

Anti-duck shooting

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Protectors: A member of the Coalition Against Duck Shooting holds an injured bird. Photo: Coalition Against Duck Shooting

For some, duck hunting is seen as a tradition. But for Laurie Levy, the campaign director for the Coalition Against Duck Shooting (CADS), he sees it as something far more sinister.

“Duck shooting is legalised animal abuse on a huge scale and that’s totally unacceptable to the public in Australia these days,” Mr Levy said.

Mr Levy started CADS in 1986, and for 37 years he has been campaigning to bring an end to duck hunting.

He said he started the organisation after being in the wetlands and witnessing duck hunting first-hand the year prior.

“I went down to the wetlands in 1985 to have a look around and I was shocked at the violence and the brutality and the cruelty that duck shooters were inflicting on native water birds,” he said.

The following year Mr Levy and 14 rescuers went out to the wetlands. “What we found out there was horrific,” he said.

“Birds receive shocking injuries — they have smashed wings, their bodies are smashed, their bills are smashed, they are often shot and blinded and their internal injuries are terrible.

“These birds suffer. Duck shooting is legalised animal abuse and that is unacceptable to the public.”

Over the past 37 years, Mr Leavy said he and the volunteers at CADS had been doing all they could to help protect birds and native wildlife.

“Our role is similar to the Red Cross,” he said. “We go into a war zone to bring out the injured victims.

“We go out every year during the duck shooting season to rescue wounded birds.

“We also help to stop birds from being shot — we carry flags, where duck shooters dress up in camouflage gear, we wear orange vests so that birds can see us. We carry flags to keep birds away from the guns.

“Duck shooters abuse our native water birds and that is unacceptable.”

This year’s duck hunting season began on March 16 and will run through to June 13.

On the opening day of the season, Mr Levy and CADS members were out in the wetlands

“Because of the very short lead-in time from the government announcement this year to the season, we only had 50 rescuers out there but they did a colossal job bringing out wounded birds this year,” he said.

Mr Levy said duck hunting posed a risk to native wildlife, with the potential for hunters to shoot protected and endangered species.

He added that the ethical treatment of birds during hunting season was unsatisfactory.

“The wounding rate is at least one in four birds that are shot are wounded and that is totally and utterly unacceptable.

“They claim they shoot 400,000 birds in a year, another 100,000 birds are wounded that escape and that cruelty is unacceptable.”

Duck hunting has been abolished in Western Australia, New South Wales and Queensland, but is still legal in Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory.

Mr Levy said he and CADS would battle against duck hunting until it was stopped completely.

“You cannot control and limit it,” he said. “We’ll keep fighting until duck shooting is banned.

“Public opinion is opposed to duck shooting and duck shooting will come to an end in Victoria as it has in Western Australia, New South Wales and Queensland.

“In Victoria we are still fighting the issue. The cruelty that rescuers see out on the wetlands is absolutely horrific.

“Duck shooters don’t have any empathy for their victims, for those beautiful native water birds that are shot out of the sky.

“Our rescuers do have empathy and it’s very hard for them to witness the shocking animal cruelty that takes place out there and not be traumatised by it.”

Mr Levy said publicity surrounding duck shooting had exposed the nature of the activity.

He said the media coverage from when CADS first went out into the wetlands was a real eye-opener for the public.

“In today’s age the public won’t stand for cruelty,” he said.

“When 15 rescuers went out to challenge 100,000 duck shooters in Victoria in 1986, the reason we succeeded was because of the media coverage.

“For the first time the public saw native water birds being rescued. They also saw the terrible damage that had been done to their bodies.

“That’s when the campaign took off, because of all the media coverage.

“It has been media coverage over the last 37 years that has brought the number of duck shooters down from 100,000 in 1986 to about 8,000-10,000 active duck shooters today in Victoria.”

Mr Levy said there was simply no role for duck shooting these days, arguing that calling the activity a tradition didn't stack up.

“It is not a tradition, it is a bloody slaughter that has always taken place and that slaughter is being exposed to the public. That so-called tradition doesn't exist and duck shooting is coming to an end.”

As for any economic advantages duck shooting might bring, Mr Levy said he believed the boost from banning the practice would be far more beneficial.

“In regional Victoria duck shooters don't bring in any money these days because their numbers are down to 0.2 per cent of Victoria's population,” he said.

“They might buy some fuel at the local petrol station in regional towns, but that's it. The money for regional Victorians is in nature-based tourism and bird watching, that's where the money is.”

He pointed to Phillip Islands and the little penguins as an prime example of bird-based tourism.

“You only have to look at the penguins down at Phillip Island. Over one million tourists go down there to look at the penguins waddle ashore every night and that brings in dollars to Phillip Island every year.

“The money in regional Victoria is in nature-based tourism and bird watching, it's an easy one. And before you can have bird watching you have to get rid of the duck shooters.”

He recommended those opposed to duck shooting write a letter to the Premier or get in contact with their local politician.

He added that people looking for more information or who are interested in joining the CADS rescue team can head to www.duck.org.au