

How to participate

Hunters who would like to assist with the project will need to collect blood on filter paper strips within 30 minutes of harvest. They will also be asked to provide the birds' hearts and few feathers for sex and age determination. Collection kits will be available for pickup at DNR area wildlife offices within ruffed grouse range after Labor Day on a first-come first-serve basis, and also at the regional DNR headquarters in Bemidji and Grand Rapids.

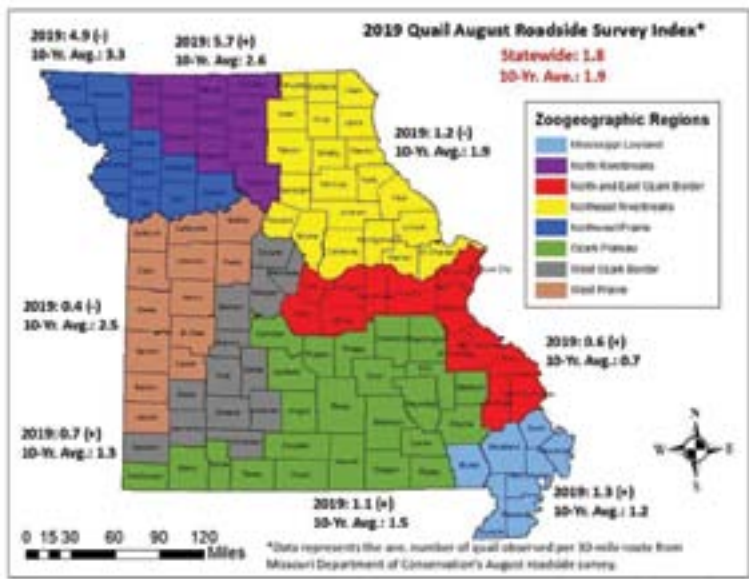
Contact information for wildlife offices is available at mndnr.gov/areas/wildlife and hunters are encouraged to call before stopping. Information can also be found in the Hunting Regulations Book. This year, the Ruffed Grouse Society is offering a shotgun and Pineridge Grouse Camp is offering a guided

According to MDC, this year's statewide average roadside index of 1.8 quail per route is slightly above last year's index of 1.7. An average of 0.3 pheasants were recorded per route, unchanged from last year.

"Hunters can expect to find a similar number of quail as last year, except for the Northeast Riverbreaks and Western Prairie regions where numbers were down notably," said MDC Small Game Coordinator David Hoover.

Hoover added that opportunities to hunt pheasants are much more limited, but northern portions of the Northwest Prairie and Northern Riverbreaks regions showed the best numbers this year.

"The amount of quality habitat is the most important factor for maintaining quail and pheasant populations, but weather also plays a very important,



hunt as prizes in a drawing for participating hunters that submit samples correctly.

Hunters are also participating in sample collection at the Ruffed Grouse Society National Hunt in October, Pineridge Grouse Camp, Bowen Lodge, Hoot-N-Holler, and the Akeley Grouse Hunt. Private hunting guides and wildlife students at participating colleges will also contribute to reaching the desired sample size of 400 birds.

Return postage and complete instructions are included in the kits. Samples also can be dropped off at Pineridge Grouse Camp near Remer.

More information about ruffed grouse management can be found on the DNR website.

Questions about the West Nile virus study can be directed to Charlotte Roy at 218-328-8876 or charlotte.roy@state.mn.us.

MISSOURI

MDC SAYS QUAIL AND PHEASANT NUMBERS STEADY DESPITE ROUGH START

With quail and pheasant-hunting season starting Nov. 1, the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) advises hunters that quail and pheasant production appears better than expected despite harsh conditions last winter and flooding this spring.

Each August, MDC conservation agents record the numbers of quail and pheasants they see while driving a 30-mile route – called the roadside index. A total of 110 routes are completed around the state. These numbers are then tallied and grouped by eight geographic areas of production – called zoogeographic regions.

even in regions with lower bird counts.

"To find birds, hunters should key in on areas with an abundance of diverse native grasslands or CRP (Conservation Reserve Program), shrubby cover, and some cropland nearby," he said.

