

State News You Can Use!

ILLINOIS

ILLINOIS WATERFOWL HUNTING UPDATES

PERMITS, OPEN HOUSES, SEASON DATES

The Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) is reminding waterfowl hunters of key dates and other information regarding the 2019-2020 waterfowl seasons and beyond.

Public Duck and Goose Hunting Permits

The application periods for Illinois Public Duck and Goose Hunting Area Permits are now open, with application periods of Sept. 1-14 for the second lottery, and Sept. 15-28 for the third lottery. Permits remaining after the third lottery will be available on a first-come, first-served basis online starting Oct. 1. Permits are no longer mailed to successful participants but will be emailed, and participants can check the status of their permit application online and print their permit.

More information, including online applications, instructions and a list of participating sites is available on the IDNR website at:

<https://www.dnr.illinois.gov/hunting/waterfowl/Pages/OnlinePermitApplication.aspx>

New sites added to the permit system this year include Mermet Lake State Fish and Wildlife Area in Massac County and the Black Crown Marsh Unit of Moraine Hills State Park in McHenry County. Mermet will offer a portion of the daily drawing opportunities to permit holders, while the remaining opportunities will be filled by daily drawing at the site. Black Crown Marsh will be available to one party of hunters per day four days per week.

IOWA

IOWA'S PHEASANT POPULATION STEADY, QUAIL DOWN

Iowa's pheasant hunters should expect to find a similar number of birds as last year, with the exception of south central and southeast Iowa, where the pheasant population decline was more significant.

Based on the August roadside survey, Iowa's statewide average is 17 pheasants per 30 mile route, down from 21 per route last year.

"The survey shows a population similar to last year for most of the state and based on those results, pheasant hunters can expect 2019 to be a near repeat in most regions of 2018," said Todd Bogenschutz, upland wildlife research biologist for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

He said hunters shouldn't avoid hunting areas with lower counts, but rather focus on hunting the best available habitat. "Hunting areas where there's good habitat next to a food source should increase the chance for success regardless of where you're hunting in the state," he said.

The 2019 roadside index is nearly identical to 2008, when hunters harvested almost 400,000 roosters.

"Unfortunately even though this year's roadside index is the same as 2008, our pheasant harvest will only

likely be 200,000 roosters rather than 400,000. Why? Because of the lack of pheasant hunters," said Bogenschutz. "In 2008 we had 86,000 pheasant hunters, this fall we predict we'll have 50,000 hunters - we have the bird population to harvest close to 400,000 birds, but we don't have the hunters to harvest them."

Iowa's quail population was down 36 percent from last year. Iowa's quail range is across the southern three tiers of counties.

The full report is available at www.iowadnr.gov/pheasantsurvey. Iowa's pheasant and quail seasons open Oct. 26.

Late winter, lousy spring hampers reproduction, opening day success

The two factors that determine Iowa's pheasant population are weather and habitat. Iowa's pheasant population dip is likely due to a combination of hen mortality from a late arriving cold and snowy winter followed by nesting failures from the cool spring and record setting rainfall in May.

That wet spring could pay benefits down the road to hunters who cannot get to the field until after opening day.

Farmers who faced significant planting delays in the spring will likely have a later than normal harvest. Hunters should expect to see standing crops when the season opens, making hunting more difficult early.

KANSAS

KANSAS' UPLAND BIRD HUNTING PROSPECTS ARE GOOD

Surveys are complete, data is in, and the 2019 Kansas Upland Bird Hunting Forecast is ready for viewing. The highly-anticipated annual forecast predicts what pheasant, quail and prairie chicken hunters can likely expect going into the new seasons. Based on this year's crow counts for pheasants, whistle counts for quail, and lek counts for prairie chickens, overall upland bird hunting prospects are looking "good" for fall.



PHEASANT

Pheasant hunting in Kansas should be fair to locally good this year. Heavy winter precipitation made hunting conditions tough in 2018 but provided ample soil moisture entering the 2019 nesting season. A few late winter storms raised some concern in western Kansas, but the spring crowing index remained the same as 2018, indicating there was no measurable impact on over-winter survival. Heavy rainfall continued throughout the spring and resulted in high levels of nest abandonment. However, nests that did hatch appear to have responded to the plentiful cover with relatively high chick survival, indicated by larger brood sizes. In wet years like 2019, the nesting season becomes lon-

ger, allowing for multiple re-nesting attempts. Overall, the large brood sizes, combined with production from re-nesting birds appear to have compensated for the losses from extreme spring weather.

The counts through much of central Kansas decreased while numbers farther west increased or remained similar to last year. Kansas continues to maintain one of the best pheasant populations in the country and the fall harvest should again be among the leading states.

The highest densities this year will likely be in the High Plains regions of western Kansas.

QUAIL

Quail hunting in Kansas should be good in 2019. Kansas is still supporting above-average quail populations after a recent population boom. While total harvest has remained below average due to decreasing hunter participation, the average daily bag has remained at some of the highest levels observed in 20 years.

