



IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

# Iowa DNR News

Conservation and Recreation

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Iowa's annual pheasant population survey begins August 1



*The August roadside survey is the best measurement of Iowa pheasant population. Surveyors watch for hens moving their broods to the road edges to dry off before starting to look for insects. Photo courtesy of the Iowa DNR.*

Iowa's 15-day annual pheasant population survey begins on Aug. 1, and after a mild winter and early spring, wildlife experts are cautiously optimistic about what they hope to find.

“Our weather this year is nearly identical to what we saw in 2015,” said Todd Bogenschutz, upland wildlife biologist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources who coordinates and collects the data from the 208, 30-mile survey routes.

“Our spring weather model is pointing toward a status quo population, but in 2015, with nearly identical data, the statewide pheasant counts increased by 40 percent. The wet spring suggests counts similar to last year, but we're optimistic that if the population responds like 2015, it will likely mark our highest statewide pheasant count since 2006.

“Either way hunters should have a great fall,” he said.

The virtual lack of snowfall across much of the state likely resulted in good hen survival and those extra hens offered great potential for increased numbers this fall. Pheasants do best during mild winters with less than 30 inches of snow followed by a warm, dry spring nesting season with less than eight inches of rain. Iowa's statewide snowfall average was 20.4 inches. The statewide spring rain average was 8.7 inches.

“I had reports from people who were seeing pheasant broods in May, which suggests early nesting, which is a good omen for the fall,” he said.

The August roadside survey is the best measurement of Iowa pheasant population. The 30-mile routes are driven at sunrise on gravel roads preferably on mornings with heavy dew and little wind. Surveyors watch for hens moving their broods to the road edges to dry off before starting to look for insects.

Surveyors note the number in the brood, any adult pheasants present and the size of the chicks, which tells Bogenschutz if this was an initial nest or if the nest was washed out and this brood was from a second or even third nest attempt. Each attempt after the first has fewer eggs than the prior attempt.

The survey also collects data on cottontail rabbits, jack rabbits, quail and Hungarian partridge.

Data is collected from the same routes each year. The information will be available online at [www.iowadnr.gov/pheasantsurvey](http://www.iowadnr.gov/pheasantsurvey) by middle September.

**Media Contact:** Todd Bogenschutz, Upland Wildlife Research Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-432-2823 ext 111.

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## Hooking summer catfish

Start a new family tradition this summer – go fishing for catfish. Bring along two coolers with ice, one to keep your bait firm and fresh and another to keep your catch cold and preserve that great taste.

“Catfish are more active in hot weather,” explained Joe Larscheid, chief of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources' (DNR) Fisheries Bureau. They are biting in every stream of any size, in all lakes and many farm ponds.

Catfish have a great sense of smell and taste. Try prepared dip baits, chicken livers, minnows or chubs, green sunfish, bluegill, crawdads, frogs, night crawlers or dead, but fresh, gizzard shad.

Lakes stratify, or form layers, this time of year, with cool, oxygen-deprived waters sinking to the bottom. Do not fish in water deeper than 8 to 10 feet.

Look for areas with vegetation, brush piles or rock. Fish the upper ends of the larger reservoirs where the water is shallower and baitfish like gizzard shad gather. Use baits fished on the bottom or suspended off the bottom with a bobber and let current or breeze move the bait to find active catfish.

Iowa rivers are loaded with catfish. Look for fish around downed trees and brush piles, but don't overlook rock piles or other objects that deflect water and form a current seam. Position your bait just upstream of brush piles so the scent of the bait is carried downstream into the structure to draw the catfish out. Anchor the bait with a heavy weight so it doesn't drift into snags. If fishing the big rivers, try upstream and on the tips of wing dykes and wing dams on the Missouri and Mississippi rivers.

Find more tips for catching, cleaning and cooking catfish on the DNR website at [fishing.iowadnr.gov](http://fishing.iowadnr.gov).

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## North Raccoon Wildlife Area is building a recreation reputation





*Sections of North Raccoon Wildlife Area have been planted with nut-producing oaks, hickories and walnuts favored by many different wildlife species. Photo courtesy of the Iowa DNR.*

The North Raccoon Wildlife Area just might be the biggest playground in Greene County. But rather than teeter-totters and swings, this playground offers excellent deer hunting, turkey, dove and rabbit hunting, river access and sandbar camping, bird watching, hiking and more.

The area, which originates from the intersection of the North Raccoon River and Hwy. 30, has as grown from nearly 290 acres to more than 720 acres since 2012, thanks to local landowners who wanted to share their piece of paradise.

“We’ve had landowners turn down multiple offers, waiting for us to buy it because they want to make their land available for everyone to use,” said Josh Gansen, wildlife biologist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

For more than 40 years, the area consisted of basically the McMahon Access with a narrow strip of public land on either side of the river around the Hwy. 30 Bridge.

The first land project was the result of an easement program within the U.S. Department of Agriculture that focused on improving the water quality in the North Raccoon watershed.

It became a catalyst for other projects in the area.

