

Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Project №: W-15-R-82

Title of Job: 2025 July Rural Mail Carrier Survey



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The 2025 July Rural Mail Carrier Survey was conducted 7-10 July 2025. We received 330 cards by 24 July 2025, of which 300 cards contained complete information needed for analysis (Tables 1-3). Rural carriers made observations while traveling 124,796 miles of rural roads in 86 of Nebraska's 93 counties.

Caveats. Interpretations of the percent change from previous year's indices and longer-term means are only meaningful in relation to the indices themselves. That is, when an index value is low, insignificant changes in the index can translate into large percent changes but result in no observable difference in abundance within the region. For example, an increase in a species' index from 0.01 animals observed per 100 miles to 0.02 animals per 100 miles is a 100% increase but would not likely be noticeable to hunters afield. Further, survey methodology does not allow the estimation of population size or density, but only trends in relative abundance through time. At a statewide scale, these indices are correlated with annual harvest and are, therefore, useful for forecasting conditions hunters may encounter in the fall, particularly when combined with results from other surveys.

Interpretations. Compared to 2024, statewide indices of relative abundance were mixed for the various upland game species: indices were up for turkey and jackrabbit, were down for pheasant and grouse, and were similar to 2024 for cottontail and bobwhite. Of the statewide indices, pheasant and jackrabbit were significantly different than those observed in July 2024, based on confidence intervals. Regional indices were also very mixed depending on the species. Pheasant age ratios were lower in all regions except the Sandhills regions where ratios were higher and the Northeast where the ratio was similar to 2024.

Take-Home Message. The results of the 2025 July Rural Mail Carrier Survey indicate that the relative abundance of small game species was mixed compared to July 2024. Fall abundance for most species will depend on this summer's production, so the results of the October Rural Mail Carrier Survey may provide more clarity on what to expect this fall.

TABLE 1. Raw counts of prairie grouse, wild turkey, cottontail, and jackrabbits from the 2025 July Rural Mail Carrier Survey by pheasant management region (Figure 1).

Region	Carriers	Miles	Grouse	Turkey	Cottontail	Jackrabbit
Central	40	17,355	19	343	342	14
Northeast	67	28,759	25	150	596	25
Panhandle	33	11,002	28	210	115	17
Sandhills	36	13,551	37	248	148	19
Southeast	89	38,564	9	331	571	5
Southwest	35	15,565	12	413	192	11
Statewide	300	124,796	130	1,695	1,964	91

TABLE 2. Raw counts from the 2025 July Rural Mail Carrier Survey for pheasants and pheasant age-ratios by pheasant management region (Figure 1).

Region	Carriers	Miles	Total Pheasants	Juveniles/Adults
Central	40	17,355	119	0.09
Northeast	67	28,759	200	0.11
Panhandle	33	11,002	106	0.23
Sandhills	36	13,551	42	0.20
Southeast	89	38,564	114	0.13
Southwest	35	15,565	173	0.27
Statewide	300	124,796	754	0.17

TABLE 3. Raw counts from the 2025 July Rural Mail Carrier Survey for bobwhites, by bobwhite management zone (Figure 2).

Zone	Carriers	Miles	Bobwhites
East Central	46	18,779	100
North Central	44	19,343	115
Northeast	60	26,517	30
Republican	21	9,842	57
Southeast	39	16,753	44
West Platte	55	22,073	40
Not Quail Range (NQR)	35	11,488	0
Statewide	300	124,796	386

Results.

Pheasant: This year's statewide pheasant index was lower than in 2024 and was lower than the long-term averages. Regionally, survey results were higher in the Central, Northeast, and Sandhill regions, and lower elsewhere. Relative abundance continues to be highest in the Southwest and Panhandle regions (Table 4). Statewide, pheasant age ratios, which can be indicative of production, were generally lower than those observed in 2024 (Table 2).

Quail: The bobwhite index was similar statewide compared to 2024 and was below the long-term averages. In 2025, declines were observed in the East-Central, Northeast, and Southeast management regions and were higher in the North Central, Republican, and West Platte regions (Table 5).

