

2020 Pheasant Season Outlook

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Ring-neck pheasants remain a popular upland game species among Oklahoma hunters with approximately 45,800 pheasants harvested in 2019. The ODWC monitors the pheasant population through two surveys; spring crow counts (Table 1) and summer brood surveys (Table 2). The data collected provides an index of the spring breeding population (crow counts) and recruitment success for that year (brood surveys). Traditionally Alfalfa, Beaver, Cimarron, Grant, and Texas Counties have had the highest pheasant numbers. These 5 counties have had spring crow surveys since 1973, and brood surveys since 1980. In 1998, the surveys were expanded to 13 counties to include Ellis, Garfield, Harper, Kay, Major, Noble, Woods, and Woodward.

The spring 2020 crow count survey resulted in a higher number of calls heard per point than 2019 (Table 1). Looking at the numbers from 1973 to 2020 there is a positive trend in the number of calls heard during the spring crow call count surveys. The August brood surveys were down from 2019 with 0.005 broods/mile observed in the state compared to 0.05 in 2019 (Table 2). The 5 traditional counties were also down from 0.27 in 2019 to 0.005 in 2020. The total number of pheasants observed also decreased from 93 in 2019 to 30 in 2020. As the nesting season wore on, rainfall seemed to stop for much of the pheasant range in Oklahoma. Figure 1 below shows a comparison of drought levels in Oklahoma from March 3rd to October 13th. At the time of this report, all of the pheasant range in Oklahoma is now at least abnormally dry, with a majority of the range in moderate to severe drought. Figure 2 shows the departure from normal rainfall from April 24th - October 20th with areas up to 8.9" below normal rainfall. Too little rain can have just as much of an impact as too much rain. However, there are still decent numbers of reports coming in from people seeing $\frac{1}{2}$ and $\frac{3}{4}$ grown birds. It appears that 2020 had multiple nesting attempts with the first broods being reported in mid-June and the most recent report in mid-October.

Pheasant numbers this season will most likely be patchy. Properties or areas where habitat is good for pheasant, insects are plentiful, forbs are abundant, and drought has not made a severe impact should still hold a fair amount of birds.

Pheasant season opens on December 1st 2020 and runs through January 31st 2021. Hunters are allowed to harvest two cock pheasants daily. Open areas include Alfalfa, Beaver, Cimarron, Garfield, Grant, Harper, Kay, Major, Noble, Osage, Texas, Woods and Woodward counties; and the portions of Blaine, Dewey, Ellis, Kingfisher and Logan counties north of State Highway 51. Seasons on public lands may vary from the statewide season. For more regulations and other information consult the Oklahoma Hunting and Fishing Guide online at <http://www.wildlifedepartment.com/hunting/> or in print wherever hunting and fishing licenses are sold.

Remember, the outdoors are #AlwaysOpen! Work some ground, trust your dog, and make a memory!

