www.bay-of-plenty-times/rural/news/article.cfm?c)) say habitat loss and predators were taking a major toll. Mr McDougall said fish and game were focused on improving survival rates. You can see ducks are struggling for habitat because so many nest beside the road and get killed during the breeding season. The long grass on the side of the road is the only thing left. Video cameras mounted in nests showed cats, hawks and pukeko eating eggs. Mr McDougall said the ducks have really got it stacked up against them. We really need to do something and prevent these environmental factors harming the mallards.

Another source which to some extent believe environment factors are decreasing mallards population is SAFE (<http://safe.org.nz/campaigns/duckshooting/>) say habitats are under threat from predators. Hunters add yet more pressure to their continued survival.

My final source was the fish and game email I received which said season length may have some influence on productivity by allowing birds to settle earlier and increasing their reproductive output found that early hatched mallard broods have a higher survival and that the chance of total brood loss increased by 5% for each 1-day delay in hatching between 17th May and 12th August. Likewise early hatched mallard broods were found to have 1.7 times higher daily survival rate than late hatched broods.

During research I also found sources that some way did not agree that environmental factors were decreasing the mallard population which was provided by fish and game ([www.fishandgame.co.nz](http://www.fishandgame.co.nz)) when they addressed the issue of ducks dying of lead poisoning, Mr Rhind said as a farmer on the land he had not seen ducks dying from lead ingestion and he questioned the science behind a change.

Mr Rhind was totally against banning the use of lead shot. Also Mr Munro was totally against the banning of lead because he said that clay target shooters have been using lead shot for years and years and said mallard duck population is declining but it had nothing to do with lead shot. My second source was the Fish and Game email I received which said ducks particularly mallards are highly fecund and resilient to harvest, disease and climate changes.

After doing the research on my topic to what extent should mallard hens be protected in New Zealand and writing this report has made me come to a conclusion. Hen mallards should be formally address to the public to not shoot hen mallards due to the tough circumstances there population is undergoing at the moment. But I believe that there can’t be a penalty if a hen mallard is shot due to factors such as the low light conditions when shooting for example the duck shooting hours start at 6:30am which the visibility is not greatest causing hunters not to see the hens and shooting them. Another reason is why there can’t be a penalty on shooting mallard hens is how hen pheasants are protected they are easily spotted unlike the ducks which can come in large groups. This allows the hen pheasants to have a penalty if shot but not the mallards.

There needs to be campaigns to encourage hunters to go for the green heads and get rid of the pests which would help the mallard population a lot. As well as decreasing the limit to 6 instead of 10 allowing more ducks to reach next season and breed, is also helping with the population.

There needs to be more wetlands in New Zealand that have no human activity through them. For example from knowledge Te Aroha wetlands had no human activity through it, then a track was put through which has enabled people to walk through the wetlands with their dogs and the dogs have disrupted the breeding causing the population to decrease.

I believe semi-automatic shotguns can remain in New Zealand as long as rangers are strict on the rules about plugging the shot gun to 3 shots during duck shooting season. Having rangers travelling to maimai’s on opening weekend which will take more control of this issue which will lead to less ducks getting crippled and left to die.

I disagree with the web site SAFE, duck shooting is a sport and is where friends and family get together that might only happen once a year. Concluding all my research provided by all my sources Mallard ducks need our help, go for green, cull pests.