Wild Turkey: Statewide, this year's wild turkey index was slightly higher to 2024, and is higher than the 5- and 10-year means. Increases compared to 2024 were observed in all but 2 of 6 regions (Northeast and Sandhills; Table 6).

Prairie Grouse: The statewide index for prairie grouse was lower than in 2024. Regionally, results were mixed this year with increases in the Panhandle, Sandhills, Southeast, and Southwest regions and declines elsewhere (Table 7). Almost all regional indices had confidence limits overlapping zero, indicating they were not statistically different from zero.

Cottontail/Jackrabbit: The statewide cottontail index was similar to that observed in 2024 and increases were observed in all management regions except Central (Table 8). Jackrabbit indices increased in all management regions except Central and Southeast. The jackrabbit statewide index was 38% higher than in 2024 (Table 9). Relative abundance of jackrabbits was highest in the Sandhills and Panhandle regions.

FIGURE 1. Pheasant management regions.

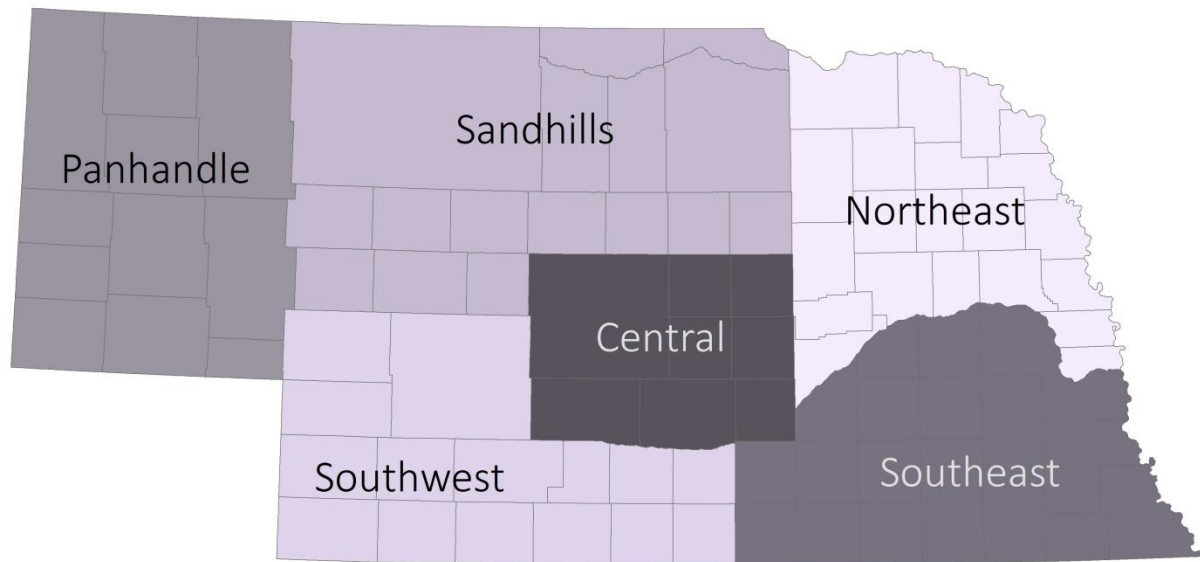


FIGURE 2. Bobwhite management zones.

