

# 2012 Upland Bird Forecast now available

The Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism has released its 2012 Kansas Upland Bird Forecast and, because of continued drought, the state will likely experience a below-average upland bird season this fall. Kansas upland bird hunters experienced a down season in 2011, and this summer's heat and drought in parts of the state have not improved upland bird prospects for 2012. For those willing to hunt hard, there will still be pockets of fair bird numbers, especially in the northern Flint Hills and northcentral and northwestern parts of the state.

Although last winter was mild, winter precipitation is important for spring vegetation, which is critical to reproductive success, and most of Kansas did not get enough winter precipitation. Pheasant breeding populations showed significant reductions in 2012, especially in primary pheasant range in western Kansas. Spring came early and hot this year but also included fair spring moisture until early May, when the precipitation stopped. Then the state experienced record heat and drought through the rest of the reproductive season.

Early nesting conditions were generally good for prairie chickens and pheasants. However, the primary nesting habitat for pheasants in western Kansas is winter wheat, and in 2012, Kansas had one of the earliest wheat harvests on record. Wheat harvest can destroy nests and very young broods. The early harvest likely lowered pheasant nest- and early-brood success. The intense heat and lack of rain in June and July resulted in decreased brood cover and insect populations, causing lower chick survival for all upland game birds.

Because of drought, all counties in Kansas were opened to Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) emergency haying or grazing. Many CRP fields, including Walk In Hunting Areas may be affected. Kansas has more than one million acres of WIHA (atlases available online at ksoutdoors.com or at any license vendor). Often, older stands of CRP grass need disturbance, and haying and grazing can improve habitat for the next breeding season and ultimately be beneficial if weather is favorable.

The regular opening date for the pheasant and quail seasons is Nov. 10 for the entire state. The previous weekend — Nov. 3-4 — is the special youth pheasant and quail season. Youth participating in the special season must be 16 years old or younger and accompanied by a non-hunting adult who is 18 or older. All public wildlife areas and

Season	Open Dates	Daily Bag (Possession)	Open Areas
Prairie chicken (Early)	15 Sep. – 15 Oct.	2(8)	East Unit: East of Hwy 281 NW Unit: North of Hwy 96 and West of Hwy 281
Youth Pheasant	3-4 Nov.	2(4)	Statewide
Youth Quail	3-4 Nov.	4(8)	Statewide
Pheasant	10 Nov. – 31 Jan.	4(16)	Statewide
Quail	10 Nov. 31 Jan.	8(32)	Statewide
Prairie chicken * East and Northwest Units	17 Nov. – 31 Jan.	2(8)	Excludes area south of Hwy 96 & west of Hwy 281
Prairie chicken * Southwest Unit	17 Nov. – 31 Dec.	1(4)	South of Hwy 96 & west of Hwy. 281

WIHA tracts will be open for public access during the special youth season.

**Pheasant:** Pheasant breeding populations dropped by nearly 50 percent or more across pheasant range from 2011 to 2012, resulting in fewer adult hens in the population to start the 2012 nesting season. Drought has resulted in less cover and insects needed for good pheasant reproduction. Additionally, winter wheat serves as major nesting habitat for pheasants in western Kansas, and a record early wheat harvest this summer likely destroyed some nests and young broods. Then the hot, dry weather set in from May to August, the primary brood-rearing period for pheasants. Insufficient precipitation and lack of habitat and insects throughout the state's primary pheasant range resulted in limited production. This will reduce hunting prospects compared to recent years. However, some good opportunities to harvest roosters in the Sunflower State remain, especially for those willing to work for their birds. Though the drought has taken its toll, Kansas still contains a pheasant population that will produce a harvest in the top three or four major pheasant states this year.

The best areas this year will likely be pockets of north-

west and northcentral Kansas. Populations in southwest Kansas were hit hardest by the 2011-2012 drought (72 percent decline in breeding population), and a very limited amount of production occurred this season due to continued drought and limited breeding populations.

**Quail :** The bobwhite breeding population in 2012 was generally stable or improved compared to 2011. Areas in the northern Flint Hills and parts of northeast Kansas experienced improved production this year. Much of eastern Kansas has seen consistent declines in quail populations in recent decades. After many years of depressed populations, this year's rebound in quail reproduction in eastern Kansas is welcome, but overall populations are still below historic averages. The best quail hunting will be found throughout the northern Flint Hills and parts of central Kansas. Prolonged drought likely impaired production in central and western Kansas.


**Prairie Chicken:** Kansas is home to greater and lesser prairie chickens. Both species require a landscape of predominately native grass. Lesser prairie chickens are found in westcentral and southwestern Kansas in native prairie and nearby stands of native grass in CRP. Greater prairie chickens are found primarily in the tallgrass and mixed-grass prairies in the eastern one-third and northern one-half of the state.

The spring prairie chicken lek survey indicated that most populations remained stable or declined from last year. Declines were likely due to extreme drought throughout 2011. Areas of northcentral and northwest Kansas fared the best, while areas in southcentral and southwest Kansas experienced the sharpest declines where drought was most severe. Many areas in the Flint Hills were not burned this spring due to drought. This resulted in far more residual grass cover for much improved nesting conditions compared to recent years. There have been some reports of prairie chicken broods in these areas, and hunting will likely be somewhat improved compared to recent years.

Because of recent increases in prairie chicken (both species) populations in northwest Kansas, regulations have been revised this year. The early prairie chicken season (Sept. 15-Oct. 15) and two-bird bag limit has been extended into northwest Kansas. The northwest unit boundary has also been revised to include areas north of U.S. Highway 96 and west of U.S. Highway 281. Additionally, all prairie chicken hunters are now required to purchase a \$2.50 prairie chicken permit.

**Norton Travel & Tourism** DiscoverNorton.Com  
 109 South State - PO Box 132 - Norton, KS 67654 - Phone 785-877-2501  
 www.us36.net/nortonkansas Where the Best Come to Stay!

**WELCOME TO NORTON STATE PARK AND SEBELIUS RESERVOIR—**  
**CAMPING, FISHING AND WILDLIFE**



GALLERY OF ALSO RANS—  
 Unsuccessful Candidates for Presidency of the United States  
 STATION 15—  
 Leavenworth to Pikes Peak Stagecoach Stop  
**"WHERE THE BEST COME TO STAY"**

**YOUR LOCAL BOTTLE FILL STATION**



**CAMPER AND BARBECUE GRILL CYLINDERS FILLED HERE**

**Stop in and Let Rick Schwab and Bob Neff Take Care of You!**

**NORTON FUEL SERVICE AND NORTON PROPANE SERVICE**  
 206 N. Jones, Norton, KS — 785-877-3218  
**TOLL FREE 800-953-4985**