

Banner year predicted for pheasants

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

With Thanksgiving fast approaching and Colorado's pheasant and quail seasons now in full swing, upland bird hunters have plenty to be thankful for, especially pheasant hunters on Colorado's Eastern Plains.

An unusually wet spring and summer throughout much of Colorado's core pheasant range improved nesting habitat, helping to boost pheasant populations to the highest numbers in years.

"There are an excellent number of pheasants this year," said Ed Gorman, DOW small game manager. "Every indication is that we had very good recruitment of young pheasants and good carryover of birds from last year. The bottom line is that where there is good habitat, there are plenty of pheasants, which should translate into an exceptional year for Colorado hunters."

According to population surveys, hunters will find the greatest number of pheasants in Yuma, Kit Carson, Phillips, Sedgwick and eastern- Logan counties, followed by improved numbers in Prowers, Baca and Cheyenne counties.

Upland hunters in Morgan, Weld and Washington counties will see better pheasant numbers over 2008; however, birds are still recovering from several years of drought conditions and populations will be more localized in these counties.

Although pheasants will be abundant in most areas, standing corn fields may pose a significant obstacle to hunters pursuing "ringnecks" during the first couple weeks of the season.

"Colorado's corn harvest is delayed again this year because of cool, wet weather during the last several weeks," said Gorman. "Therefore, pheasants may concentrate in standing corn and be inaccessible to hunters until these fields have been harvested later in the season."

Hunters would do well to look for areas where corn has already been harvested or where winter wheat is the predominant crop. Hunting should quickly improve as the remaining corn crops are

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harvested and pheasants are pushed into more accessible habitat.

Quail: Southeast Colorado scaled quail populations are in the process of recovering from the 2006 blizzard and several years of drought. Quail populations should be higher than last year, but remain below long-term averages despite good nesting conditions in 2009.

In northeast Colorado, bobwhite quail are generally restricted to the South Platte River, the Frenchman and Arickaree drainages, and scattered coveys are also found within the sandhills of Phillips and Yuma Counties. Bobwhite quail populations appear to be improved over 2008 although, in some areas, populations are much lower than five years ago. Even with higher water this summer, quail appear to have had a fairly good nesting and brooding season. A delayed corn harvest in the valley, particularly the fields adjacent to the river corridor, will make hunting more difficult early in the season.

Walk-In access program: The DOW Walk-In Access program offers approximately 220,000 acres of small game hunting access on private lands across the state. Many of these areas provide opportunities for pheasant and quail hunting.

The "2009 Walk-In Atlas" and the "2009 Late Cropland Atlas" are now available and include all properties enrolled in this program. The "Late Cropland Atlas" includes only those properties which were added for the pheasant and waterfowl seasons. Therefore, hunters must obtain both atlases to view all properties enrolled in the WIA program.

Atlases provide detailed descriptions of each property, including the type of cover crop (corn, grass, wheat stubble) and offer other useful information and tips for upland hunters.

Walk-In Atlases are available at DOW offices and license agents statewide.

While the printed atlases have been written to be as accurate as possible, hunters should not hunt fields unless they are clearly marked with Walk-In Access signs. A Walk-In Access Permit is required to hunt any WIA properties.

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New for the 2009 season: Sprinkler corners enrolled in the WIA program are closed to hunting until farming operations have concluded. This closure is in effect to allow harvesters to work efficiently and to minimize safety concerns to hunters and farm workers. Corners are posted with closure signs in addition to WIA boundary signs.

Hunters are reminded to keep WIA properties clean and to never clean birds or litter on WIA areas.

Hunting Private Land: Hunters must obtain permission to hunt on private land, whether that land is posted or not. Hunters wishing to hunt on private land should seek permission from the landowner or lessee well in advance of their planned hunt.

Harvest Information Program: Hunters are reminded to register with the Harvest Information Program (HIP) and get their HIP number before heading out into the field. Hunters must write their HIP number in the space provided on their small game license. HIP numbers can be obtained by calling 1-866-265-6447 or at: www.colohip.com.

2009 Small Game Brochure: For more information on small game regulations, season dates and bag-and-possession limits, pick up a copy of the 2009 Colorado Small Game brochure. Brochures are available at any DOW office or license agents statewide.

'Step up to Better Pheasant Hunting.' Upland hunters who would like to improve their success in the field this season are encouraged to pick up a copy of the 2009 Colorado Outdoors "Hunting Guide." This special edition of Colorado Outdoors magazine features "Step up to Better Pheasant Hunting," an in-depth article providing tips and tactics on how to evaluate pheasant habitat, hunt planning and getting the most out of the Division's Walk-In Access program.

For more information about Division of Wildlife go to: <http://wildlife.state.co.us>.