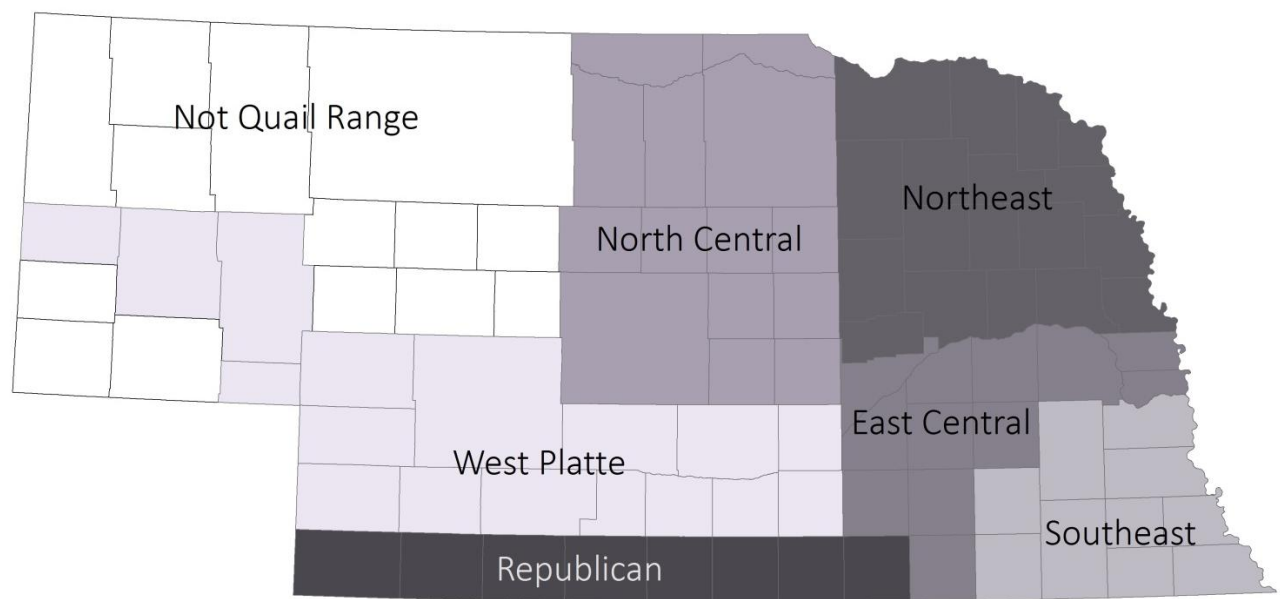


TABLE 4. Pheasant indices from the 2025 July Rural Mail Carrier Survey by pheasant management region (Figure 1). Carrier means are weighted by miles traveled per carrier.

Region	Mean pheasants per 100 miles & 90% Confidence Limits	Percent Difference from:			
		2024	Mean 2020-2024	Mean 2015-2024	Mean 2005-2024
Central	0.69 (0.45-0.91)	9	80	47	-10
Northeast	0.69 (0.18-1.21)	3	-4	5	-35
Panhandle	0.96 (0.37-1.56)	-23	-33	-40	-36
Sandhills	0.31 (0.00-0.88)	198	-47	-24	-58
Southeast	0.30 (0.00-0.79)	-38	-19	-28	-61
Southwest	1.11 (0.55-1.67)	-8	-13	-26	-47
Statewide	0.60 (0.52-0.69)	-12	-9	-17	-44

FIGURE 3. Regional and statewide time series (1979-2025) of pheasant abundance indices from the July Rural Mail Carrier Survey by pheasant management region (Figure 1).



TABLE 5. Northern bobwhite indices from the 2025 July Rural Mail Carrier Survey by bobwhite management zone (Figure 2). Carrier means are weighted by miles traveled per carrier.

Zone	Mean bobwhites per 100 miles & 90% Confidence Limits	Percent Difference from:			
		2024	Mean 2020-2024	Mean 2015-2024	Mean 2005-2024
East Central	0.53 (0.38-0.68)	21	-2	-22	-14
North Central	0.59 (0.23-0.95)	37	79	3	-16
Northeast	0.11 (0.00-0.46)	-56	-57	-41	-52
Republican	0.58 (0.17-0.98)	27	13	-31	-28
Southeast	0.26 (0.00-0.63)	-54	-40	-68	-70
West Platte	0.18 (0.00-0.54)	34	2	-23	-34
NQR	0	NA	NA	NA	NA
Statewide (QR)	0.31 (0.25-0.37)	-2	-2	-29	-33

FIGURE 4. Regional and statewide time series (1979-2025) of indices of northern bobwhite abundance from the July Rural Mail Carrier Survey.

