



Illustration by Chris Medley

Pheasants prey on Saturday

By Jeff Obrecht

Saturday marks the opening of Nebraska's 56th consecutive pheasant season. From the first two-day open season in 1927, to this year's three-month hunt, the ring-necked pheasant reigns king as Nebraska's favorite game bird.

The pheasant has experienced many population ups and down in its brief Nebraska history, said Ken Johnson, chief of the wildlife division for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.

Populations peaked in the early '50s when Nebraska had 12 million to 15 million pheasants in the state. Since then, there has been a steady decline because of changes in agricultural practices, Johnson said.

Jim Mitchell, game commission upland game specialist, estimated that the pheasant population is down 10 to 15 percent from last year.

He said the southwest portion of the state, including the McCook area, is down 30 to 40 percent; the northeast down 25 percent the sandhills up slightly and the popular Alliance area "is pretty grim."

"Our estimates are based solely on rural mail carrier surveys," Mitchell said. "The southwest still has a fairly high density of pheasants, despite being down in numbers. Mail carriers on the average saw 4 1/2 pheasants per mile there and only 1 1/2 per mile in the Alliance area."

Mitchell said pheasant numbers are down because their early nesting efforts were a failure because of rainy and cold weather in May and early June.

"A hen pheasant will try to nest several times if her first nest is destroyed before the eggs hatch," Mitchell said. "But after the eggs hatch — if the nest is destroyed — very rarely will she try again."

He said the second and third hatches people see are actually the second and third attempts at nesting. Hens don't raise more than one brood a year, he said.

"Our years of best hunting are when we have a very successful early hatch," Mitchell said. "Later hatches are not as successful because of the declining physical condition of the hen pheasant."

Pheasant hatching peaks in mid-June, but the quail hatch peaks in mid-July and continues throughout the summer. Quail numbers are basically the same as last year, Mitchell said. Quail season also

opens Saturday.

"I expect this quail season to pretty much be a reflection of last year," Mitchell said.

As always, the best quail hunting will be along river drainages and in the southeast portion of the state. The northeast offers another game bird, the Hungarian partridge.

"The rural carriers say that they (partridges) are up a little but we really don't have much information on them," Mitchell said. "There were only about 3,600 of them harvested last year, while the pheasant harvest was 878,000 and the quail 572,000."

Nebraska's habitat plan, implemented in 1977, is providing more opportunities for sportsmen to hunt upland game, Mitchell said, but isn't extensive enough yet to have any impact on total harvest.

The Payment-In-Kind program had no beneficial effect on wildlife, Johnson said.

Bag and possession limits for quail and Hungarian partridges are three and nine respectively and six and 18 for pheasant.

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Teacher shortage serious problem

By Jonathan Taylor

A shortage of mathematics and science instructors has caused a near-crisis situation in the teaching profession, said Judith Sayre Grim, vice president of the national teaching honorary Pi Lambda Theta.

Grim said the shortage exists because more graduate students are accepting jobs from industries in their field of study rather than entering the teaching profession. She said the value of teaching as a profession has "slipped a few rungs on the ladder" because other professions offer higher salaries.

Society rewards professions such as lawyers and doctors with attractive incomes, but teachers' low starting salaries discourage graduates from entering the profession, she said.

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