

Good Populations Of Game For 1968 Hunting Season

Good populations of most game species will be available for Pennsylvania hunters this fall, according to field reports of the Pennsylvania Game Commission.

Statewide, 1968 has been a good year for reproduction, food supplies have been sufficient and cover for wildlife has been more than adequate.

Cottontail rabbit habitat, which supports the number one game animal in terms of abundance and harvest, is recovering from a drought which plagued the northeastern U.S. for about five years. Game Commission bi-

ologists report that the population of cottontails is up at least ten percent in nearly all areas of the state compared to last year. There are always local exceptions, of course.

Vegetation and feeding habits of rabbits start to change about August 10; that is, rabbits become nocturnal, feeding at night and spending more daylight hours in dens.

Rainfall also seems to have an effect on rabbits — dog trainers found fewer bunnies during the latter part of a dry August and more cottontails following early September rains.

Ringneck pheasant, the most abundant game bird, will be plentiful in the primary range. Last year's bumper crop was at or near an all-time high, and this year promises to be almost as good.

A late, wet spring this year resulted in later nesting, more nest destruction and additional re-nesting. Broods were similar to or slightly smaller than 1967. Because of the later hatching, some cockbirds in the 1968 hunting season may not be fully feathered and may resemble hens.

Continued, although slight, improvement is expected in the availability of ruffed grouse. Populations of the state bird appear to be starting to recover from their cyclic low of the past few years, and should offer fair to moderately good hunting for the state's sportsmen.

Squirrels are probably the most underharvested small game species and are abundant statewide. Some migration of squirrels has been noted from the northern to more central parts of the state due to a lessening of favorite food supplies for bushytails.

Populations of turkeys and bears are the major question marks this year. Turkey nesting was also late this spring because of cool, wet weather. Brood counts in July indicated that there might be a decline in the overall supply this year, but August observations indicated that there were almost as many sightings as during August, 1967. Data currently being collected may give a clearer picture of turkey availability in another few weeks. However, there certainly are enough of the big hunting this fall.

Keystone State hunters reported taking almost 1,200 bears during the past two seasons, and it cannot be expected that harvests of this magnitude will continue. Techniques to inventory

the prized big game trophies have not yet been perfected. A number of sightings have been reported, but there are other strong indications that the population has declined.

Game technicians are more confident about estimates on the availability of whitetail deer. Deer are abundant throughout the Commonwealth, with local populations at or exceeding the comfortable carrying capacity of the range.

All in all, it looks like another good year for Pennsylvania hunters.

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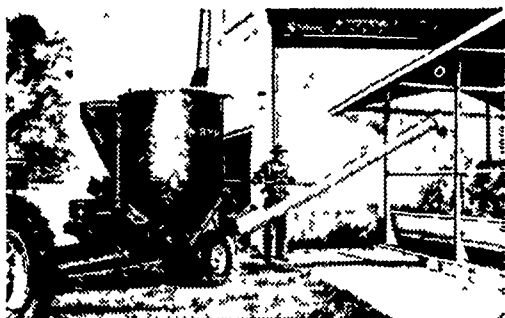
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