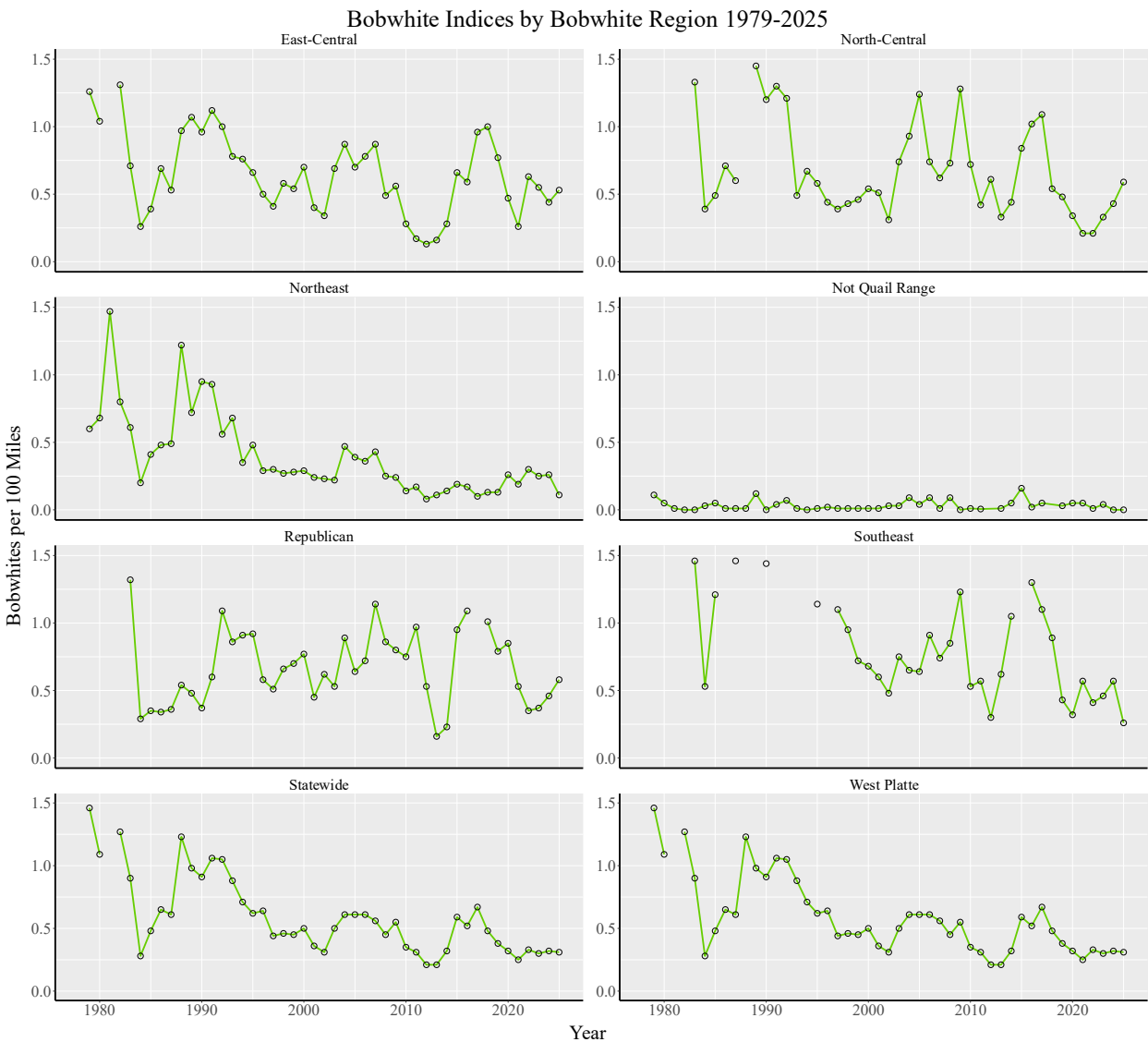


TABLE 6. Wild turkey indices from the 2025 July Rural Mail Carrier Survey by pheasant management region (Figure 1). Carrier means are weighted by miles traveled per carrier.

