

Texas Wildlife officials predict good quail hunting

For quail hunters with long memories, this fall's hunting prospects are reminiscent of the 1992 season, according to Texas Parks and Wildlife (TPW) biologists. For those who don't recall, that was a very good year.

"Favorable spring and summer conditions in South Texas, the Trans-Pecos and the Gulf Prairies of Texas have set the table for good

quail hunting," said Dr. Gary Graham, TPW Wildlife Division director. "I'm excited about the prospects."

Texas quail hunting season opens Oct. 30 and runs through Feb. 27. If field reports and anecdotal information are indicators, South Texas should be a boon for quail hunters this fall. According to Pleasanton-based TPW wildlife

biologist Joe Herrera, "Field staff are seeing a lot of birds right now. It's not quite up to what we saw in 1992, but there are more quail out there than we've seen in a long while."

During 1992 and 1993, Texas hunters killed more than 2 million quail each season and averaged nine birds apiece. Last year, the harvest dipped to less than

750,000 quail and less than six birds per hunter. TPW research has shown that quail populations tend to follow this "crash and boom" cycle based on annual reproduction. Because these birds are prolific, they can rebound quickly from poor years if habitat and weather conditions are favorable, said Herrera.

"It's attributable primarily to rainfall. We had good rains last Oct. and Nov., which was a critical time because it set up range conditions for the spring," he explained. "Then we got some good rains this spring and on into the summer. Consequently, range conditions prior to and during the nesting period were excellent and continued to be excellent when young clutches were on the ground; there was good cover and an excellent forage base of insects. We're going to see a higher survival rate this fall as a result, and all things point to a really good season for quail."

State wildlife officials have estimated quail population from roadside surveys since 1976, and long-term patterns reflect a history of "boom and bust" cycles. Each quail-count survey "line" is a 20-mile route where biologists record all quail by mile and species. The same routes are counted each year. This trend information is useful in determining quail populations. Quail surveys this year in South Texas showed an average of more than 20 birds per route, as com-

pared to fewer than 10 birds per route just three years ago. In 1992, the average route revealed more than 50 quail each.

In Central Texas and parts of North Texas where range conditions remain dry, the outlook this fall is not as bright as down south. Survey results indicate below-average numbers throughout the region. "We could have a problem with quail survival in some areas," said Ron George, TPW Wildlife Division deputy director. "Conditions were not as favorable in the Cross Timbers, Rolling Plains and Edwards Plateau regions where quail numbers remain below the long-term average. However, areas within these regions under proper range management are holding average number of birds."

According to TPW wildlife biologist Stephen Jester, whose area surrounds Brownwood, last year's drought and too many cattle on some ranges will affect this season's quail harvest. "Local quail production is dictated primarily by ranch management practices," Jester noted. "We got some rain early in the year and range conditions had improved somewhat, but the rainfall ended in much of the area by June."

The daily bag limit for quail is 15, with 45 in possession. Shooting hours are one-half hour before sunrise to one-half hour after sunset. The bag limit is the maximum number that may be killed during shooting hours in one day.

Venison

contribute to the assurance that the venison we distribute is indeed safe for human food." He goes on to suggest the following field care tips for hunters:

- Remember at all times that the venison will be food for a Texas family.

- Do not harvest animals for the program that are acting abnormally (i.e. they have a limp, appear extremely thin or are lying down and are reluctant to get up).

- Do not transport the game long distances on the hood of the car or in the back of a truck.

- As soon as is safely possible, retrieve the animal and transport it to an appropriate field-dressing area. Dressing areas should be protected from excessive dust and other forms of contamination-if under a tree, select a grassy area as opposed to a dusty area, and be sure the tree is not a common roost for birds.

- Remove the hides and intestines, taking care to avoid spillage of intestinal or bladder contents on the carcass.

•If the temperature is cold (below 50 degrees F), the carcass may be hung if protected from external contaminants such as flies or dust.

•If the temperature gets above 50 degrees F, move the carcass to a refrigerated storage cooler or cut it into quarters and keep the meat cold by packing it in ice. When packing in ice, place a layer of ice between parts (quarters). Keep the ice chest drained and well-iced until delivery and/or packaging.

