

# Pheasant and quail numbers increase over the past year

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Pheasant and quail seasons are just around the corner and the good news is that biologists say the weather over the last year has helped increase or keep the numbers of the birds the same in northwest Kansas.

Pheasant season starts the first Saturday in November, while quail season starts the second Saturday of the month this year.

This is the second year that the pheasant season will start the first weekend of November, on Nov. 3.

Randy Rodgers, small game biologist with the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks in Hays, said although he is sure people around the area know bird numbers are better than he does, the summer brood survey looks good.

The survey, he said, is done each year from mid-July to mid-August. Wildlife managers keep track of every pheasant and quail seen in a six-week period. Part of that, said Mr. Rodgers, is how many birds are seen, where they are seen, young or old and male or female. Those numbers are then compared to last year.

Last year, Mr. Rodgers said the pheasant population was down, as was the quail population.

This year, he said, he is pleased with the pheasant numbers in most of the area, predicting the population is up significantly despite a hard winter. He said numbers in the areas south and southwest of Oberlin probably are the same as last year.

It looks like there was good pheasant production in northwest Kansas, said Mr. Rodgers. A lot of that was due to the wheat crop, which greened up early giving the pheasants a place to live.



A cock pheasant stands in a field. Hunting season for these birds opens on Saturday, Nov. 3.

— Photo by Bill Bussen

The frost last spring, which delayed harvest, also helped the birds out because the hens had a chance to nest in green wheat. The chicks had a chance to get a little older before they had to figure out a way to get out of the way of the combines, he said.

Areas west and southwest of Decatur County, he said, where there were even deeper snows over the winter, didn't fare as well with their pheasant population. The birds just couldn't survive the snow, he said; it made it hard for them

to find anything to eat.

In those areas, said Mr. Rodgers, the hunting will be patchy, although there still are some birds.

There are going to be some hunting areas, he said, that will be quite good, and others that won't be as good.

Overall, he said, he is pleased with the population. Mr. Rodgers said he just didn't believe the population would increase like it did.

There should be a much higher portion of

young birds this year, he said, whereas there were more adult birds last year. Adult birds, said Mr. Rodgers, are harder to hunt; they have more experience and are more wryly. The younger birds just don't know as much.

"I do think the pheasant population in northwest Kansas is better this year than last year," said Mr. Rodgers, adding that he is fairly optimistic about the upcoming season.

As far as quail go though, they didn't fare as well. Decatur County and west of there isn't really top quail country to begin with, the biologist said.

In Phillips, Norton and Graham counties, quail numbers are average, said Mr. Rodgers, but in other counties in the northwest, there aren't as many birds.

Quail have a more limited population, especially in the west and southwest, just because of the nature of the country, he said. The extreme winter last year was really hard on those birds; he said. Quail just can't handle that kind of snow cover.

Joe Dejmal, co-owner of Dale's Fish 'N' Fun, said earlier on it was hard to know how many birds there really were in the area because there was good cover this year. The rain fall over the last year really helped out the chick production as far as pheasants go.

A lot of guys weren't saying anything, not really seeing any birds, but once the crops started coming out people started to talk.

Now, said Mr. Dejmal, he has received good reports about how many birds there are in the area.

This is the second year, he said, that pheasant season starts the first weekend in November. Mr. Dejmal said he is looking forward to a good turnout this season with a good number of birds available.

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