Region	Mean turkeys per 100 miles & 90% Confidence Limits	Percent Difference from:			
		2024	Mean 2020-2024	Mean 2015-2024	Mean 2005-2024
Central	1.98 (1.47-2.47)	7	22	34	8
Northeast	0.52 (0.00-1.65)	-47	-51	-44	-47
Panhandle	1.91 (0.61-3.21)	51	34	95	140
Sandhills	1.83 (0.57-3.08)	-5	9	6	-38
Southeast	0.86 (0.00-1.96)	22	10	-1	-27
Southwest	2.65 (1.42-3.87)	18	9	-12	-16
Statewide	1.36 (1.16-1.55)	4	3	4	-13

FIGURE 5. Regional and statewide time series (2000-2025) of wild turkey abundance indices from the July Rural Mail Carrier Survey.

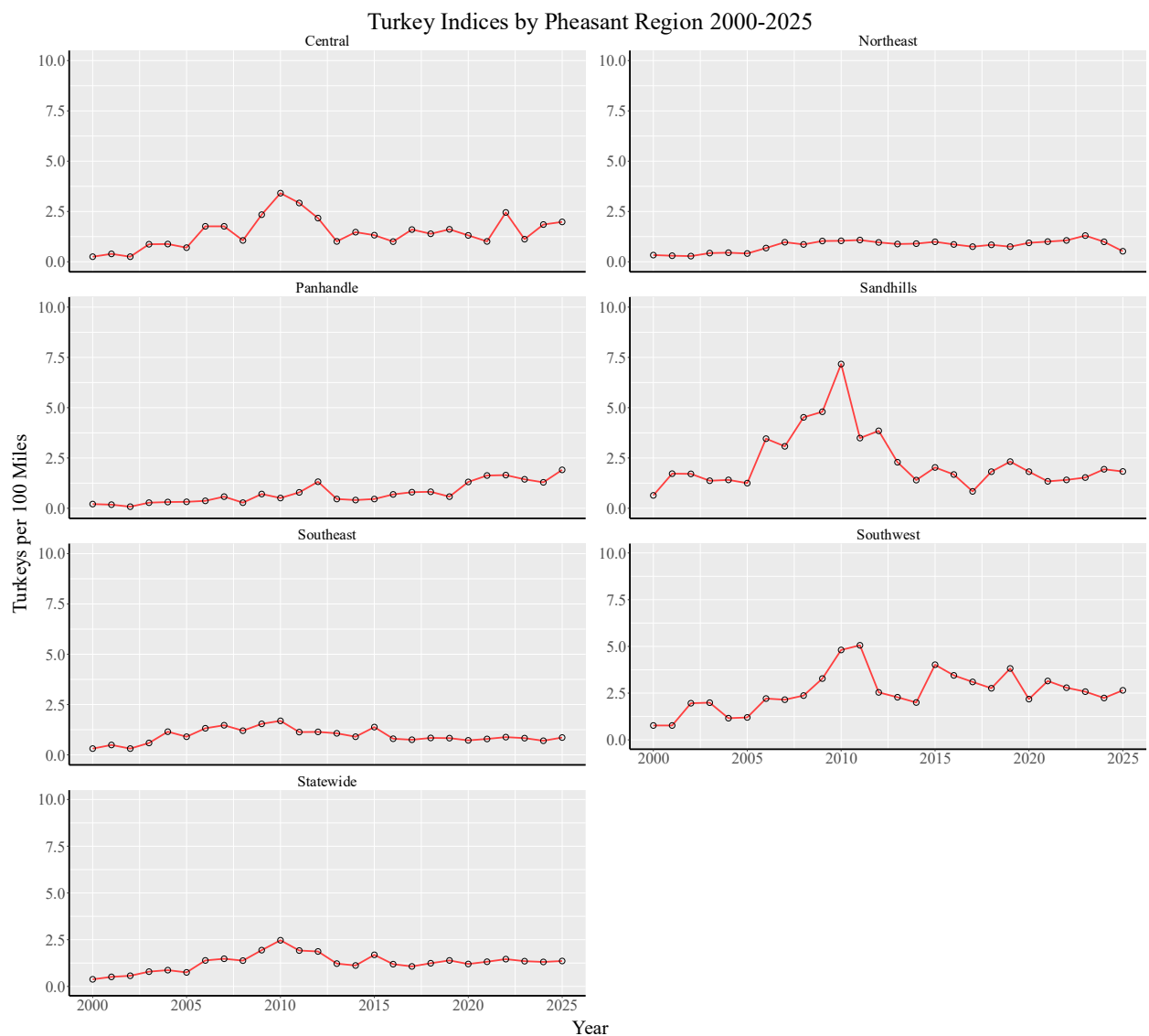


TABLE 7. Prairie grouse indices from the 2025 July Rural Mail Carrier Survey by pheasant management region (Figure 1). Carrier means are weighted by miles traveled per carrier.

Region	Mean grouse per 100 miles & 90% Confidence Limits	Percent Difference from:		
		2024	Mean 2020-2024	Mean 2015-2024
Central	0.11 (0.00-0.23)	-70	-50	-61
Northeast	0.08 (0.00-0.35)	-71	-31	28
Panhandle	0.25 (0.00-0.56)	135	95	117