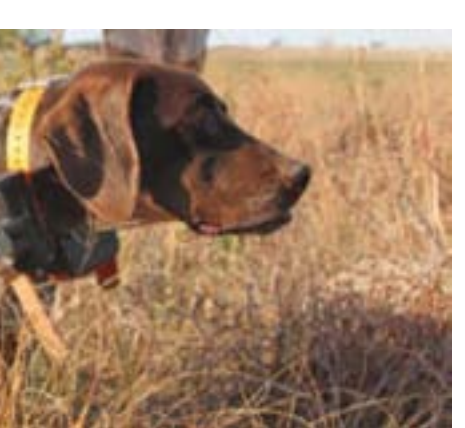
The bobwhite whistle survey in spring 2019 saw a modest decline following a generally poor production season in 2018. However, this is relative to a 20-year high in 2017, so despite the decline, spring densities were still well above average. The 2019 roadside survey index was just slightly higher than 2018, suggesting production compensated for any reductions previously recorded. However, regional quail densities have changed. Heavy precipitation and associated flooding across the eastern regions reduced productivity. While rainfall was also high across the western regions, a mid-summer dry period and improved habitat increased production. While densities in the eastern-most regions have decreased, all remaining regional indices remain at or above their respective long-term averages.

Kansas maintains one of the premier quail populations in the country and harvest will again be among the highest this year.

The best opportunities will be found in the central regions, extending east into the northern Flint Hills and west into the Southern High Plains.

PRAIRIE CHICKEN

Kansas is home to both greater and lesser prairie chickens. Both species require a landscape of predominately native grass and benefit from a few in-



terspersed grain fields. Lesser prairie chickens are found in west-central and southwestern Kansas in native prairie and nearby stands of native grass established through the CRP.

Greater prairie chickens are found primarily in the tallgrass and mixed-grass prairies that occur in the eastern third and northern half of the state. Greater prairie chickens have expanded in numbers and range in the northwestern portion of the state while declining in the eastern regions. Hunting opportunities will be best in the Northern High Plains and Smoky Hills regions this fall, where populations have either been increasing or stable, and public access is more abundant.

The Southwest Prairie Chicken Unit, where lesser prairie chickens are found, will remain closed to hunting this year. Greater prairie chickens may be harvested during the early prairie chicken season and the regular season with a two-bird daily bag limit in the Greater Prairie Chicken Unit. All prairie chicken hunters are required to purchase a \$2.50 Prairie Chicken Permit.

To view the complete forecast, including regional breakdowns for all three species, visit ksoutdoors.com/Hunting/Upland-Birds or pick up a printed copy at any Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism office (available soon). The full forecast will also be featured in the 2019 November/December issue of Kansas Wildlife and Parks Magazine, available for \$2.75 by calling (620) 672-5911.

MINNESOTA

TICKETS AVAILABLE FOR MINNESOTA GOVERNOR'S PHEASANT HUNTING OPENER BANQUET

Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz invites all Minnesotans to join him on Friday, Oct. 11 for the 9th Annual Minnesota Governor's Pheasant Hunting Opener Community Banquet in Austin.

Celebrating the pheasant opener is a long-standing Minnesota tradition, and one that Walz is proudly carrying on in his first pheasant opener as governor.

"I'm excited and proud to open the pheasant season in Austin," Walz said. "I'm grateful for the hard work and hospitality shown by our hosts in Austin, and I invite everyone to join us for this special Minnesota fall tradition."

Tickets to the banquet are \$35 each and can be purchased at Discover Austin, or by calling 507-437-4563. The banquet will feature a social hour, dinner, and program which will include Walz, Department of Natural Resources Commissioner Sarah Strommen, Explore Minnesota Director John Edman, and local presenters. Tickets are available until sold out.

The banquet is part of a week-end of festivities in Austin that will showcase the many hunting, recreational, and travel opportunities the area has to offer visitors. Austin has a population of 24,563 and is located at the junction of Interstate 90 and U.S. Highway 218 just north of the Minnesota-Iowa state line in Mower County. Explore Minnesota and the DNR are assisting Discover Austin in planning the event.

WHAT: Minnesota Governor's Pheasant Hunting Opener Community Banquet

WHERE: Austin Holiday Inn, 1701 4th St. NW, Austin, MN 55912

WHEN: Friday, Oct. 11, — 5 p.m. social hour; 6 p.m. community banquet

TICKETS: \$35 per person

In person: Discover Austin (301 North Main St., Suite 101, Austin, MN 55912)

By phone: 507-437-4563

More information and updates on the Governor's Pheasant Hunting Opener can be found at exploreminnesota.com/mngpho.

