

# El Dorado Wildlife Area News



## Area News – Fall 2014

### 2014/2015 Hunting Outlook:

Upland Birds: The fall hunting outlook for quail on the area is fair. Hunters should see quail numbers that are again increased as compared to last fall. Quail production in recent years (2007-2010) was believed to have been hampered by heavy rains, cool temperatures, and significant flooding during the critical reproductive months of May, June, and July. The 2011 and 2012 reproductive seasons however were notably different. Rather than too much moisture and associated cool temperatures, both years were marked with record breaking excessive heat and drought. Quail production during those years is believed to have suffered as well. More moderate weather conditions in 2013 and 2014 are believed to have resulted in improved production, as several coveys were observed or reported early this fall, but current quail populations remain below levels observed during 2005 and 2006 when quail populations were very good. Within most habitat areas, natural vegetation and area crops should provide good food and cover conditions for wildlife, including quail, and should help to sustain breeding populations into next spring. The wildlife area lies outside the primary range of ring-necked pheasant. Hunters occasionally encounter pheasants on the area, but numbers are low.



Male bobwhite.

Waterfowl: The fall hunting outlook for waterfowl on the area is fair. Waterfowl populations are reported to remain strong following another good production year within breeding habitats to the north. Habitat conditions however here are not nearly as strong as those experienced last year. Abundant precipitation and a slight flood in June kept lake levels full, or nearly so, for much of the summer. Food producing plants could not become established within dewatered zones at the upper ends of the lake until late this summer. As such, a thin fringe of food producing vegetation became established along some lake edges, but stands are not nearly as extensive as those witnessed last year. Late summer and early fall weather was mild and relatively dry, contributing to declining lake levels which has pulled water away from food and cover edges. Currently, food producing vegetation will not be available to feeding waterfowl without precipitation and increases in lake levels. Weather will undoubtedly play a part (as it always does) in determining the extent of waterfowl use this year as well. Hunters are encouraged to visit the area website to view weekly waterfowl population and habitat condition updates. Hunters are reminded that El Dorado Lake lies within the Southeast Duck Zone.



Drake mallard.

Deer: The fall hunting outlook for deer on the area is fair. Reports from last season indicated that many hunters saw fewer deer and fewer older bucks. On the bright side, deer remain relatively common on the wildlife area, but observations suggest that populations are reduced and younger deer predominate. The 2012 EHD outbreak that struck many Midwestern states is believed to have had an impact in Kansas, but deer losses were not as extensive as other nearby states. Frequent and large reports of die-offs were lacking within the county and on the wildlife area in that year and conditions have not been conducive for additional outbreaks of this disease since 2012. Antlerless deer and fawns were a common sight this summer, and reports of a few nice bucks have been received, suggesting that an area breeding population remains strong and will provide hunting opportunity into the future.



**White-tailed buck.**

Turkey: The fall hunting outlook for turkey on the area is good. Area populations remain strong following good production dating back to at least 2012. Several broods were again observed this summer indicating a moderate level of production on the wildlife area. Hunters should find good turkey numbers early this season with numbers declining later in the year as some harvest occurs and remaining birds spend more time on nearby private property as a result of hunting pressure.



**Male wild turkey.**

Small Game: Opportunities to hunt fox squirrel and cottontail exist. Of the two, fox squirrel, typically provide greater opportunity. With much of the area wooded and with hunting interest in squirrels often low, the area can provide some attractive hunting. Cottontail populations are often not strong, but can provide some opportunity during most years.



**Fox squirrel.**

Furbearers & Coyotes: The area is open to the hunting and trapping of furbearers . In most years, good opportunity to harvest beaver and raccoon exists. Coyote and bobcat populations are generally fair, providing some opportunity.



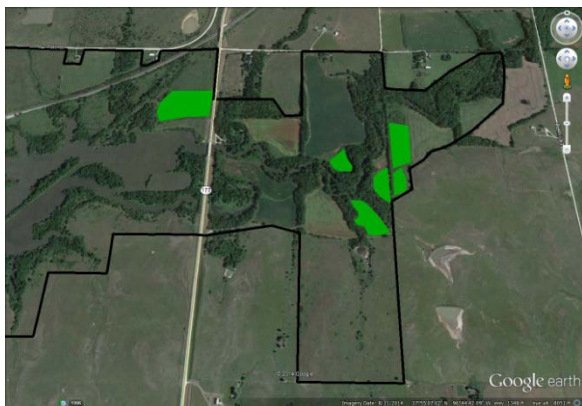
**Coyote.**

**Year Two of Upland Habitat Planting Plan Completed:**

A new 5 year plan designed to provide multiple benefits, including those to enhance water quality, wildlife habitat, and associated recreation was initiated in 2013. Beginning last year, portions of agricultural lands along 5 lake tributaries will be idled and planted to native grasses and forbs. These annual planting projects are designed to enhance grassland cover availability in areas dominated by woodland and cropland habitats. As a result, plantings should enhance habitat diversity within the wildlife area, ultimately enhancing habitat for wildlife species such as quail, turkey, deer, and others, and enhance lake water quality by filtering some run-off from adjacent agricultural lands. In 2013, six former agricultural tracts were planted totaling approximately 30 acres along Durechen Creek. Similar efforts were completed in 2014, converting portions of 4 tracts totaling 10 acres along Cole Creek. Approximately 35 acres are planned to be converted within 3 tracts along the Walnut River in spring 2015. Additional work will be conducted each spring along each of the primary drainages leading into El Dorado Lake. By improving habitat, we can enhance wildlife populations and outdoor recreation opportunities such as hunting.