Sandhills	0.27 (0.00-0.56)	25	49	-27
Southeast	0.02 (0.00-0.28)	43	10	-12
Southwest	0.07 (0.00-0.36)	28	-36	-21
Statewide	0.10 (0.06-0.15)	-37	-7	-9

FIGURE 6. Prairie grouse regional and statewide time series (1979-2025) of indices of abundance from the July Rural Mail Carrier Survey.



TABLE 8. Cottontail indices from the 2025 July Rural Mail Carrier Survey by pheasant management region (Figure 1). Carrier means are weighted by miles traveled per carrier.

Region	Mean cottontails per 100 miles & 90% Confidence Limits	Percent Difference from:			
		2024	Mean 2020-2024	Mean 2015-2024	Mean 2005-2024
Central	1.97 (1.64-2.29)	-31	10	19	-17
Northeast	2.07 (1.33-2.81)	21	59	110	64
Panhandle	1.04 (0.19-1.89)	2	25	20	40
Sandhills	1.09 (0.27-1.91)	3	61	64	32
Southeast	1.48 (0.76-2.20)	9	26	23	5
Southwest	1.23 (0.43-2.03)	14	11	6	-3
Statewide	1.57 (1.45-1.69)	1	31	40	-15

FIGURE 7. Regional and statewide time series (1958-2025) of cottontail abundance indices from the July Rural Mail Carrier Survey.

