



# *Iowa Outdoors*

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

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**Oct. 25, 2005**

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## **IOWA PHEASANT SEASON OPENS SATURDAY STATEWIDE BIRD NUMBERS ENJOY HEALTHY INCREASE**

By Lowell Washburn

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

DES MOINES---Anticipation is mounting. The count down is on. For tens of thousands of Iowans, the Sporting Event of the Year arrives Saturday.

It's the opening weekend of the 2005 pheasant season, and the outlook is bright. Based on the results of this year's August roadside surveys, Opening Day hunters will encounter a significantly greater number of pheasants than they did one year ago. Statewide pheasant populations are up 19 percent over last year, which puts overall ring-neck numbers right at the 10-year average. With the exception of south central Iowa [where bird numbers suffered a dismal, 40 percent decrease from last year] all regions of the state will enjoy the same or higher numbers of ring-necks than were surveyed during 2004.

The state's greatest pheasant densities will occur among the grasslands of northwest Iowa. North central Iowa also harbors substantial populations -- up 34 percent from 2004. Central Iowa pheasant numbers rose 45 percent over 2004. This represents the state's largest regional increase and brings central Iowa counts to 10 percent above the average.

As always, Iowa pheasant enthusiasts will be looking at some of the best hunting

to be found anywhere in the nation -- or on the planet, for that matter. Based on this summer's population index, our hunters will harvest anywhere from 900,000 to 1,000,000 roosters by the time the season concludes on January 10. Only, South Dakota will be able to top the Iowa harvest.

But regardless of how many roosters may actually be lurking in your favorite hunting spot, Opening Weekend success will be greatly enhanced or hindered by two additional, make or break factors -- weather conditions and corn harvest.

For upland bird hunters, rain and wind spell disaster. By contrast, fair skies and a light breeze all but guarantee roast pheasant for Sunday dinner. We'll just have to wait and see which weather conditions we get. After all, this is Iowa.

The status of this year's grain harvest easier to predict. As of Monday, around 60 percent the state's corn acreage was out of the field and in the bin. This is good news for pheasant hunters -- especially those who are Iowa residents and will be tromping the fields for the entire season.

Here's how it lays. Come Saturday's opener, enough corn will have been harvested to make a good number of birds available to hunters. The other [and perhaps best] side of the coin is that there is also enough corn left standing to provide thousands of acres of temporary pheasant refuge. As the harvest continues, a steadily shrinking supply of standing corn will insure a dependable number of naive, yet to be hunted roosters in the days ahead.

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[Hold Until Oct. 27]

## **IOWA PHEASANT SEASON PREVIEW**

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

For some, the anticipation starts weeks before. It might be the week you step up work with the dog. Maybe it's when you check with the property owners. It could be a couple sessions with clay birds. Or it might not come until the night before, packing your gun, shells and jacket and the portable kennel for the next morning.

Then, it's Opening Day, 7:55 a.m. After a two-hour drive--or a short walk out the back door--there are a couple final sips of coffee as you stand at the field edge, talking with your partners. A few more ticks of the clock...and the pheasants await.

Pheasant season in Iowa is an event, not just a box on the calendar. It's two or three generations stepping out into corn stubble and grass waterways on the family farm.

It's high stepping into over-your-head switchgrass, anticipating that whirl of wings and familiar cackle.

And this year, it comes with a pretty good forecast. "We should harvest about 900,000 roosters this year. That's up about 200,000 from a year ago. I think hunters will be happy," anticipates Todd Bogenschutz, upland game biologist for the Department of Natural Resources. "Our roadside counts came back about 20 percent higher than last year. Crop harvest is running close to normal. As long as we have good weather for the opener, I think hunters will be satisfied with what they see this year."

A mild winter and typical spring boosted pheasant numbers. The August roadside counts averaged 35.9 pheasants per 30-mile route. Just once in the last seven years has that been higher. "We had a good carryover of hens. And I think we had a pretty good hatch overall," says Bogenschutz. "The eastern third of the state suffered through a pretty hard drought. It's going to impact reproduction there. Generally, though, hunters are going to see more birds than they saw a year ago."

And when hunters are happy, Main Street merchants are happy. Pheasant hunting is a \$170 to \$250 million dollar boost to Iowa's economy. And much of that is felt in small town motels, hardware stores, restaurants and other businesses.

On Opening Day, Bogenschutz steers hunters toward that habitat, if they can find it. "Look for grassy areas where birds roost; areas next to corn and soybean fields," says Bogenschutz. "The birds are going to move there for their morning meal. Usually you can intercept them moving from roosting cover to feeding areas. Late in the day, it'll be the same routine. Work that habitat interchange between crop fields and grassy cover."

Opening Day is not always a Norman Rockwell painting, though. Warm, wet or windy weather; maybe standing corn are often factors. And it was just a handful of years ago (2000-01) when ice and snow cover lasted most of the winter, leading to an all time low pheasant harvest the next fall. It is a simple reminder that habitat—*year round habitat*—grows more pheasants. With about two million acres of Conservation Reserve Program land out there, some areas are sitting pretty comfortably. Northwest, north central and central counties show much improved counts, over the last few years.

As usual, my opening day will be a couple days delayed. And with 4-month old Molly on the end of a leash instead of the 'veteran' Jane quartering ahead of me, I doubt if I get any real hunting done. But we have to start some where. Besides, my preseason call to the owner did confirm, 'the quail are back.' Just a covey or two, but a welcome bonus when an extra slow one gets up once or twice a season.