Table 1: Pheasant crows heard per point

Pheasant Crows/Point

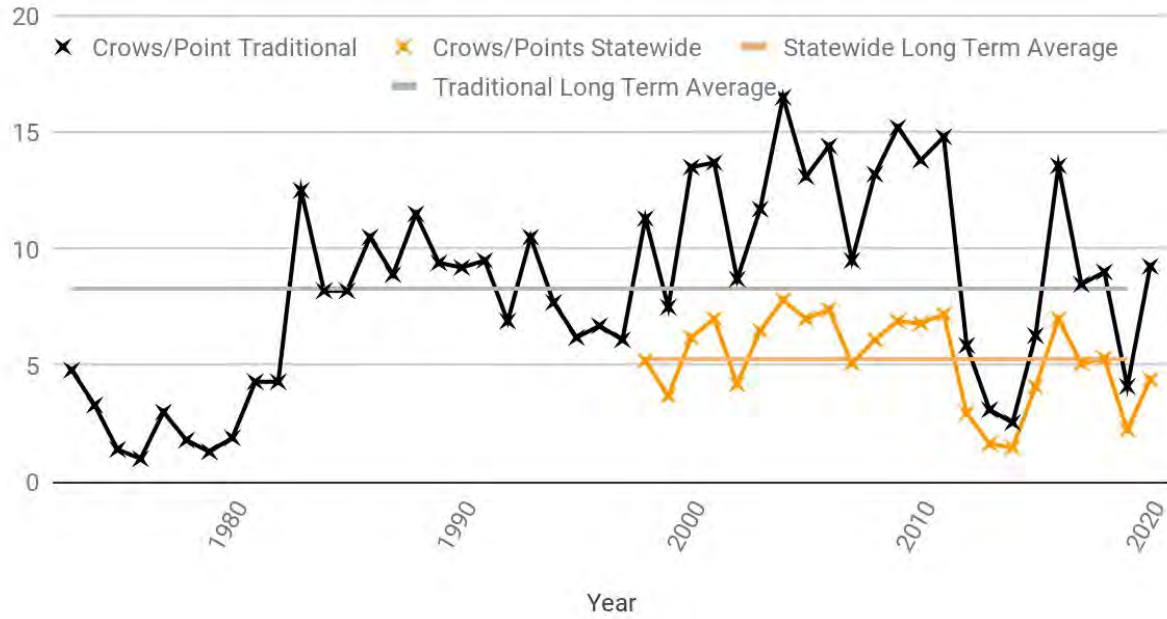


Table 2: Pheasant broods observed per 20 mile route

Pheasant Broods/Route

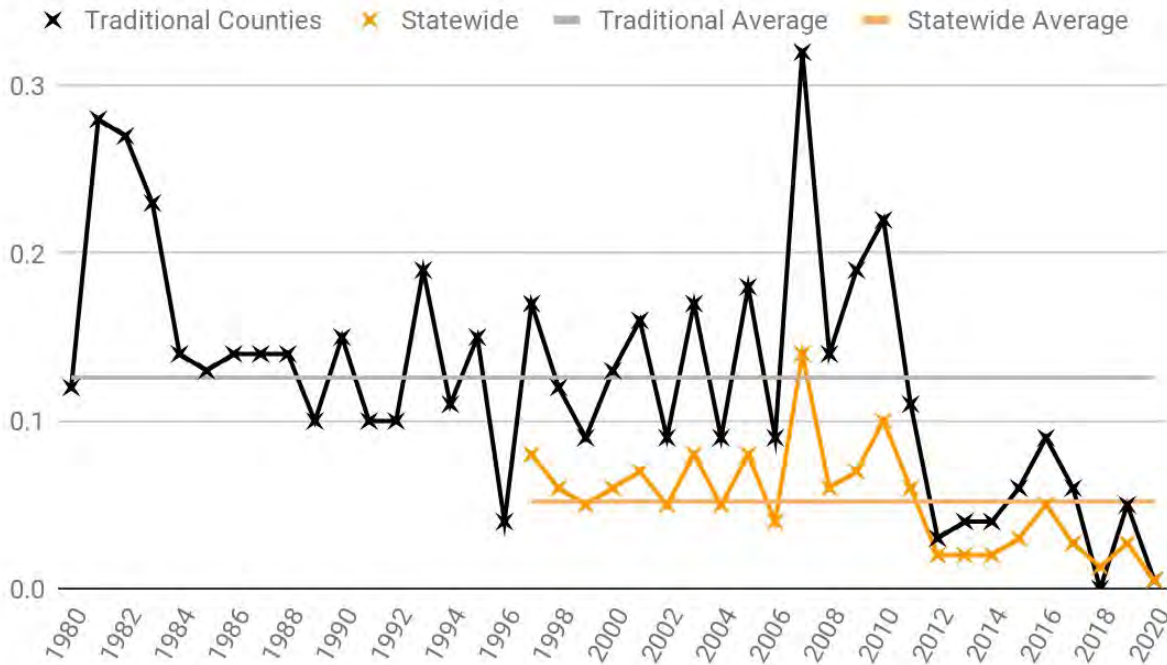


Figure 1: Oklahoma Drought Monitor Comparison (Source: droughtmonitor.unl.edu/)

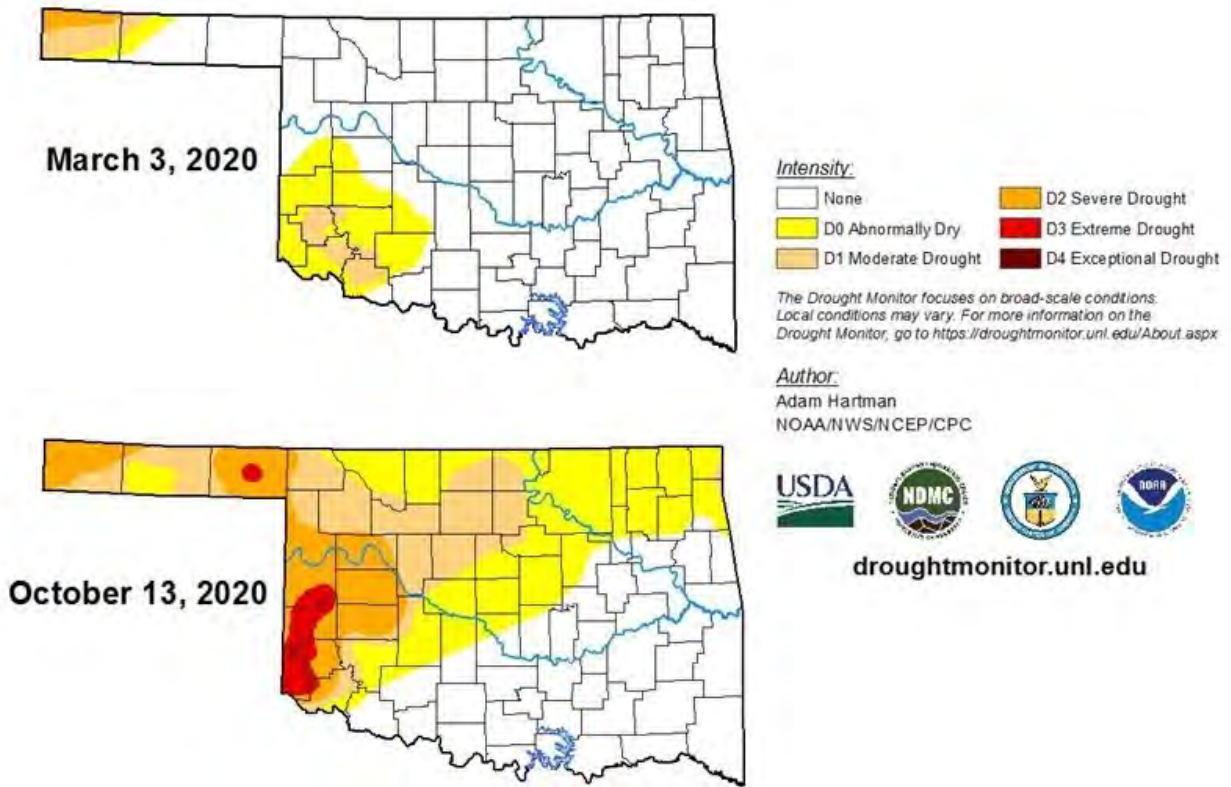


Figure 2: Departure from normal rainfall April 24, 2020 through October 20, 2020 (Source: climate.ok.gov)