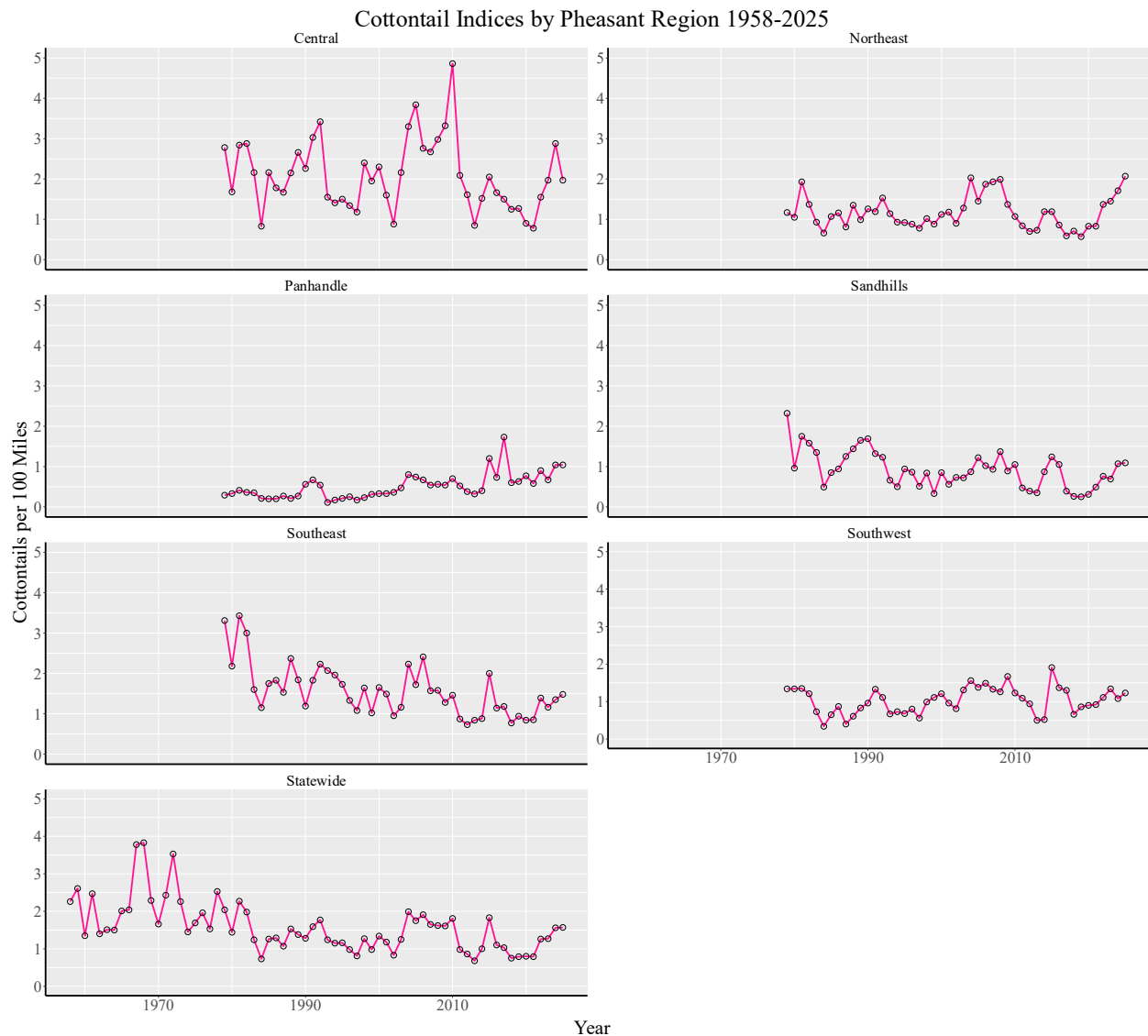


TABLE 9. Jackrabbit indices from the 2025 July Rural Mail Carrier Survey by pheasant management region (Figure 1). Carrier means are weighted by miles traveled per carrier.

Region	Mean Jackrabbit per 1000 miles & 90% Confidence Limits	Percent Difference from:			
		2024	Mean 2020-2024	Mean 2015-2024	Mean 2005-2024
Central	0.80 (0.27-1.34)	-10	69	-8	-15
Northeast	0.87 (0.00-2.08)	90	268	357	153
Panhandle	1.54 (0.15-2.94)	18	34	-44	-42
Sandhills	1.40 (0.05-2.75)	134	168	43	-23
Southeast	0.13 (0.00-1.31)	-20	-37	-5	-63
Southwest	0.71 (0.00-2.02)	41	4	-63	-65
Statewide	0.73 (0.53-0.93)	38	68	-6	-24

FIGURE 8. Regional and statewide time series (1963-2025) of jackrabbit abundance indices from the July Rural Mail Carrier Survey.