Providing venison to feed the hungry requires teamwork. Ideally, the hunters will provide clean, cold meat, the processors will process only healthy-looking meat, and the organizations that serve the venison will handle and cook the meat to an appropriate temperature as measured by a meat thermometer. The Federal Drug

Administration Food Code recommends that venison should be cooked until it reaches a temperature of 165 degrees F for at least 15 seconds.

In addition to hunters, processors and food providers, other organizations have contributed to the success of the program. The End Hunger Network of Houston, the Texas Association of Second Harvest Food Banks, the Texas Wildlife Association, the Exotic Wildlife Association, Texas Parks and Wildlife, TDH and Housing and Community Affairs all provided valuable information and support over the years. Any volunteer organizations, corporate sponsors or processors that are interested in working with the Hunters for the Hungry program are encouraged to contact either Mike Rhodes or Kerrin Lemieux of the Texas Association of Community Action Agencies at (800) 992-9767.

Continued from Page 16



Mike Fisher and David Gerhart, owners of Tailfeathers Guide Service, invite you to make a hunt with us. With 50 years of combined experience guiding waterfowl hunters, we believe in making your hunt the best hunt possible. Our location on the Eagle Lake prairie 60 miles west of Houston, includes rice fields, flooded timber and prairie ponds for duck hunting, as well as plowed ground, rice and oat fields for goose hunting.

All duck hunting is done from blinds, with decoys set and retrieved by the guides. For an additional charge, goose spreads can be set by the guides the evening before your hunt.

Decoys and hunters are carried to the blind or hunting area by ATV. This service is ideal for children, the veteran hunter, the disabled hunter or the hunter who is simply out of shape.

If you are tired of hunting with "guides" who don't know a Pintail from a Porcupine, "guides" who spend more time calling their dog than ducks, then give Tailfeathers a try! Hunt with guides who love to hunt, hunt every day and will do their dead-level best to make sure you kill birds, and have a great hunt.

We have the highest bird per man average during Snow Goose only season... more than any club in Colorado County. No Brag... Just Fact. We offer quality hunts at fair prices.

We meet our hunters at the Sportsman's Restaurant in Eagle Lake, starting at 4:30 a.m. Here you have the opportunity to eat breakfast and get your equipment organized for the hunt. If you need to purchase a license, stamps or other necessities, Johnny's Sport Shop is located next door.

Please feel free to call for additional information or special requests.

Tailfeathers Guide Service

Guided Duck & Goose Hunts — We Kill Ducks - Not Time

Mike "Duck" Fisher & David "Greenhead" Gerhart

Available Guided Hunts:

What you will need:

•Duck and Goose:

- Experienced Guide, Dog, Decoys and Parkas furnished
- No minimum number of hunters
- \$110.00 per person
- Kids under 12, half price with paid adult

•Early Teal Season:

- Experienced Guide, Dog and Decoys furnished
- \$55 per person
- Kids under 12, half price with paid adult

•Doves:

- September-November
- \$35 per person

•Afternoon Hunts Provided by Top Flight Hunting Preserve

- Pheasant
- Quail
- Chukar
- Available by appointment only

•Taxidermy available through Unlimited Animal Artistry

•Licenses

- Texas Hunting License
- State and Federal duck stamp

•Guns and Shells:

- 12 or 10 gauge preferred
- Non-toxic shot
- 2' OR 3' for Ducks; BB or BBB for Geese

•Clothing:

- Camouflage clothing
- Waders or Hip Boots
- Weather very unpredictable; prepare for hot or cold
- Flashlight
- Camera

•Sporting Goods:

- All types available at Johnny's Sport Shop conveniently located in Eagle Lake

•Bird Processing:

- Available from our friends at Prairie Waterfowl Hunts

•Accommodations:

- By request

Reservations:

•Call Duck: 409-732-2997 •Greenhead: 713-688-1521

•Confirmed with 50% deposit •30 Day notice for full refund •References on request

P.O. Box 426, Eagle Lake, Texas 77434