

NDG&F September 13th Newsletter

Pheasant Numbers Rebound from Last Year

North Dakota's roadside pheasant survey conducted in late July and August revealed the pheasant population is in much better shape than last year, especially in the southern half of the state.

Stan Kohn, upland game management supervisor for the North Dakota Game and Fish Department, said total pheasants were up 34 percent statewide from last year, brood observations were up 26 percent, and average brood size was up 14 percent. However, pheasant numbers are still down roughly 40 percent from the peak years of 2003-08. The final summary is the result of 277 runs made along 99 brood routes across North Dakota.

This summer's brood data suggests much better production this spring than in 2008 and 2009. "Good nesting and brooding cover this spring, coupled with improved weather conditions, has increased nesting success and brood/chick survival," Kohn said. "Consequently, more young birds will be added to the population this fall, improving pheasant numbers, especially in the southern half of the state."

Statistics from southwestern North Dakota indicate both the number of broods and number of birds observed were up 30 percent from 2009. Observers counted 19 broods and 165 birds per 100 miles. The average brood size was six. "Brood numbers indicate the southwest will have the best pheasant numbers this fall," Kohn said. "Though survey numbers are not at the level observed during the peak years of the mid 2000s, hunters in the southwest can expect to see good numbers of pheasants."

Results from the southeast show 10 broods and 76 birds per 100 miles. The average brood size was 5.2. "Hunters should find more pheasants in the southeastern part of the state than last fall, as an increase in the number of broods and birds observed indicates about a 30 percent increase in pheasant numbers," Kohn said.

Statistics from the northwest indicated seven broods and 48 birds per 100 miles. Average brood size was 5.1. "I expect the northwest will have about the same number of pheasants this fall as last year, as birds observed on the routes were unchanged from 2009 and the number of broods observed increased only 9 percent," Kohn said.

The northeast district, generally containing secondary pheasant habitat with much of it lacking good winter cover, showed 1.3 broods and 12 birds per 100 miles. Average brood size was 5.36. Both number of birds observed and number of broods recorded were down 30 percent. "This district is not known for its pheasant population, but there will be local areas holding birds," Kohn said.

The 2010 regular pheasant season opens Oct. 9 and continues through Jan. 2, 2011. The two-day youth pheasant hunting weekend, when legally licensed residents and nonresidents ages 15 and younger can hunt statewide, is set for Oct. 2-3.

Bighorns Resilient Despite Tough Winters

While two consecutive severe winters played a significant role in reducing the state's bighorn sheep population, overall numbers are still strong, according to Brett Wiedmann, big game biologist for the North Dakota Game and Fish Department in Dickinson.

A July-August survey in western North Dakota showed 289 bighorn sheep, down 20 from last year and 27 below 2008's record summer survey. "Let's keep in mind we are comparing this year's count to record totals, so all things considered I am pleased with our current numbers," Wiedmann said.

Bighorn sheep can tolerate frigid temperatures, Wiedmann said, but it's the deep snow that causes problems. "They struggle in deep snow because of their short legs, especially lambs," Wiedmann said. "Similar to other western big game species, bighorns could really use a mild winter this year."

Survey results revealed 94 rams, 150 ewes and 45 lambs – 231 in the northern badlands (a decrease of 11 from last year) and 58 in the southern badlands (down nine). "The encouraging news is bighorns are doing very well in the northern badlands, but continue to struggle in the south," Wiedmann said, while noting that 39 lambs were observed in the north, but only six in the south. "The northern badlands herds are carrying the population right now."

The department's survey does not include an additional 30 bighorns that inhabit the North Unit of Theodore Roosevelt National Park.

Annual bighorn sheep survey statistics are not recorded using a calendar year, but instead are done over a 12 month period beginning each April and ending the following March. Each summer, Game and Fish Department biologists count and classify all bighorns, a process that takes nearly six weeks to complete as biologists locate each bighorn herd in the badlands by tracking radio-marked animals from an airplane, and then hike into each band in order to record population demographics using a spotting scope and binoculars. Biologists then complete the annual survey by recounting lambs in March to determine lamb recruitment.

North Dakota's bighorn sheep hunting season opens Oct. 22 and continues through Nov. 4. Six licenses were issued.

BOW, Delta Waterfowl to Host Waterfowl Workshop

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's Becoming an Outdoors-Woman program and Delta Waterfowl are hosting the third annual waterfowl hunting workshop for women Sept. 25-26 in Bismarck.

Saturday's events will include instruction on waterfowl identification, firearm safety, hunting with decoys and calling birds. Sunday will feature a mentored hunt, followed by cleaning game.

Women interested in participating in the workshop must have a firearms safety certificate, 2010 hunting license and duck stamp. Waders or rubber boots are recommended. Some ammunition will be provided if necessary.

The workshop is open to the first 20 woman ages 18 or older to register. The cost is \$20, and preregistration with payment is required.

For more information contact Nancy Boldt, North Dakota Game and Fish Department, at (701) 328-6312; or by [e-mail](#).

[Registration forms](#) are available on the Game and Fish website.