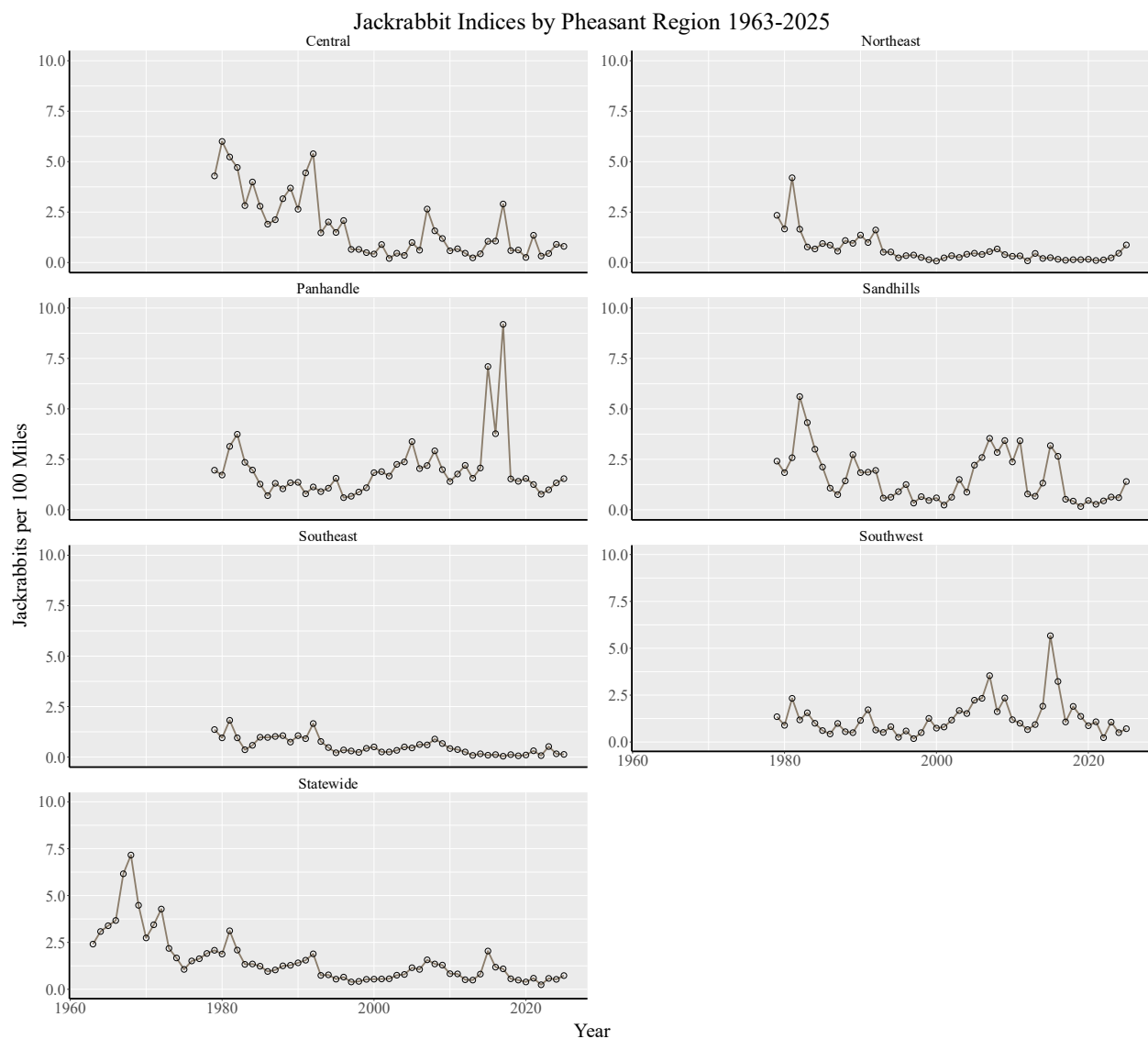


TABLE 10. Number of cards and percent of total cards ($n = 300$) that contained zero observations of each species of wildlife. Overall, 10.7% of cards contained zero observations of all species (32 cards), which is slightly down from the 41 of 333 cards (12.3%) with no observations returned in 2024.

	Pheasant	Bobwhite	Grouse	Turkey	Cottontail	Jackrabbit
Nº of Cards	146	226	268	130	72	259
Percent	49%	75%	89%	43%	24%	86%

We appreciate the time, support, and valuable information from all the mail carriers that participated in this survey.

Without the help from these carriers, this survey would not have been possible.

Thank you.

For further information regarding these results, please contact Bryan O'Connor at bryan.oconnor@nebraska.gov