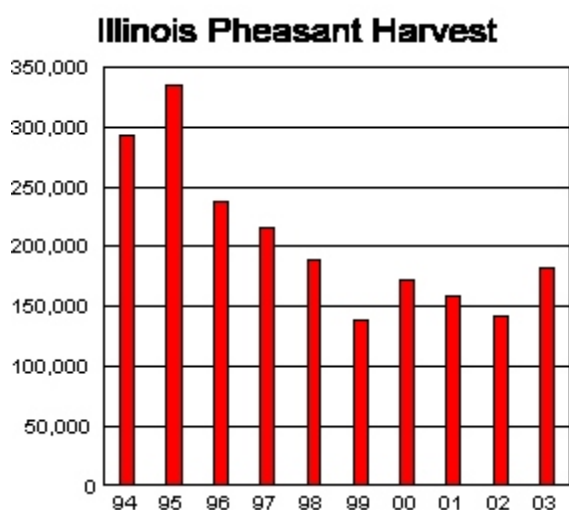


## Pheasant Hunting Prospects, 2004

### Upland Wildlife Program Management Notes 04-7

#### 2003-2004 Hunting Season

Last year, 50,592 hunters harvested 181,976 pheasants, a 28 percent increase from the 2002-03 season. This was 14 percent above the average of the last five years. Hunters went afield 274,287 days in 2003, unchanged from 2002 and daily harvest increased by 27 percent in 2003.



#### Winter Weather 2003-04

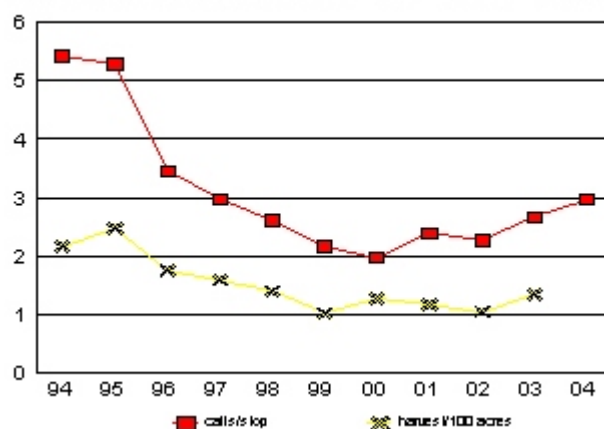
Winter weather was very mild throughout the Illinois pheasant range. Temperatures were 1-5° above normal but the duration and depth of snow cover was below normal in central and northern Illinois.

#### Pheasant Breeding Population Index

Pheasant call counts, conducted in May, were 11 percent above those conducted in 2003. This was 32 percent above the average of the previous five years but 21 percent below the 1975 to 2003 average. Counts were up 26 percent in northern Illinois and up 6 percent in central Illinois. Biologists conducting the North American Breeding Bird Survey

reported a 32 percent decrease in pheasant observations from 2003.

#### Call Counts and Pheasant Harvest



#### Pheasant Production Index

Pheasant brood counts, conducted in August, provide an index to annual pheasant production. The number of broods observed in 2004 was 5 percent above last year. A decrease was recorded in northern Illinois and an increase was recorded in central Illinois. The proportion of hens with broods decreased 17 percent and the number of chicks per brood was unchanged from 2003. However, the total number of chicks seen increased 6 percent. Weather conditions were favorable during the nesting season in 2004 with moderate temperatures and above average rainfall in most areas.

#### 2004 Season Outlook

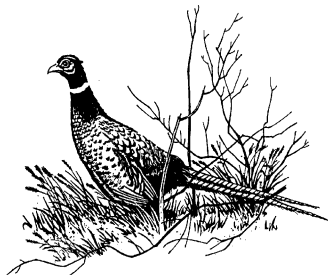
It appears that pheasant numbers will be higher for the 2004 season. The estimated pheasant harvest declined for four successive years but stabilized in 2000. The last half of the 1990's was unfavorable for pheasants in Illinois. Adverse weather reduced production

in 1996, the winter of 1998-99 reduced breeding populations and the hot, dry summer of 1999 again reduced productivity. At the same time, changes in Federal farm programs reduced the acres of nest cover and brood habitat available through the Acreage Conservation Reserve and Conservation Reserve Programs. Since 1997, the number of acres of CRP fields and filter strips has increased to 1995 levels so an upswing in pheasant numbers appears possible.

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

### Best Areas

Look for farms with unharvested grassland in fields, , field borders, ditch banks, terraces or filter strips. The most productive areas for pheasant hunting continue to be in east central and northern Illinois. Based on the annual average harvest from 1994 through 1998, some of the top counties are: Ford, Iroquois, Livingston, McLean, Mercer and Will.



### Season Dates

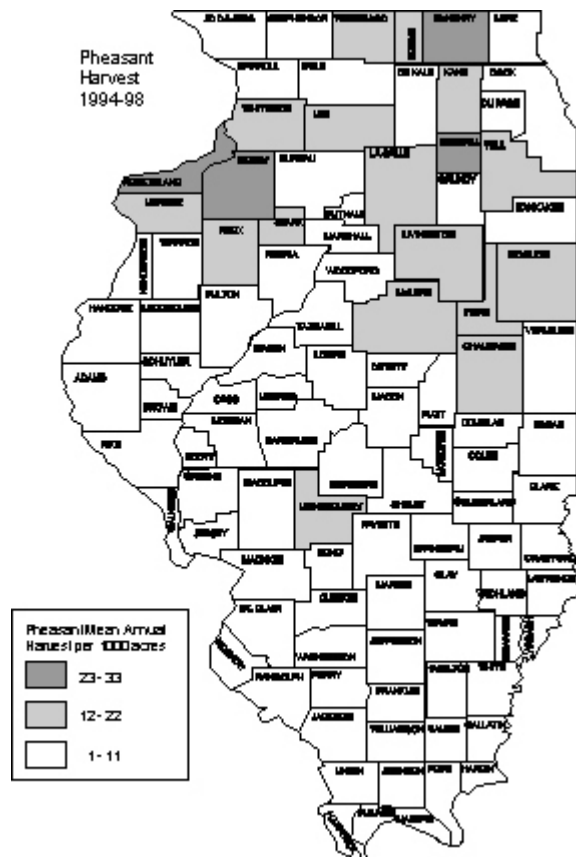
November 6 - January 8 (North)  
November 6 - January 15 (South)

### Hours

Sunrise to Sunset

### Bag Limits

2 per day with 6 in possession after third day



*Prepared by John Cole 10/04  
Illinois Department of Natural Resources  
Division of Wildlife Program Development*

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