

2021 Pheasant Season Update

*By: Tell Judkins, Upland Game Biologist
Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation*

Ring-neck pheasants remain a popular upland game species among Oklahoma hunters with approximately 18,000 pheasants harvested in 2020. The ODWC monitors the pheasant population through two surveys; spring crow counts (Table 1) and summer brood surveys (Table 2). The data collected provides an index of the spring breeding population (crow counts) and recruitment success for that year (brood surveys). Traditionally Alfalfa, Beaver, Cimarron, Grant, and Texas Counties have had the highest pheasant numbers. These 5 counties have had spring crow surveys since 1973, and brood surveys since 1980. In 1998, the surveys were expanded to 13 counties to include Ellis, Garfield, Harper, Kay, Major, Noble, Woods, and Woodward (Figure 1).

The spring 2021 crow count survey showed a lower number of calls heard per point than in 2020 (Table 1). Looking at the numbers from 1973 to 2021 there is a positive trend in the number of calls heard during the spring crow call count surveys. The August brood surveys were equal to 2020 with 0.005 broods/mile observed in the (Table 2). The 5 traditional counties were slightly up from 0.005 in 2020 to 0.0057 in 2021. The total number of pheasants observed was also up from 30 in 2020 to 36 in 2021.

February brought with it a severe winter storm that appears to have delayed wildlife breeding activity for a few weeks. This year's spring season saw normal to above normal rainfall across the range, allowing for an excellent forb and insect crop. As the nesting season wore on, rainfall seemed to stop for much of the pheasant range in Oklahoma. Figure 2 below shows a comparison of drought levels in Oklahoma from March 9th to October 19th. At the time of this report, all the pheasant range in Oklahoma, except a small portion of southern Beaver County is now at least abnormally dry, with much of the range in moderate to severe drought. Figure 3 shows the departure from normal rainfall from April 28th - October 24th with areas up to 6.9" below normal rainfall. Too little rain can have just as much of an impact as too much rain. However, there are still decent numbers of reports coming in from people seeing $\frac{1}{2}$ and $\frac{3}{4}$ grown birds. It appears that 2021 had multiple nesting attempts with the first broods being reported in late-June and the most recent report in early September.

Pheasant numbers this season will most likely be patchy. Properties or areas where habitat is good for pheasant, insects are plentiful, forbs are abundant, and drought has not made a severe impact should still hold a fair number of birds.

Pheasant season opens on December 1st, 2021 and runs through January 31st, 2022. Hunters are allowed to harvest two cock pheasant daily. Open areas include Alfalfa, Beaver, Cimarron, Garfield, Grant, Harper, Kay, Major, Noble, Osage, Texas, Woods, and Woodward counties; and the portions of Blaine, Dewey, Ellis, Kingfisher, and Logan counties north of State Highway 51. Seasons on public lands may vary from the statewide season. For more regulations and other information consult the Oklahoma Hunting and Fishing Guide online at <http://www.wildlifedepartment.com/hunting/> or in print wherever hunting and fishing licenses are sold.

Remember, the outdoors are #AlwaysOpen! Work some ground, trust your dog, and make a memory!

