

Southeast Area -- UPLAND

Harney County

Upland game bird hunting is expected to be similar for some species as last year, while not as good for others. This past winter the county experienced lower than average precipitation compounded by a dry spring and lack of moisture through the summer months. Although birds survived due to the lack of winter, the dry conditions caused early senescence of some beneficial vegetative species for upland birds in portions of the district which was compounded by a lack of insects specifically grasshoppers. The county also experienced significant wildfire this year in multiple upland bird ranges around Warm Springs Reservoir, the Steens mountain area, and Frenchglen rim, which will negatively impact birds this year.

Chukar: Trend surveys found a 6% increase compared to last year and a 33 percent increase from the 10-year average. Production was slightly higher than last year with an increase to 0.8 chicks/adult. Production from North to South in the County was relatively similar as conditions on the landscape caused for dry conditions throughout.

California Quail: Trend surveys performed found a 32 percent decrease from last year, which reflects in the 10-year average as a 13 percent decrease. Production was 1.2 chicks/adult, dipping below the 10-year average.

Pheasant: Pheasant hunting primarily occurs on the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Harney County. No formal surveys are conducted, but observations suggest some pheasant production did occur on the refuge. Unfortunately, compounding environmental factors including a dry spring, early senescence of vegetative forage, and a lack of insects on surrounding rangeland more than likely led to a decrease in pheasant production away from the refuge, although carry over from last year due to mild winter conditions where water was still available should provide some birds for hunting.

Overall, Harney County chukar hunting should be very similar to last year, quail hunting will more than likely be less productive, and due to access restrictions on the refuge due to wildfire this year pheasant hunting will be more difficult.

Similar to the chronological water forecast, upland bird numbers this summer came back better than anticipated in Malheur County following a low chick production year in 2025. High April precipitation timed up well to bring 2026 production back in line with the average. Therefore, we predict another better bird hunting season as populations remain inflated following the 2024 boom year. The county did have another bad wildfire season this summer. The Coleman Creek Fire burned 312,773 total acres across Harney and Malheur counties. It burned through prime chukar habitat in the Riverside Wildlife Area, The Monuments, Cottonwood Creek, and the entire south side of the Malheur Canyon. The Big Grass Fire burned some 180,000 acres of land in Oregon before moving into Idaho this July. It consumed quality chukar areas south of Rome down Skull Creek, along the mainstem Owyhee Canyon, Three Forks, and Cherry Creek. Bird populations in these burned areas will decline significantly over the next couple of years and hunting them this season will contribute to further declines. A lot of productive upland habitat still remains along the north side of the Malheur Canyon, along the river in the Owyhee unit, and further south into the Whitehorse and the Trout Creeks. If some of your traditional spots burned, this would be a great year to explore new territory.

Malheur County

Chukar: Surveys on established routes yielded 77 birds per 10 miles. This is a 20% decrease from last year and 28% above the 10-year average of 60 birds per 10 miles. Brood production was average with 11.2 chicks per brood. Chicks per adult was 2.0, which is low and will make the hunting season somewhat more difficult.

Pheasant: Surveys along established routes yielded 7.1 birds per 10 miles, a 25% increase in number of birds observed over last year and 55% above the 10-year average. Chick production was good at 4.4 chicks per brood, also ahead of last year's numbers. Hunting prospects will vary depending on the farming practices in the area where you have permission to hunt.

California Quail: Surveys on established routes yielded 77 quail per 10 miles, an 89% increase from last year and 65 percent above the 10-year average. Production was lower than the previous 10 years at 8.7 chicks per brood. Quail opportunities abound along water sources on the rangeland and farm edges on private ground.

Mourning Dove: Surveys on established routes yielded 63 doves per 10 miles, which is an 85% increase from last year and 87% above the 10-year average. These surveys are conducted on both pheasant and chukar routes. [Learn more about hunting these fast-flying birds.](#)