

Fearful swans abandon their nests at start of duck-shooting season

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Black swans have abandoned their eggs after being scared away by the sound of gunshots on the opening day of Victoria's duck-hunting season.

Animal rescuers who have been working at Lake Bael Bael, near Kerang in the state's north, say the parents had flown from at least six black swan nests, leaving their eggs behind.



Also this week, two blue-winged shoveler ducks and one hardhead duck – all endangered species – were either killed by hunters or had to be euthanised.

Bird rescue volunteer Gavin, who did not want to use his surname for professional reasons, said before the duck hunting season began on Wednesday he saw swans sitting on the nests at Lake Bael Bael.



An endangered blue-winged shoveler duck- being examined by a Wildlife Victoria vet. It was later euthanised.

But when he went back on Wednesday morning, there were about 15 hunters in the same area of reeds as some nests, and the swans had flown.

“I went down to have a look when I could and all the nests were empty,” he said.

“We saw one parent circling over where the nests were and calling, frantic, she looked stressed. She did come down, but the shooters ended up entering the water not long after, and she took off.”

Wildlife rescuers said the eggs in one nest had been scattered into the water.



One of the abandoned black swan nests at Lake Bael Bael, near Kerang.

Lisa Palma, chief executive of Wildlife Victoria, said her organisation had sought expert advice on the nest abandonment, and were advised that after a few hours without a parent sitting on the nest, there was a high likelihood the swan eggs would be unviable. Black Swans are not an endangered species.

“There are multiple bird species at this wetland and with the duck season we’ve observed birds taking off in fright every day when the guns go off in the morning,” Ms Palma said.

“We are concerned because other species of birds are at the site which are threatened species.”

A total of 19 ducks have been treated at Wildlife Victoria’s veterinary tent since Wednesday. Although it is against the law to shoot birds and leave them, lead vet Dr Natasha Bassett has seen birds each day that have been left to die. The majority showed shotgun pellets inside their bodies.

Earlier this week, Premier Daniel Andrews resisted calls to end duck hunting and urged hunters to follow the rules.

“Some of us play golf. Some people go shooting. That’s a choice they are free to make, but there are rules and I do see some reports the rules seem to have been broken,” he said on Thursday.

Justice Helen Rofe dismissed the interim injunction filed by the Coalition Against Duck Shooting on Friday afternoon.

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The Game Management Authority, Environment Minister Lily D’Ambrosio and Agriculture Minister Mary-Anne Thomas were named in the failed application.

Jo Soren, for the coalition, argued the authority and ministers were in breach of Commonwealth environment and conservation laws by allowing the full 90-day game season to go ahead.

She said waterbird species had not recovered from the recent drought, and birds that were not shot were still displaced from critical habitat and could be traumatised by the noise of gun shots: “The birds don’t get a chance to bounce back.”



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