PHEASANT INDEX SHOWS VARIED OPPORTUNITIES ACROSS THE STATE

When the Minnesota pheasant season opens on Oct. 12, hunters are likely to find some areas with plenty of pheasants and other areas where the birds will be tougher to find, judging by results of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources annual roadside pheasant survey.

The roadside pheasant survey showed a 17 percent decrease in the overall pheasant index this year from 2018. The 2019 index was 11 percent below the 10-



year average, and 60 percent below the long-term average. This year's statewide pheasant index was 37.4 birds per 100 miles of roads driven.

"Though some regional and statewide pheasant indices declined, there is still reason to be optimistic," said Tim Lyons, upland game research scientist. "Birds are still abundant in some areas. But after a prolonged winter and wet spring, hunters may need to be choosier about where they go."

Uplands that escaped spring snowstorms and flooding, and contain native grasses and wildflowers provided the

best opportunities for hens to nest and raise young. These areas typically provide the best hunting opportunities as well. Hunters can use the DNR's online mapping tools to find wildlife management areas, at mndnr.gov/wmas, and the DNR Recreation Compass, at mndnr.gov/maps/compass.html, to help locate state hunting grounds and private lands enrolled in the Walk-in-Access program.

Looking at the survey results, the pheasant index decreased throughout much of the pheasant range, except in the south-central and east-central regions. There, the index grew by 24 percent and 13 percent, respectively, from 2018. The highest pheasant indexes were in the west-central and south-central regions where observers reported 43 to 49 birds per 100 miles driven. Hunting opportunities will also be good in the southwest and central regions.

Weather and habitat are the main influences on Minnesota's pheasant population trends. Weather causes annual fluctuations in pheasant numbers, while habitat drives long-term population trends.

Winters that linger can delay the start of the breeding season and reduce the success of early nests. Heavy rain, particularly at or just after hatching, can reduce chick survival.

This year, deep snow cover blanketed most of the pheasant range in February and March. Snowmelt and rainfall in April and May contributed to widespread flooding and estimated hatch dates indicate that nesting activity was delayed over much of the pheasant range. The range-wide hatch date in 2019 was nearly a week later than in 2018, and also a week later than the 10-year average.

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres in particular play a large role in providing habitat for pheasants in Minnesota. The program, authorized under

the federal Farm Bill, pays farmers to remove environmentally sensitive land from agricultural production and restore vegetation that will reduce soil erosion, improve water quality, and provide habitat for wildlife and pollinators.

Minnesota's 2019 pheasant season is open Saturday, Oct. 12, through Wednesday, Jan. 1.

HOW DNR CONDUCTS THE SURVEY

Monitoring pheasant population trends is part of the DNR's annual August roadside wildlife survey, which began in 1955. DNR wildlife managers and conservation officers in the farmland region of Minnesota conduct the survey during the first half of August. This year's survey consisted of 172 25-mile-long routes, with 152 routes located in the pheasant range.

Observers drive each route in early morning and record the number of farmland wildlife game species they see. The data provide an index of species abundance and are used to monitor annual fluctuations and long-term population trends of pheasants, gray (Hungarian) partridge, eastern cottontail rabbits, white-tailed jackrabbits, mourning doves, Sandhill cranes, and white-tailed deer.

Additional resources

For the 2019 August Roadside Survey report, a map of pheasant hunting prospects, survey data for other surveyed species, and information on hunting regulations and bag limits, visit the DNR pheasant hunting page at mndnr.gov/hunting/pheasant.

GROUSE HUNTERS ASKED TO HELP COLLECT SAMPLES FOR WEST NILE VIRUS STUDY

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources is asking ruffed grouse hunters in northern Minnesota to voluntarily submit samples for a West

Nile virus research project that the DNR is conducting.

Researchers will test hunter-harvested birds for exposure and active infections of the disease.

"We want to learn more about West Nile virus in ruffed grouse, because of concerns that it might be impacting the production of young birds, which make up a large portion of what hunters see in the fall," said Charlotte Roy, grouse project leader with the Minnesota DNR.

The adult grouse population has been cycling around a stable 10-year average.

Minnesota is collaborating on this project with researchers in Wisconsin and Michigan.

This is the second year of the study and results from the first year are expected from the lab early this fall. The research is partially funded by the Ruffed Grouse Society and the Game and Fish Fund.

"Thank you to all our volunteers and hunters who help us collect these samples. Participation from hunters is critical to the success of the project," Roy said.

West Nile virus has been present in Minnesota since the early 2000s, and cases have been found in wild birds, people and other mammals. Birds vary in vulnerability to the virus. Some bird species recover quickly and become tolerant to the virus while others, such as blue jays and crows, suffer higher rates of mortality. A study in Pennsylvania indicated the virus could impact ruffed grouse populations when combined with habitat stresses.

West Nile virus is carried by infected mosquitoes. Not all people or animals bitten by an infected mosquito will contract West Nile virus. There have been no documented cases of people contracting West Nile virus from consuming properly cooked meat.

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