Hunting season for quail and pheasants is Nov. 1 through Jan. 15, 2020. The daily bag limit for quail is eight with

a possession limit of 16. Daily bag limit for pheasant is two male pheasants with a possession limit of 4. Get more information from MDC online at <https://huntfish.mdc.mo.gov/hunting-trapping/species>, or pick up a copy of MDC's 2019 Missouri Hunting and Trapping Regulations booklet, available where permits are sold.

For information on places to hunt quail and pheasants on public lands, check out MDC's Small Game Hunting Prospects online at <https://huntfish.mdc.mo.gov/sites/default/files/downloads/SmallGameHuntingProspects.pdf>.

More on the roadside survey

MDC Resource Scientist Beth Emmerich manages the August roadside survey, which has been conducted since 1983.

"It represents the best way we have to track quail and pheasant populations on a statewide basis," Emmerich said. "The survey does a good job of tracking large-scale population changes and is a good barometer for how more localized populations may also be doing from year to year."

She added that 2015 saw the highest statewide roadside index in nearly a decade.

"That summer was extremely wet, resulting in many crop fields in northern Missouri left unplanted, and most of which developed diverse annual plant cover that persisted well into August. This abundance of good brood cover led to a very good production year for quail, despite the abnormally wet summer conditions. We had similar conditions this summer, but the previous winter had more periods of prolonged snow cover than we've had in the past three years."

MONTANA

IMPROVING UPLAND GAME BIRD HABITAT AND ACCESS

To improve habitat for upland game birds, landowners can apply to enroll in a variety of cost-share programs under the Upland Game Bird Habitat Enhancement Program (UG-BHEP) to develop, enhance, and conserve Montana's upland game bird habitats. Part of the agreements for these programs is that the land in the



Quail (pictured) and pheasant season starts Nov. 1 with numbers about the same as last year. MDC staff advise good hunting can be found in areas with quality habitat in north and west-central portions of the state.

project area remains open to reasonable public hunting. Generally, up to 75% of the cost of the landowner's UGBHEP project can be reimbursed.

One of the UGBHEP options to secure habitat and provide hunting opportunity is the Open Fields program. Open Fields started in 2014 and is a grant program that com-

MARKETPLACE

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bines Farm Bill funds with state hunting license dollars. The program works with landowners to manage CRP in a wildlife-friendly way that provides important cover for Montana's game birds. Conservation-incentive programs like Open Fields are geared to help landowners keep some land enrolled in CRP and to provide public game bird hunting opportunities.

Interested hunters can find the locations of Open Fields and other UGBHEP projects in the annual Montana Upland Game Bird Guide Enhancement Program Access or through the "hunt planner" on the FWP website.

In addition, the Block Management Access guides are another great resource to find places to hunt for upland birds.

NEBRASKA

UPLAND BIRD OPPORTUNITIES AWAIT NEBRASKA HUNTERS THIS FALL

Another fall of diverse upland bird hunting opportunities awaits Nebraska hunters.

The Southwest and Panhandle regions will provide the best hunting opportunities for pheasants, with more publicly accessible lands – primarily Open Fields and Waters – available in the Southwest, according to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's 2019 Upland Gamebird Hunting Outlook.

Overwinter survival was relatively high for pheasants this year but the cool, wet conditions that persisted into May and June likely had a negative impact on nesting success. However, habitat conditions have remained good to excellent and brood survival should be relatively high for those that successfully hatched. The statewide pheasant index from the 2019 July Rural Mail Carrier Survey was 14% lower compared to 2018.

The Outlook is based on spring and summer upland game surveys and conditions reported by biologists. Regional habitat trends and weather conditions that could impact populations are considered.

The best quail hunting opportuni-

ties will be found in the Republican, Southeast and East Central regions, but hunters should expect to find lower densities compared to recent years. Bobwhites experienced declines in most regions and statewide indices from two surveys were 21-37% lower compared to 2018. However, bobwhites are prolific breeders and have the ability to repopulate areas very quickly where suitable habitat exists.

The highest densities of prairie grouse are found in the Sandhills region, which also offers an abundance of publicly accessible lands. Spring lek counts were generally lower compared to recent years, but hunters should still find good grouse numbers and plenty of cover to walk this fall. The Sandhills remain the most popular destination for prairie grouse hunters but other public access opportunities in the Southwest and Panhandle regions should not be overlooked.

The Commission reminds hunters that surveys provide a broad assessment of upland game species

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