The federally endangered Topeka shiner was living in multiple streams in the North Raccoon River watershed. In 2015, federal funding became available to purchase specific parcels in the watershed to protect the minnow.

After the Topeka shiner project closed, Gansen started to receive calls from neighbors who were also interested in selling their property.

“Some were recreational landowners and some were calling from estates,” he said.

The Iowa DNR has been working with the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation to purchase land from willing sellers for appraised value. One family – the Gorsuchs – had used part of their land as their own private getaway. They had always allowed others to hunt their land, but now their kids away at college and the getaway wasn’t getting much use.

Another tract was purchased from a sand and gravel company who had a lot of land that it wasn’t using. It has oak savannah knobs by the river and an abandoned quarry that offers 8-9 acres of good fishing.

One section of the parcel had a dove food plot last year but this year it will have food plots of turnips and winter wheat attractive to deer and turkeys. The area had just been mowed to prep the site. Gansen expects it to be green for this fall, once the rain returns.

Across the road, an 80-acre tract will be allowed to return to forest with nut producing trees and shrubs interspersed to add diversity.

The latest acquisition – a 65 acre tract - was just closed on a few weeks ago. Now the work begins.

DNR staff will clean up the old farmhouse foundation and remove rusting farm machinery and house appliances, lawn mower and sewing machine, livestock feeders and more. Property signs have not yet been installed.

“Some of these areas are so new that we don’t have a lot of history on what flora and fauna is here,” Gansen said.

Management varies by parcel – one section in a floodplain has a 100-acre prairie and wetland basins built to flood each spring. Gansen planted sections of the area with nut-producing oaks, hickories and walnuts favored by many different wildlife species. He opted to plant larger trees to get them established before the much more wet soils tolerant but less wildlife beneficial willows, silver maples and cottonwoods appear.

“We want to be sure there is a hard mast producing component on the floodplain as the area matures,” he said.

The young prairie wetland area is alive with grasshoppers, monarchs, swallows, dragonflies darting, zagging and bombing under the watchful eye of an immature bald eagle. Three young crow-sized pheasants darted from the mowed area to the safety of the taller prairie grasses.

### **Paddlers finding the area**

The North Raccoon Wildlife Area is bisected by the North Raccoon River giving paddlers, anglers and other river users the unique opportunity to camp on the sandbars on the public area. If the river is high, they can move their campsite to the wildlife area.

“These aren’t standard camping sites, these are remote spots for paddlers looking for a specific experience,” Gansen said.

**Media Contact:** Josh Gansen, Wildlife Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515- 432-2545.

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## Meeting to discuss proposed bird conservation area in Lower Loess Hills set for Aug. 17

HAMBURG – The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will discuss its proposed designation of the region that includes Waubonsie State Park and Riverton and Forney Lake wildlife areas as a state Bird Conservation Area (BCA) at a public meeting on Aug. 17.

The meeting begins at 6:30 p.m. at Waubonsie State Park’s Washawtee Lodge on Washawtee Rd., one half mile northeast of Bluff Rd. (Co. road L44), 4.5 miles north of Hamburg.

“The proposed Lower Loess Hills BCA is especially unique and contains a wide variety of woodlands, grasslands, and wetlands, providing habitat for 128 nesting birds and 282 bird species overall, 92 of which are species of greatest conservation need,” said Bruce Ehresman, with the Iowa DNR’s Wildlife Diversity Program.

“From large forest birds like the broad-winged hawk and wood thrush, to savanna species like the barn owl and red-headed woodpecker, to declining grassland birds like eastern meadowlark and bobolink, this unique area encompasses a beautiful portion of the Loess Hills, along with riverine areas along the Missouri and East Nishnabotna rivers, providing an ideal southwestern Iowa setting for what can become Iowa’s twenty-fourth Bird Conservation Area.”

The Bird Conservation Area concept focuses on all-bird conservation at a large landscape scale, and the program’s success depends upon partnerships between public agencies, private conservation organizations, and private landowners. Each BCA consists of at least 10,000 acres, with one or more core areas of permanently protected bird habitat surrounded by large areas of privately owned land that also provides important habitat for birds. Core public lands are managed for all wild birds, but especially for those species experiencing regional or continental population declines.

Wildlife biologists and private lands specialists work with willing landowners to find ways to improve their properties for birds. Participation in this BCA program is completely voluntary, and there are no restrictions or requirements placed on landowners. The program can result in extra incentives for landowners to make bird habitat improvements.

Creating Bird Conservation Areas remains a high priority for the Iowa DNR.

“Establishing a Bird Conservation Area helps draw attention to the needs of birds that are in trouble, while it allows the local community and concerned citizens an opportunity to take action to help these birds,” said Matt Dollison, wildlife management biologist for the DNR. “Declining species ranging from game birds like northern Bobwhite and blue-winged teal to

nongame species such as whip-poor-will and belted kingfisher all can benefit from the creation of the Lower Loess Hills Bird Conservation Area.”

Dollison and Ehresman encourage anyone interested in bird conservation, bird watching, and improved natural resource management to join them for this informative public meeting.

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