

- breaking news

Hunters slaughter protected birds in Vic

Victorian hunters shot 260 protected birds and dumped more than 1000 dead ducks in a state park on the opening day of the 2017 hunting season.

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Australian Associated Press

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Police and gamekeepers stood powerless on a Victorian wetland as hunters illegally shot ducks out of the sky well before the 2017 hunting season opened in March.

The Game Management Authority's annual report says "despite the best efforts of its staff", hunters entered the Koorangie State Game Reserve and started shooting well before opening time on the first weekend of the season. At least 260 protected birds were shot and more than 1000 duck bodies were dumped by the hunters that weekend, the report says.

The Coalition Against Duck Shooting's Laurie Levy was at the Koorangie reserve on opening day and said police and gamekeepers could not stop illegal hunters due to the size of the park.

"The duck shooters started at least 20 minutes before opening time and one of the police officers said to me 'it sounds like World War Three out there'," Mr Levy told AAP on Thursday.

"Our rescuers brought out 295 illegally shot protected birds and also 183 illegally shot threatened freckled ducks and blue-billed ducks.

"And with all the illegal activity going on, I was the first person arrested at twenty past seven for rescuing a wounded bird."

One week after the start of the hunting season the GMA announced it was closing Koorangie after identifying significant numbers of freckled and blue-billed ducks on the reserve.

But Mr Levy says activists told the authority about the numbers of threatened species and tried to get the park closed to hunters well before the season started.

The GMA report says it has just nine field staff to cover every wetland and park in the state, while Mr Levy said officers often can't go into the wetlands to apprehend shooters due to occupational health and safety issues.

Despite the widespread illegal shooting, only three hunting licences were cancelled last financial year, the annual report shows.

The Game Management Authority said it is reviewing the illegal hunting on opening weekend and will make reform recommendations before the 2018 season.

Agriculture Minister Jaala Pulford has been contacted for comment.