

2009 Quail Season Outlook

By

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The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation has conducted annual roadside surveys in August and October since 1990 to index quail populations across Oklahoma. Department employees run 83, 20-mile routes in all counties except Oklahoma and Tulsa. Some larger counties like Beaver, Ellis, LeFlore, McCurtain, Osage, Pittsburg, and Roger Mills have two routes. The survey provides an index of annual population fluctuations. Observers count the number of quail observed and classify the size of the young birds comprising broods to provide an index of quail abundance (number seen/20 mile route) and reproductive success. This report combines the August and October surveys to provide a composite index of quail abundance.

With the mild winter and no long lasting snow and ice storms, the quail population was expected to have good carryover into the 2009 nesting season. The weather during the nesting season for the most part was favorable. There were a few consecutive days of hot and dry weather but for the most part it was a mild summer with periodic, timely rainfall. Reports from the field by landowners and biologist have been positive with more quail being observed than has been reported the last couple of years. With all of the good reports from the field, expectations were up and the survey was expected to show a population increase. However, the composite August and October survey average actually decreased from 2008 and remains well below the long-term average.

During the October survey period, survey conditions were generally poor with much of the state receiving precipitation nearly everyday and many of the remaining survey days being heavily overcast. In addition, above average rainfall again this summer in much of the state produced dense vegetation that also made it more difficult to observe quail. These factors may have contributed to lower numbers of quail being seen on roadside surveys.

This year marks the 20th year that roadside quail surveys have been conducted in Oklahoma. Although the aforementioned reasons may partially explain this year's survey results, the fact remains that the statewide index declined from 2008, and is 64% below the 19-yr average (Table 1).

Every year regional differences are seen in survey results due at least in part to the effects of weather and land use such as livestock grazing on quail nesting conditions and habitat quantity and quality. Although the 2009 statewide index decreased 12% from 2008, the number of quail observed on Northwest, Northeast, and Southeast region routes increased an average of 25% over 2008 numbers (Figure 1).

Table 1. Average number of quail seen/20 mile route during the August & October roadside surveys.

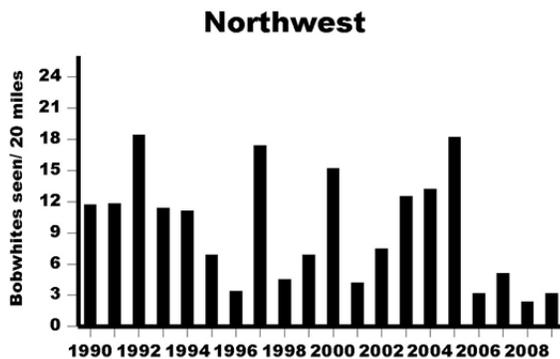
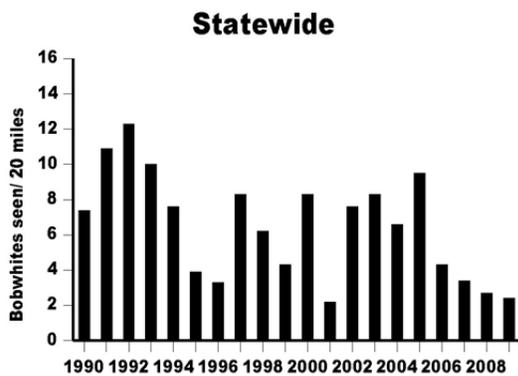
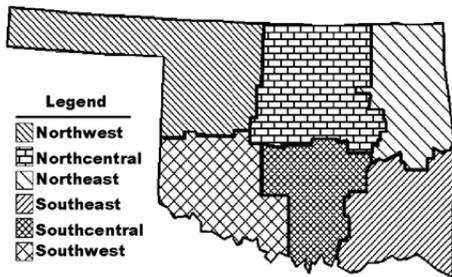
Reports from landowners and biologist in the field continue to suggest the quail population may be better than survey results indicate. However, the true test of how well quail did this nesting season will come when the season opens and Oklahoma quail hunters take to the field and begin their own survey efforts.



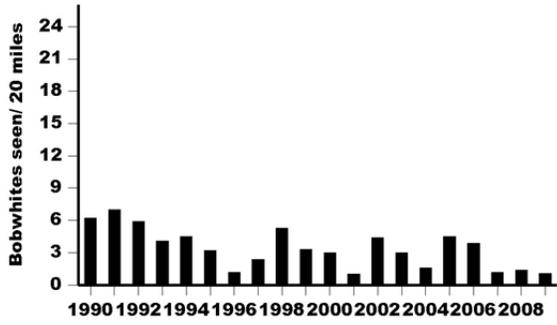
Figure 1

| Region | 1990-2008 19-yr. average | 2008 | 2009 |
|---------------|--------------------------------|------|------|
| Statewide | 6.7 | 2.7 | 2.4 |
| Northwest | 9.6 | 2.4 | 3.2 |
| North-central | 3.5 | 1.4 | 1.1 |
| Northeast | 3.8 | 1.0 | 1.3 |
| Southwest | 14.4 | 10.7 | 8.2 |
| South-central | 2.7 | 1.1 | 0.6 |
| Southeast | 6.7 | 0.4 | 0.6 |

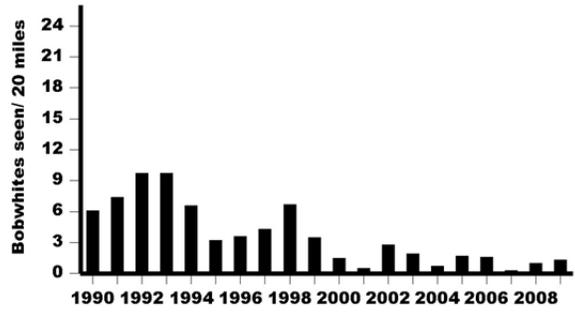
Regional boundaries for Oklahoma used for quail roadside surveys.



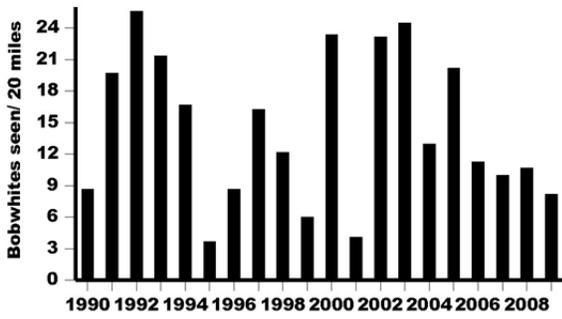
Northcentral



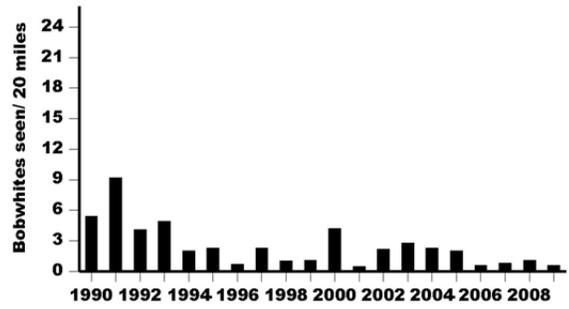
Northeast



Southwest



Southcentral



Southeast