Figure 1: Traditional and Non-traditional Pheasant Survey areas



Table 1: Pheasant crows heard per point

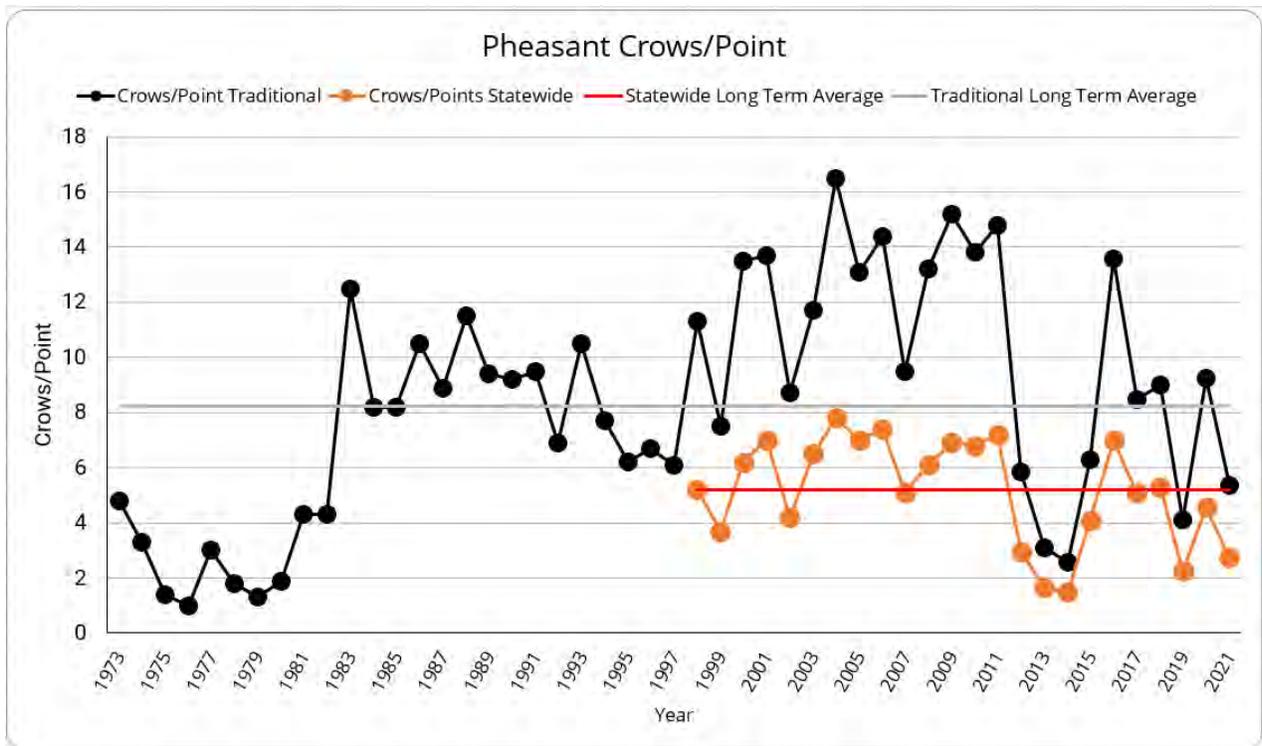


Table 2: Pheasant broods observed per 20-mile route

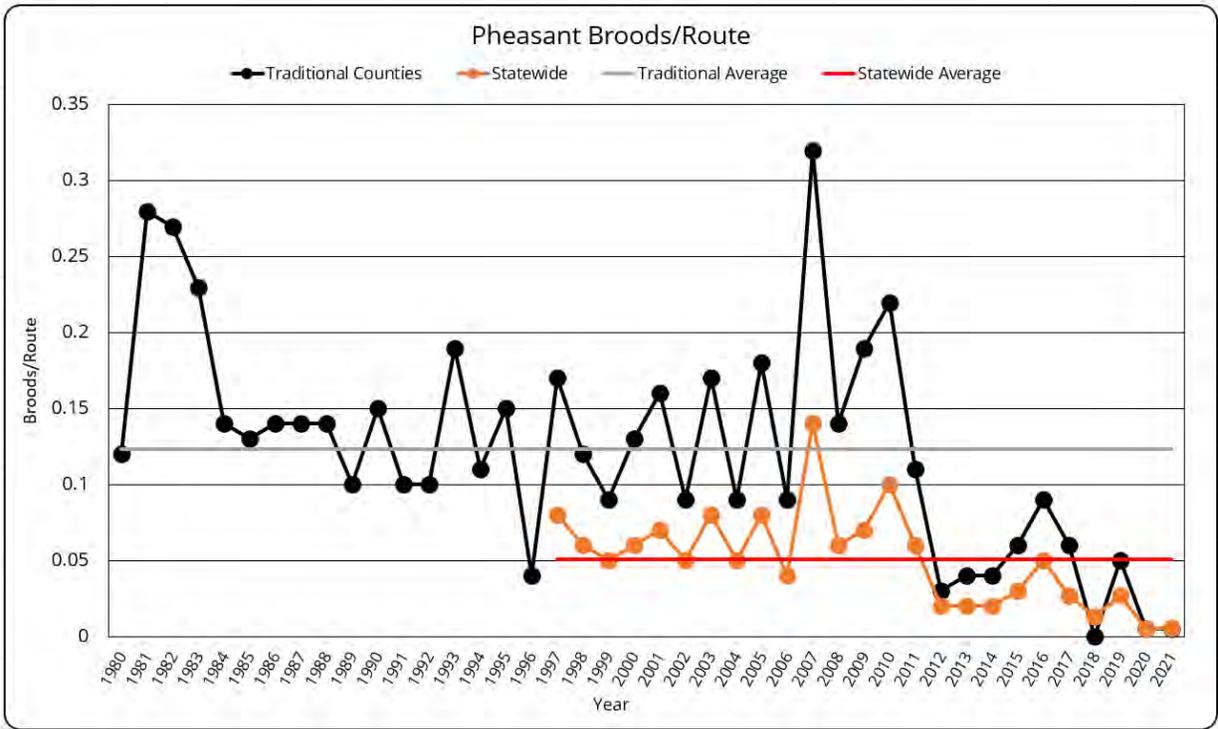
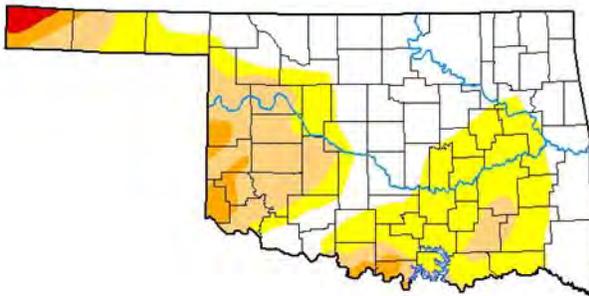


Figure 2: Oklahoma Drought Monitor Comparison (Source: droughtmonitor.unl.edu/)

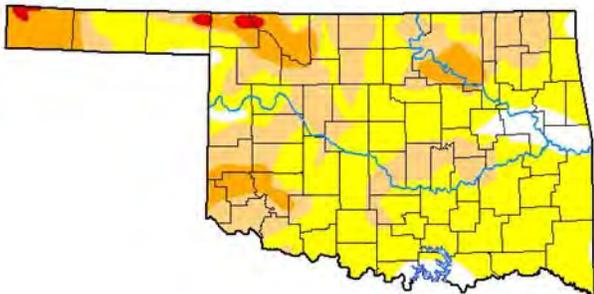
March 9, 2021



July 20, 2021



October 19, 2021



Intensity:

- None
- D0 Abnormally Dry
- D1 Moderate Drought
- D2 Severe Drought
- D3 Extreme Drought
- D4 Exceptional Drought

droughtmonitor.unl.edu

Figure 3: Departure from normal rainfall April 28, 2021 through October 24, 2021 (Source: climate.ok.gov)