**Grassland habitat planting at El Dorado Wildlife Area**



**Durechen Creek Area. 2013 habitat planting locations.**



**Cole Creek Area. 2014 habitat planting locations.**

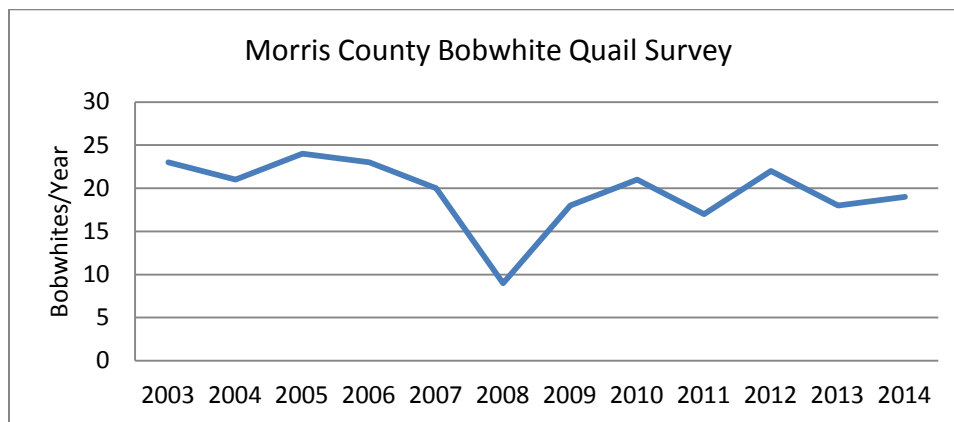
### Surveys Provide Insight into Wildlife Population Trends:

How are our wildlife numbers looking this year? How do those numbers look compared to other years? How did the weather impact populations? Why are the populations changing?

Questions such as these are commonly asked of Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks & Tourism (KDWPT) staff, and can be a topic of lively discussion among outdoor enthusiasts. In an effort to answer such questions, KDWPT staff spend considerable time each year conducting surveys. These surveys are designed to monitor changes in populations and are based upon scientific principles to reduce bias and provide information based upon observation, rather than speculation. By conducting surveys and collecting population data, KDWPT biologists can better tailor or target habitat management programs to meet species needs, modify harvest opportunities as populations change, and inform the public of population changes and reasons for noted changes.

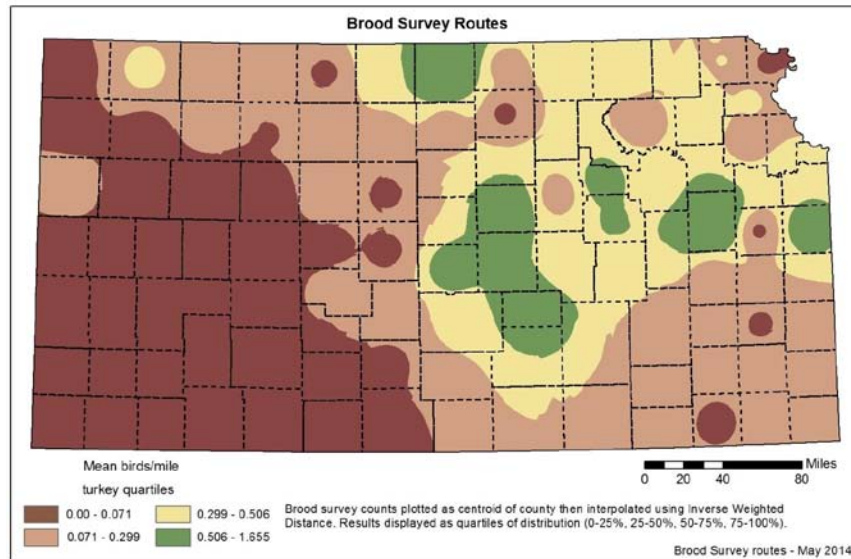
So what surveys are conducted and how are they completed? Area staff are involved with surveys designed to provide population information for species such as bobwhite quail, ring-necked pheasant, wild turkey, greater prairie chicken, waterfowl, white-tailed deer, and furbearers. Each survey provides biologists with a snapshot of the population at a specific time of year. By conducting a survey each year, at the same time of year, under similar environmental conditions, and within the same area, biologists can then determine how populations have changed, and offer explanations for changes.

