

2010 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.

This marks the 21st year that roadside quail surveys have been conducted in Oklahoma. The statewide index has declined from the 2009 survey results and is 71% below the 20-year 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. These key factors in the success of nesting quail can vary markedly at relatively small scales. Differences in rainfall amounts, duration, and timing along with differences in grazing pressure can be quite different within and among counties, townships, or even smaller areas. Although the 2010 statewide index decreased 21% from 2009, the number of quail observed on Northeast and Southeast region routes slightly increased over 2009 numbers (Figure 1).

Western Oklahoma remains in the forefront when it comes to quail habitat in Oklahoma. Although there have been varying reports from landowners and biologists over the course of this years nesting season, western Oklahoma will still typically have the best population of birds in the state. Certain areas did see above average rainfall during July that could have lowered nesting success, but had average to below average rainfall in June and August for early or late nesting attempts.

Central Oklahoma has seen average to just above average rainfall throughout the nesting season this year. While some of the reports from the field have been positive for hearing and seeing more quail than the last few years, there are also a few negative reports. This area did receive some rainfall in July which could have hurt nesting success, but either early or late attempts could have been successful. There are areas scattered throughout this region that have high quality quail habitat that can provide good hunting.

Eastern Oklahoma did see a slight increase in quail observed compared to 2009 survey results. However, much of this part of the state does not provide quality quail habitat due to extensive changes in land use that have been detrimental to quail. In areas where timber harvest and intense management for quail has taken place, quail numbers can increase and provide good hunting. Most of this region had below average rainfall and periods of high temperatures that could have negatively affected nesting success in parts of the region.

Weather plays a key role in quail production and although Oklahoma has had what some would call an average year; there have been big swings in temperatures and rainfall or lack of rainfall at times throughout the nesting season. Reports from landowners and biologist in the field have been positive with more quail being observed than last year. 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.

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

Region	1990-2009 20-yr. average	2009	2010
Statewide	6.5	2.4	1.9
Northwest	9.3	3.2	2.8
North-central	3.4	1.1	0.5
Northeast	3.7	1.3	1.8
Southwest	14.1	8.2	5.0
South-central	2.6	0.6	0.5
Southeast	6.4	0.6	1.3

Figure 1

Regional boundaries for Oklahoma used for quail roadside surveys.







