

What We Know About **HUNTING**



Pheasant populations rise and fall with annual weather patterns and populations often plummet following severe winters. Public response to declining pheasant populations is often manifested in demands to reduce harvest or close the season to speed population recovery, or stockpile roosters for future years.

PHEASANT BIOLOGY

WHY STOCKPILING ROOSTERS FOR FUTURE YEARS DOESN'T WORK

- Pheasants are polygamous breeders, meaning one rooster will breed many hens.
- Biologists have long recognized there is little danger of overharvesting roosters with a rooster-only hunting season because the polygamous breeding habits of pheasants ensure that only a small percentage of the males are actually needed for reproduction.
- Additionally, stockpiling roosters assumes that roosters have a long-life span, when in fact few wild pheasants (male or female) live much beyond 2 years of age.
- Iowa research shows on average only 21% of the population is comprised of birds at least 2 years old. In a typical fall, 79% of the rooster population are birds hatched that year.
- This high annual turnover in the population means few birds survival long enough to be saved or stockpiled for future years.
- Only hens lay eggs and their survival and success is what drives annual pheasant numbers, including roosters available to harvest. Hens are protected from hunting thus restrictions to rooster only hunting season have little if any impact on future populations.



IOWA/MINNESOTA COMPARISON

- A comparison of IA and MN roadside pheasant population counts along the shared state boundary demonstrate that hunting restrictions of a rooster only hunting season (shorter season, reduced daily bag limit, or closure of the season) have little effect on population trends.
- Graph shows IA and MN pheasant counts and hunting season length (days) from 1964 thru 2000.
- Following severe winters MN severely reduced (1967) or closed (1969) their pheasant season. Iowa maintain regular season lengths and bag limits. The MN DNR in addition reduced their daily bag limit from 3 to 2 roosters in 1970 and this remained in effect through 2000. Iowa’s daily bag limit has always been 3 roosters. Population trends both sides of the border showed the same pattern even though MN has consistently been more restrictive with hunting regulations.
- Iowa’s pheasant counts on average are higher because the IA DNR has an abundance of top-quality public land along the MN border.
- Pheasant populations in both states crashed from 1981-83 following 3 severe winters. With the start of the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) in 1985, both states show a steady increasing trend in pheasant populations from 1985 onward – the CRP added significant pheasant habitat to both states.
- Iowa’s pheasant population increased at a faster rate than Minnesota’s even though Iowa had consistently longer pheasant hunting seasons and a higher daily bag limit from 1985 thru 2000.
- These data demonstrate pheasant populations are primarily regulated by habitat and weather, and current rooster only hunting seasons have little impact on populations.

Impact of Rooster Only Hunting on Pheasant Populations

