

Small game provides year-round opportunities

By Tom Betz

Kansas has game that can be hunted during the year beyond the big three: deer, pheasant and antelope.

Among the small game available are prairie chicken, cottontail and jack rabbits, squirrels and crows, and then there is non-game hunting of prairie dogs and other rodents.

A hunting license is required to take non-game species such as prairie dog, ground squirrel, woodchuck, kangaroo rat, starling and house sparrows. The season is open year around, and there is no possession limit on these animals.

Rabbit season is open year round for cottontail and jackrabbits. Daily bag limit on rabbits is 10 with 30 in possession. Squirrel (gray or fox) season is from June 1 to Feb. 28. Daily bag limit for squirrel is five with a possession limit of 20. Crow season is from Nov. 10 to March 10. There is no bag limit for crows.

Prairie chicken season runs from Nov. 19 to Jan. 31 except in the southwest. In the Southwest the prairie chicken season is from Nov. 19 to Dec. 3. The bag limit in the Northwest is 2 per day, and the bag limit in the Southwest is 1 per day.

Some landowners allow hunting of prairie dogs on their land as part of an effort to control them. The area wildlife conservation officer can usually provide a list of those who allow prairie dog hunting.

In Sherman, Cheyenne and Wallace counties, the officer is Mike Hopper and he can be reached at 785-899-5199. In Decatur and Rawlins County and west half of Norton County, the wildlife officer is Dick Kelly, 785-475-2950. The number in the east half of Norton County is 785-543-5820, and in Thomas County, 785-462-7602.

While some small game may seem pretty tame hunting, prairie dogs are tougher than it might seem at first blush because these little animals have organized themselves into towns, flat sections of ground where the "watchers" can see approaching trouble. With the first shot, they spread the alarm and quickly slip into their holes.

A hunter will have to be patient to wait for

the watchers to return and give them time to give the all-clear before taking the next shot.

Small game in Kansas can be hunted with shotguns no larger than 10 gauge with shot only; center fire and rimfire rifles and handguns; muzzleloading shotguns, rifles and pistols; cap-and-ball pistols; pellet guns; BB guns; bow and arrow; sling shot; and falconry.

Residents age 16 through 64 must have a hunting license, and nonresident hunters, regardless of age, must have a nonresident license. Anyone who has not lived in Kansas for 60 days is considered a nonresident. Arrangements for a lifetime license can be made through the department's office in Pratt.

Nonresidents who are full-time students at state colleges or vocational schools may obtain resident licenses and permits, but must carry evidence of their status as students.

There are exemptions from the hunting license requirement for landowners or tenants of land leased for agriculture, and their immediate families living with them, while hunting or fur harvesting on this land.

The season for furbearer hunting or trapping of badger; bobcat; gray, red, swift fox; mink; muskrat; opossum; raccoon; striped skunk and weasel is Nov. 17 to Feb. 15. The license cost \$20.15 for an adult, \$12.15 for a junior license (under 16) and \$252.15 for a nonresident. A nonresident bobcat permit can be purchased for \$102.15 which allows the hunter to bag one animal.

A furharvester license is required to hunt, trap or pursue (run) furbearers or to sell their pelts. Those born on or after July 1, 1966, must complete a furharvester education course approved by the Department of Wildlife and Parks. Course information is available by calling 620-672-5911 or at www.kdwp.state.ks.us.

Anyone born after July 1, 1957, must complete a certified hunter education course to purchase a hunting license or furharvest license, except on lands they own.

Those under age 27 must carry an approved hunter education card with them while hunting in Kansas. Kansas recognizes approved courses in all other states.

This year's rain helps out pheasant population

By Kimberly Davis

Thanks to the good start on wheat fields in northwest Kansas last spring and some timely rains, biologists say the pheasants population has had a huge increase over last year.

Randy Rodgers, small game biologist with the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks in Hays, said the agency ran its annual summer brood survey in July and August. The index for birds was up 42 percent.

"That is a huge increase," said Mr. Rodgers.

That means this is the second year in a row the bird population has been up, he said, and that's good news, especially after years of declining numbers through the drought.

The drought, said Mr. Rodgers, seemed to really take hold in 2000. From 2002 to 2003, the pheasant numbers in northwest Kansas were at a low. Last year, there was a little increase, but this year, the increase is much bigger.

One of the key reasons the population went up, said Mr. Rodgers, is that the wheat got off to a good start this year. By the third or fourth week in April, crops were roughly 10 inches high, which provided good nesting conditions and cover for young birds. The wheat, he said, actually got off to one of the best starts he has seen.

It turned out to be pretty dry in May, so the wheat didn't fill out with grain which wasn't good for the farmers, he said, but as far as cover for the birds it was great.

Actually, said Mr. Rodgers, the weather helped the birds some because the nests were established and the birds didn't have to contend with major storms during the nesting period.

The main downside this year was the hot, windy spell in mid July. That weather reduced chick survival, he said.

This year, said Mr. Rodgers, the peak of the hatch was in the first 10 days of June, although pheasants can hatch any time from April to August. The hot, dry conditions in July was hard on younger chicks, three weeks and under.

Mr. Rodgers said it a good thing the area started to get rain in August, because it helped the birds out. If the rain hadn't started to fall, the bird count would have been a lot lower, he said.

Another reason there is an increase this year, he said, is simply because there was a slight jump last year, which meant there were more birds breeding this year.

With more birds, Mr. Rodgers said, there probably will be a few more hunters. If hunters comes out early in the season, which starts the second Saturday of November, and hunting is good, then they will most likely make more trips. In the past few years, he said, many have come out early to hunt and didn't see anything, and many didn't come back.

A strong hunting season should boost the area's economy a little, he added.

Although it didn't have anything to do with the bird numbers, he said, the of the Kansas Wildlife and Parks Commission has voted to start pheasant season a week earlier in 2006. That means the opening day will be the first Saturday in November.

Mr. Rodgers said quail numbers are up a little, too. Although quail don't nest in wheat, the weather was favorable for them, too. Still, there aren't that many quail in this area compared to farther east.

Northwest Kansas is not the hotbed of quail country, but with the federal Conservation Reserve Programs, there has been an increase in the population in the western part of the state. The program pays farmers to put "highly erodible" land into grass or trees rather than crops, providing more cover.

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