

As 43 protesters are fined, four rare birds die



Laurie Levy holds a rare freckled duck, which was shot at Lake Murphy, near Kerang, following the start of the hunting season over the weekend.

Photo: *Craig Sillitoe*

By Stephen Moynihan
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FOUR rare birds were killed, three hunters had their guns confiscated by authorities and 43 protesters were fined as duck season began at the weekend.

Two freckled ducks — classed by some conservationists as among the world's 10 most endangered water birds — were shot at Lake Murphy, near Kerang in the state's north-west, and another two were killed at Lake Mokoan, near Benalla.

On Saturday, one hunter was charged with killing a freckled duck and, along with two other hunters, had his gun confiscated for shooting before the designated starting time.

Laurie Levy, campaign director for the Coalition Against Duck Shooting, said hunters showed a lack of respect for the protected wildlife.

More than 150 protesters gathered at Lake Murphy on Saturday and tried to scare the birds away before shooting began at 7.20am. Overall, 43 protesters were fined for entering a wetlands without a permit.

Protester Tamara Griffiths said she cried from exhaustion on the banks of the lake. "Seeing birds falling from the sky is very emotional," Ms Griffiths said.

Some birds were treated in a mobile veterinary clinic after protesters retrieved them.

Russell Bate, chairman of shooting association Field and Game described most hunters' behaviour as "exemplary" and said the person charged with firing too early at Lake Murphy was chastised by other hunters.

He said about 400 hunters at Lake Murphy bagged around 1600 ducks. He defended the deaths of the four freckled ducks, saying hunters must pass a waterfowl identification test.

The Department of Sustainability and Environment's acting manager of flora and fauna utilisation, Simon Toop, said hunters were generally well behaved. The DSE and Parks Victoria monitored 2519 hunters at 19 wetlands over the weekend.

Members of the Coalition Against Duck Shooting will display dead birds outside Premier Steve Bracks' office today.

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