

# 2009 Game Animal Population and Hunting Information

**Biologist:** Mike Livingston

**District/Wildlife Area:** District 4

For the following game animals (as they apply to your area), please provide your thoughts regarding current populations (related to recent years, not the 1970's), any factors that you think influenced the current condition, and your opinion about the fall 2009 season as it compares to recent seasons. For deer and elk, are there any GMUs that have unique characteristics- lots of private land with difficult access, difficult terrain to negotiate, wilderness, etc. If you have both white-tailed deer and mule deer, please provide information for each one. NOTE- this is not a scientific publication and it does not have to be lengthy, just informative.

**Pheasant:** Spring precipitation was favorable with lots of nesting and brood rearing cover. Insects including grasshoppers are abundant. Field observations indicate some pheasant broods are around where habitat remains. It may take a couple more years of favorable weather to boost populations significantly. Overall it should be a better year than last with numerous young birds. Best pheasant habitat in the District is in north Franklin County on and surrounding WDFW's Windmill Ranch Wildlife Area and the Register To Hunt Bailie Memorial Youth Ranch. Other habitat areas include the Hanford Reach National Monument's Ringold Unit, Umatilla National Wildlife Refuge along the Columbia, and the Corp of Engineers Big Flat and Lost Island Habitat Management Units along the Snake River.

**Quail:** Spring precipitation was favorable with lots of nesting and brood rearing cover. Plenty of insects and seed producing plants have been available for chicks. Field observations indicate lots of broods of various ages are present. It should be a better fall hunting season than last year. Best quail habitat in District is similar to those listing above for pheasant. In addition, anywhere along the rivers where riparian and herbaceous vegetation intersect will provide quail habitat. An ideal setting is where Russian olives or willows are adjacent to black greasewood or sagebrush.

**Gray Partridge:** very few in good years

**Chukar:** very few in good years

**Forest Grouse:** none

**Wild Turkeys:** none

**Waterfowl:** Local production appears to be low this year. Both breeding pair counts and brood counts were below the 5-year average for the District. There should be plenty of ducks for the youth season and opening weekend. Success will likely taper off as the ducks get “educated”, and then we’ll have to wait for the migrants to arrive in the mid- to late-season. There are lots of places to hunt ducks and geese in the District. Small ponds and lakes can be found on WDFW’s Windmill Ranch Wildlife Area and Bailie Memorial Youth Ranch and else where in north Franklin County. The Corp of Engineers and USFWS provide hunting areas along the Snake and Columbia Rivers for both bank and boat hunters.

**Dove:** The number of doves counted locally during the annual spring call count survey was just below the 9-year average. And, dove abundance at a local banding station was lower than average. Weather patterns, however, play a critical role in determining how many doves are present during the season opener. Therefore it is difficult to predict what the hunting will be like. Based on observations, it is likely to be an average to below average year for dove hunting.

**Deer:** Most of the District is private, open country farmland. Highest concentrations of deer (mostly mules with a few white-tails) are in GMU 381, with a large percentage migrating in from northern units starting in October/November. Hunter success rates (avg.=33% for modern firearm) tend to be high due to restricted access for hunters and a lack of cover for deer. There are some “Feel Free To Hunt” and “Hunt By Written Permission” acres where hunters can gain access to deer. Pre-season scouting is advisable in order to learn where to hunt. Classification surveys in December 2008 yielded an estimated 17 bucks and 48 fawns to 100 does. Both estimates were below the 5-year average. 2009 deer hunting may not be as good as last year when hunters harvested a record 303 bucks in GMU 381.

**Elk:** Opportunity for elk hunting is limited in the District to lands surrounding the west and south boundaries of the Hanford Reach National Monument (GMU 372). Hunts are geared toward addressing crop damage on surrounding wheat farms, vineyards and orchards. Access is extremely limited to either a couple pieces of state land north of Prosser and Benton City (contact Region 3 Yakima office for maps) and private land through special permit drawings. The best way to secure access is to apply for a special permit through the Landowner Hunt Program (LHP). If selected, permit holders are guaranteed a one day guided hunt. Most permits are limited to antlerless opportunity for youth hunters, but a few any elk permits are issued each year. Surveys in January 2009 yielded a total herd estimate of 639 elk with 49 bulls and 15 calves per 100 cows. The high bull ratio is typical for this herd since they can seek refuge on the federal Hanford lands during hunting season. The calf count was below average and was likely a result of the stress the cows experienced from a wildfire that burned in August 2007.

#### **Miscellaneous Comments:**