



# 2019-20 Upland Gamebird Hunting Outlook

The following forecast is based on spring and summer upland game population surveys, including the July Rural Mail Carrier Survey (RMCS), and the Northern Bobwhite Whistle Count Survey. In addition, biologists from across the state provided input on regional weather events and habitat trends that could have impacted populations. The summaries below reflect the best available information regarding the relative abundances of upland gamebird species among the different regions of Nebraska, but should not be used to predict hunting conditions or local population densities at any single location within a region. Preseason scouting is highly encouraged to increase hunter success. For more information about upland gamebird hunting in Nebraska, visit [www.OutdoorNebraska.org/upland](http://www.OutdoorNebraska.org/upland). All of Nebraska's publicly accessible lands are displayed in the 2019-2020 Public Access Atlas, which is available online at [www.OutdoorNebraska.org/PublicAccessAtlas](http://www.OutdoorNebraska.org/PublicAccessAtlas).

## **RING-NECKED PHEASANT**

---

The statewide index for pheasant abundance from the 2019 July RMCS was 14% lower compared to 2018, and declines were observed in 5 of 6 regions. Although many areas of the state experienced extreme winter weather and/or flooding resulting from the "bomb-cyclone" event in February/March, declines were not observed in the April 2019 RMCS (+14% statewide increase), indicating high overwinter survival. In nearly all regions, cool/wet conditions persisted into May/June, which likely had a negative impact on nest success. Given the timing of the July RMCS (8-11 July), lower indices observed are likely indicative of delayed nesting and/or abandonment of early nesting attempts caused by the cool/wet weather. Recent field reports are mixed but many have noted numerous (smaller-sized) broods produced from later nesting attempts in areas where suitable habitat exists. Current habitat conditions are good to excellent following the abundant moisture received earlier this spring/summer and brood survival should be relatively high for those that successfully hatched. The Southwest and Panhandle regions will again provide the best hunting opportunities for pheasants, with more publicly accessible lands (primarily OFW) available in the Southwest.

## **NORTHERN BOBWHITE**

---

Statewide, bobwhite abundance indices from the July RMCS and Whistle Count Survey were 21-37% lower compared to 2018 and also below the 5-year averages. At the northernmost extent of their range, Nebraska's bobwhite populations are limited by extreme winter weather events. Over the past several years, bobwhites expanded into many areas outside of their core range in southeastern and south-central Nebraska following several consecutive mild winters. This past winter, much of Nebraska's bobwhite range experienced above normal snowfall, prolonged snow cover, and extreme freezing temperatures. This likely had a negative impact on overwinter survival as declines in bobwhite abundance were observed in all regions except West Platte (East Central results mixed among surveys). No mass mortality events were reported and field staff have been observing/hearing quail in all the usual places where suitable habitat exists. Bobwhites are prolific breeders (i.e., large clutch size, long nesting season, potential to produce multiple broods) and thus, have the ability to re-populate areas very quickly. The best hunting opportunities can be found in the Republican, Southeast, and East Central regions but hunters should expect to find lower densities compared to recent years.

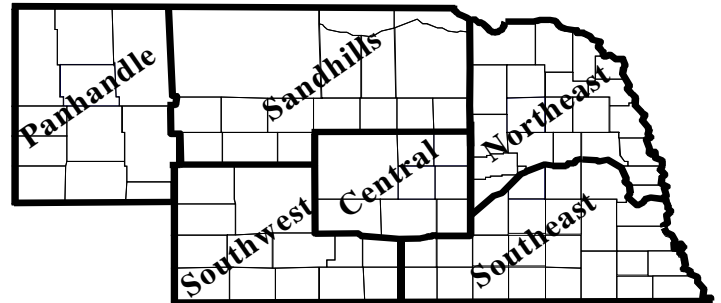
## **PRAIRIE GROUSE (SHARP-TAILED GROUSE & GREATER PRAIRIE-CHICKEN)**

---

Spring lek counts for prairie grouse were generally lower compared to previous years but many of these surveys were confounded by poor weather conditions and inaccessible roads. The Sandhills region has experienced relatively cooler temperatures and above normal precipitation throughout 2019 and many low-lying roads and meadows have remained flooded throughout the summer. Current habitat conditions are good throughout the region but it is unclear to what extent these environmental factors may have impacted nesting and/or brood survival. Brood reports are generally limited for prairie grouse due to the remoteness of grasslands they inhabit yet field staff and local ranchers have been observing broods of variable sizes and ages. The Sandhills region offers excellent hunting opportunities (both species) on several large tracts of federal land, along with a scattering of other publicly accessible sites (WMAs, OFW sites, etc.). There are also some good public hunting opportunities on OFW sites and Conservation Partners lands in the Southwest (mostly greater prairie-chickens) and Panhandle (mostly sharp-tailed grouse) regions that should not be overlooked.

◆ *See back of sheet for regional survey results* ◆

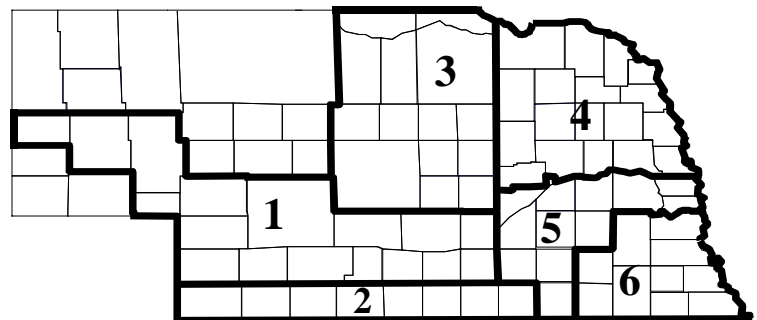
### Ring-Necked Pheasant Surveys:



Region	% Change from*:		OVERALL Abundance Rank (1 = Best)	Top Counties (Based on July Rural Mail Carrier Survey)
	2018 July Rural Mail Carrier Survey	2014-2018 July RMCS Average		
Central	83	6	4	Sherman, Greeley, Howard
Northeast	-2	-17	3	Burt, Pierce, Boone, Madison, Platte
Panhandle	-50	-44	2	Cheyenne, Box Butte, Dawes, Morrill, Deuel
Sandhills	-38	-26	5	Blaine, Grant, Cherry
Southeast	-6	-32	6	Hamilton, Clay, Thayer, York
Southwest	-13	-17	1	Hitchcock, Perkins, Chase, Hayes, Keith
Statewide	-14	-19		

### Northern Bobwhite Surveys:

1. West Platte
2. Republican
3. North Central
4. Northeast
5. East Central
6. Southeast



Region	% Change From*			OVERALL Abundance Rank (1 = Best)	Top Counties (Based on July Rural Mail Carrier Survey)
	2018 Bobwhite Whistle Count	2018 Rural Mail Carrier Survey	2013-2017 July RMCS Average		
West Platte	+9	+36	+13	4	Adams, Hayes, Perkins, Buffalo
Republican	-43	-22	-21	1	Furnas, Harlan, Franklin, Nuckolls
North Central	-77	-11	-39	5	Greeley, Sherman, Valley
Northeast	-31	0	-11	6	Washington, Boone, Platte, Nance
East Central	+2	-23	+10	2	Hamilton, Clay, Sarpy, Polk, Fillmore
Southeast	-41	-52	-63	3	Gage, Lancaster, Johnson, Jefferson, Cass
Statewide	-37	-21	-26		

\* For low-ranked regions, large percent changes in indices might not translate into noticeable changes in hunting conditions.