As an example let's take a look at a survey used by biologists to monitor population trends for bobwhite quail. Each June biologists throughout the state travel their own 10 mile survey route. They are asked to travel the exact same route each year. They may begin the route if winds are light and no rain is falling. They begin at sunrise and stop at each mile along the route to listen for whistling quail. At each stop they exit the vehicle and listen for 5 minutes. After listening at each stop they record the number of whistles heard and the number of individual quail heard. Information collected from the current year can then be compared with that collected during surveys completed in the past. Data from a route conducted in the Flint Hills region since 2003 is provided below.



From the data one can see that the breeding quail population has changed each year, most drastically in 2008, but overall has remained relatively constant. Biologists use the information collected from that single route to inform area hunters of the status or abundance of the spring breeding population. Looking back, changes may have been influenced by the degree of successful nesting and brood rearing the previous year, or by the severity of the previous winter and resulting survival. Looking ahead, the survey provides biologists with information relating to the status of the population going into the current reproductive season, and can then provide clues into how strong populations may be the coming fall. Without the survey, biologists would not know specifically how the population was enhanced or impacted each year. Collectively, survey results from several routes completed in the Flint Hills region indicate populations have fared much better recently as compared to other regions of the state where severe heat and drought are believed to have negatively impacted populations. In the case of quail, additional surveys are conducted from July through August of each year to determine production or the level of success from nesting and brood rearing efforts earlier in the spring and summer. Surveys are designed to count adults and young, and age chicks, along routes. Results are then compared with those from the past to determine trends.

In a similar fashion, other wildlife species are surveyed and monitored. Other upland game birds such as pheasant and prairie chicken are monitored in a manner similar to quail. Spring population surveys are conducted along specific routes throughout the species range to determine the health of the breeding population, and then later, production is estimated by completing surveys which count adults and young along routes. Turkeys are also included in these types of production surveys. Some recent survey results for turkey follow.



Deer populations are monitored in part by conducting surveys along routes to count bucks, does, and fawns. In addition to simply counting individuals seen, other information is collected to include angle and distance to an observed animal. By doing so, information collected during these surveys is used not only to provide population trend information, but can be used to estimate deer density as well.

Waterfowl populations are monitored from September through March of each year at all sizeable public lakes and wetlands in the state. Populations of ducks, geese, and mergansers are estimated simply by traveling routes along the edges of areas and noting species present and estimating numbers twice each month. Such surveys have found as many as 22 species of waterfowl totaling nearly 10,000 individuals during some winter months at El Dorado Lake.

Furbearer populations are monitored in part by tabulating observations of species such as raccoon, opossum, skunk, coyote, bobcat, and fox along roadways throughout summer months each year. Trends can then be derived based upon the number of observations per mile traveled per year.

Wildlife and outdoor recreation are important to the quality of life for all Kansans. Surveys play an important part in helping KDWPT to meet its mission to conserve and enhance Kansas wildlife and its habitats, and to inform the public of the status of the natural resources of our state. Ultimately they help to ensure future generations the benefits of the state's diverse, living resources.



### **Disking Project Completed to Enhance Upland Habitats:**

KDWPT continues to enhance habitat for upland game birds on the area by periodically light disking some area grassland and retired agricultural tracts. This management activity is designed to enhance plant diversity on these acres and improve year-round habitat for game birds. Treated acres are allowed to grow to annual grasses and forbs in an effort to enhance brood-rearing habitat and native plant seed (wildlife food) production. Recent management treatments have involved disking of 25 acres within 3 retired agricultural tracts. Additional treatments are being considered for other tracts in coming years.



Disking to promote plant diversity and enhance grassland habitat at nearby Council Grove Wildlife Area. Left to right - spring, summer, winter response.

### **Hunters Reminded of Recent Changes to Public Lands, Big Game, & Turkey Regulations:**

The Kansas Wildlife, Parks and Tourism Commission has recently approved new regulations relating to hunting on public lands, and hunting of big game and turkey. Designed to provide hunters with equal opportunities on limited public lands, and to simplify equipment regulations for the hunting of big game and turkey statewide, the following regulations have been enacted:

- Fall turkey game tags are valid only in Unit 2 (north-central Kansas). They are NOT valid on Council Grove or El Dorado Wildlife Areas.
- Baiting is illegal on public lands. Bait is considered any grain, fruit, vegetable, nut, hay, salt, sorghum, feed, or other food or mineral capable of attracting wildlife. Liquid scents and sprays are not considered bait.
- Only two portable blinds or tree stands are allowed per hunter on public lands.
- Portable blinds and tree stands must be marked with the owner's name and address or KDWPT number. Portable blinds may not be left unattended overnight on public lands.
- Decoys may not be left unattended overnight on public lands.
- Commercial guides must have a permit to guide on public lands. The permit is free and must be specific to the land where guiding takes place.
- Big game hunters can now select any caliber centerfire rifle or handgun, any gauge shotgun with slugs, and any muzzleloader rifle and pistol .40 caliber or larger.
- Crossbows are now legal equipment during archery seasons for anyone with a valid archery permit.
- Turkey hunters are no longer restricted to 20 gauge shotguns or larger. All gauges are allowed, using shot size No. 2 through No. 9.

Would you like more information about the El Dorado Wildlife Area?

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