Newsnotes:

Birds Eye Book Signing: Ann Johnson will be signing her new book *Iowa Birds*, at Birds' Eye View in Coralville on Sunday, November 5. It is a great book, by an expert birder, for novice birdwatchers, especially children. It provides identification details, habitat and nesting, illustrations and more for 145 birds. A book review is in the Iowa

City Bird Club's fall newsletter: <http://icbirds.org/newsletter.html>.

With Johnson on hand, pick up a copy and ask questions about birds and birding.

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## **PLAY IT SAFE, PHEASANT HUNTERS URGED**

DES MOINES – The number one weekend for hunters has also been the number one weekend for unintentional injuries. The Iowa pheasant hunting season begins at 8 a.m. Saturday with an estimated 150,000 hunters heading to the field.

“The first two weeks of pheasant season have historically had the most hunting injuries of any hunting season in Iowa,” said Rod Slings, recreation safety program supervisor with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. “The excitement of a flushing bird, maybe a little competition among hunters or not knowing where everyone is during the hunt are all factors that make these early weeks the most injury riddled of any of our hunting seasons.”

Slings said hunters need to approach opening weekend with a plan that spells out where every hunter in the group will be and each person's role in the hunt.

“Discussing the hunting plan single best thing hunters can do to avoid injuries. Stay in sight of each other. Know the zone of fire and stay within that zone and be sure to wear plenty of blaze orange,” Slings said.

Hunters are reminded of the blaze orange requirement to hunt upland game - pheasants, roughed grouse, quail, Hungarian partridge and woodcock. The requirement can be fulfilled by wearing a hat, cap, vest coat, jacket, sweatshirt, sweater, shirt or coveralls that are at least 50 percent solid blaze orange.

The DNR investigated five injuries in 2004 that occurred while pheasant hunting. In 2003, 15 pheasant hunters were injured, and in 2002, there were five injuries.

**For more information, contact Slings at 515-281-8652, or your local conservation officer.**

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## **DNR TO HIRE A COMPANY TO HELP CREATE, OPERATE HONEY CREEK RESORT STATE PARK**

DES MOINES-The Iowa Department of Natural Resources is seeking a private company to participate in the design of facilities, and in the bidding, construction and operation of those facilities at Iowa's first Resort State Park on the north shore of 11,000-acre Rathbun Lake, near Centerville.

Legislation creating a revenue bonding authority was passed by the Iowa Legislature and signed by Governor Tom Vilsack during the 2005 legislative session. The bond authority will allow the DNR to raise up to \$28 million to build the resort style state park. Additional funding will be derived from Iowa's Park and Institutional Road Fund, Marine Fuel Tax Funds, state and federal appropriations, and a required \$4.0 million from private sources.

"We have sent letters to companies across the country seeking their interest and qualifications to work with us to create and run a special resort state park found no where else in Iowa," said Arnie Sohn, Honey Creek Resort State Park project coordinator for the Iowa DNR. "We are open to considering additional private involvement in the building and operation of the courtesy boat docks, beach, RV campground and other features."

The resort state park plan calls for a 108-room lodge/conference facility, indoor aquatic center, restaurant, golf course, cabins, enclosed picnic shelters, boat ramp, beach and several miles of hiking and multipurpose trails. Potential partners can find more details on the Iowa DNR's website: [www.iowadnr.com/parks/honeycreek/](http://www.iowadnr.com/parks/honeycreek/)

The resort park site is located on an 850-acre peninsula on the north shore of Rathbun Lake. Much of that 850 acres will remain in its natural state, providing opportunities for hiking, nature study and conservation education programs. A pedestrian trail bridge is planned for linking the existing Honey Creek State Park to the resort property.

Interested parties must respond by 4:30 PM, November 18. The DNR will notify potential partners by December 3 if they were selected for a formal proposal. The formal proposals from up to five selected firms will be due January 31, 2006.

"Our goal is to be in a position to hold a ground-breaking ceremony on one or more of the major facilities by next fall, with major construction beginning in spring 2007," Sohn said.

**For more information, contact Sohn at 515-281-5814.**

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**SPECIAL YOUTH DEER HUNTS CONTINUE TO ACCEPT PARTICIPANTS**

GUTHRIE CENTER – Applications are currently being accepted for the 2005 Iowa Youth Educational Deer Hunt slated for Nov. 18-20 at three state parks.

Hunts are planned for Springbrook, near Guthrie Center, Green Valley, near Creston, and Viking Lake, near Red Oak. Youth hunters will receive instruction on the basics of deer hunting and safety at the Springbrook Conservation Education Center then will move to their chosen park to hunt deer in a controlled setting with adult mentors at their side. Hunters must be between the ages of 12-15, and have never harvested a deer before. Hunters are welcome to bring their own mentors, or one can be arranged through the Iowa DNR.

The weekend event includes hands-on classroom instruction on whitetail deer biology, management, hunting equipment, methods, scouting, laws, a safety trail, sighting in their firearm, field dressing, photography, and processing, followed by a day and a half of supervised hunting on state park property. The program is designed to give young hunters a positive first experience that they can carry the rest of their lives, and allow the mentors to share the experience with the youth.

Cost of the hunt is \$100, which includes material, food and lodging for both the hunter and his or her mentor, plus \$27 for the deer license. Registration is limited to the first 52 hunters – 20 hunters each at Springbrook and Viking Lake state parks, and 12 at Green Valley. For more information, contact A Jay Winter at the Conservation Education Center, (641) 747-8383 ext.11 or [ajay.winter@dnr.state.ia.us](mailto:ajay.winter@dnr.state.ia.us).

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