

## Iowa Department of Natural Resources

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# 2020 Pheasant Nesting Outlook

## *For Immediate Release*

Use by June 30th

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June is here and the peak of Iowa's pheasant hatch is at hand, so what can Iowa's upland hunters expect this fall? Todd Bogenschutz, DNR upland wildlife biologist, says the DNR can make an educated guess at fall pheasant trends each year based on winter and spring weather conditions as reported by NOAA. The predictions are based on a weather model using 50 years of DNR roadside count and NOAA weather data. Our pheasant population typically shows increases following mild winters (Dec – Mar) with springs (Apr – May) that are dryer and warmer than normal. Last year our weather model predicted a downward trend in pheasant numbers, said Bogenschutz, and our roadside counts showed a 16% decrease so the model was correct again. We have used this model to forecast the pheasant trend since 2002 and the model has been correct 15 of those 18 years (83%).

Winter weather - statewide snowfall from December through March totaled 18.3 inches or 7 inches below the 1961-90 average (Table 1). This was Iowa's lowest snowfall since 2012. Snowfall was below normal in all regions of the state (Table 1). Winter hen survival was likely above normal for most regions for both pheasant and bobwhite (Figure 1). The unusual part about this past winter, said Bogenschutz, is we started very mild in Dec, had above normal snow in January and then relatively mild again in February and March. Pheasant and quail populations typically show increases following milder winters because more hens survive the winter leading to more hens available for nesting and more nests equals more chicks for the fall, provided nesting weather is favorable.

Spring nesting weather – Statewide the spring months averaged drier and colder than the 1961-90 average (Table 1). The spring came early with little snow cover in March. April temperatures were cooler than normal, but rainfall was well below normal. Weather in May remained on the cool side and rainfall was slightly above normal. Nesting season rainfall was 6.1 inches or one inch below the 1961-90 average. This is Iowa's lowest nesting season rainfall since 1994. Similar to snowfall, rainfall totals were below normal in all regions (Table 1). Rainfall was particularly lower than normal in the WC region of the state (Figure 1). Although cooler than normal, the drier weather during nesting this spring make it likely Iowa will have a strong pheasant hatch in 2020. Hurricane Cristobal dropped 3-5” of rain in the eastern half of Iowa on June 9<sup>th</sup>, which is normally the peak of the pheasant hatch. Terrible timing, said Bogenschutz, we will have to see what the roadside counts show and how this affected nesting.

Given the statewide information our weather model is predicting pheasant populations will be higher for the fall 2020 hunting season, said Bogenschutz. Last year was a down year after several upward trending years, said Bogenschutz, but these data suggest a nice increase this fall. Hunters in the northern half of Iowa reported good success last fall, so hunting could be even better this fall. Anecdotally staff and landowners have reported early and large pheasant broods suggesting a good hatch is underway. This prediction is a best guess based on weather data, said Bogenschutz, and it can be wrong. The DNR's August roadside survey is the best gauge of what upland populations will be this fall. The DNR will post its August roadside numbers on the DNR webpage [www.iowadnr.gov/pheasantsurvey](http://www.iowadnr.gov/pheasantsurvey) around September 15<sup>th</sup>.

Habitat for pheasant and quail has remained stable compared to last year, although the Wildlife Bureau is concerned about the impact of low rental rates on CRP signups. USDA is expected hold another general CRP signup this fall. For more information about CRP visit the DNR's website [www.iowadnr.gov/habitat](http://www.iowadnr.gov/habitat). CRP lands

