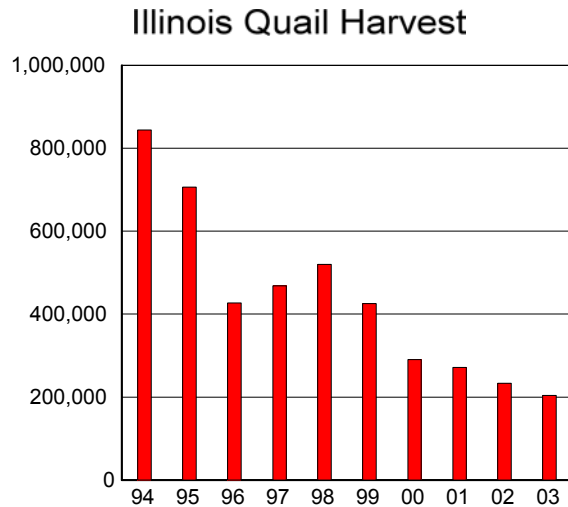


Bobwhite Quail Hunting Prospects, 2004

Upland Wildlife Program Management Note 04-8

2003-2004 Hunting Season

Last year, 30,044 hunters harvested 204,236 quail, a 12 percent decrease from the 2002-2003 season. This was 41 percent below the average of the last five years, 59 percent below the average for the last 10 years and the lowest estimated harvest ever recorded. Hunters went afield 177,617 days in 2003, a decrease of 14 percent over 2002 but daily harvest increased 2 percent in 2003.



Winter Weather 2003-2004

Winter weather was mild in the west-central portion of the quail range and very mild in southern Illinois. Temperatures were 1-5° above normal. The duration and depth of the snow cover was below normal in west-central Illinois and much below normal in south-central and southern Illinois.

Quail Breeding Population Indices

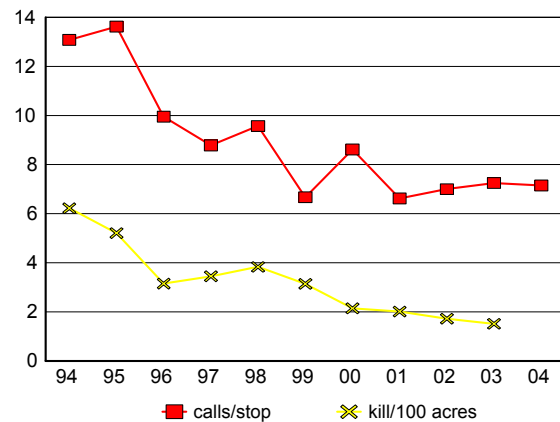
Quail call counts, conducted in June 2004, were unchanged from those conducted in 2003. This was 7 percent below the average of the previous five years and 37 percent below the 1975 to 2003 average. Calls were unchanged in west-central Illinois and south-central Illinois. In far southern Illinois, a 15 percent decrease was recorded.

Biologists conducting the North American

Breeding Bird Survey reported a 20 percent increase in quail observations over 2003.

Additional information about quail hunting in 2003-04 was provided by the hunter survey

Call Counts and Quail Harvest



conducted by the Cooperative Wildlife Research Laboratory at Southern Illinois University.

Hunter success (harvest per trip) in Illinois' primary quail range was 4 percent below 02-03. In addition to reporting success, hunters also submit one wing from each quail harvested for aging. The ratio of juveniles to adults provides an index to annual reproductive success. In 2003, the age ratio was 4.11, below the 29 year average (4.5). The long term average is 5. Hens probably came in to the 2004 nesting season in good physiological condition after the mild winter of 2003-04. This usually results in more eggs in clutches.

2004 Season Outlook

It appears that quail numbers will be near 2003 levels in Illinois. Breeding populations were unchanged in the primary quail range. Temperatures during the nesting season were slightly cooler than normal and adequate rainfall

may have positively affected quail productivity.

The total acres of good quality nest cover and brood habitat available through the Conservation Reserve Program has increased somewhat from the low point in 1997. The quality has also been enhanced on new and re-enrolled acres through the planting of native grasses and forbs, more wildlife friendly grass/legume mixes and an increased emphasis on proper management after planting, including strip disking and burning.

Hunter success is also affected by weather and cover conditions during the hunting season. If large acreages of crops are still in the field during the hunting season, hunting will be negatively affected.

Best Areas

Look for farms with a good mix of row crops, small grains, legumes and grassland (excluding fescue and reed canary grass) well connected by wooded fencerows and forest edges. Though quail occur throughout the state, the most productive regions continue to be south-central and west-central Illinois. Based on average annual harvest from 1994 through 1998, some of the top counties are: Brown, Hancock, Edwards, Franklin, Perry and Wayne.



Season Dates

November 6 - January 8 (North)
November 6 - January 15 (South)

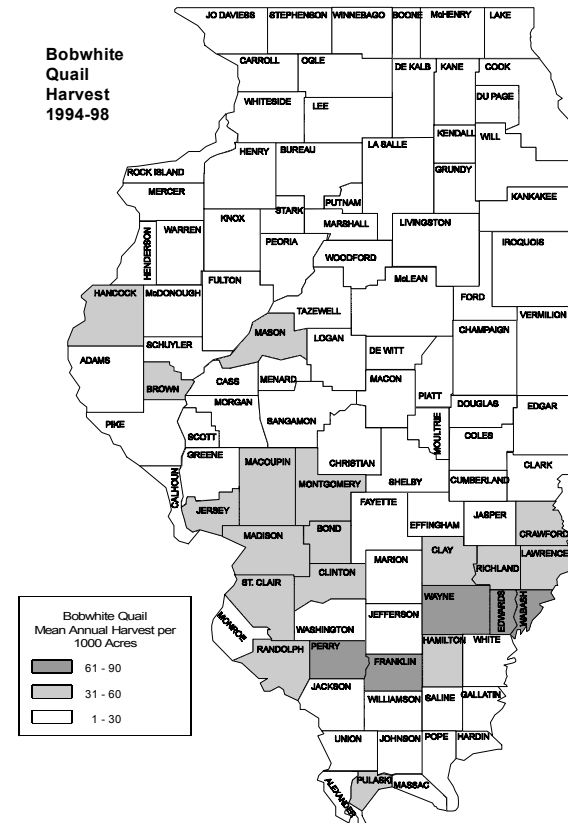
Hours

Sunrise - Sunset

Bag Limits

8 per day with 20 in possession after the third day

Prepared by John Cole 10/04



*Illinois Department of Natural Resources
Division of Wildlife Program Development*

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