



## Quail numbers significantly increase this year

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A favorable spring with mild temperatures and timely rains has pushed Texas quail populations to their strongest position since 2018.

An increase in quail numbers means better hunting opportunities for several areas of the state when quail hunting season opens Oct. 28.

“Counts are up across the state,” John McLaughlin, upland game bird program leader for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD), said. “Generally, that’s a very good sign that we made some significant gains this year.”

Population numbers are up thanks to spring rains that improved habitat conditions.

The hot and dry summer then diminished conditions in many regions, dampening population recovery.

“Grass, forbs and all those shrubs really require rainfall, and they’re really reliant on soil moisture,” McLaughlin said. “The more soil moisture we have coming out of the winter and heading into the spring, the more likely we are to see early green-up

periods. The earlier green-up periods we have, the higher likelihood of quail being in breeding condition early and nesting early. We know from a lot of research that early season nesting really contributes the greatest amount to our fall population.”

The regions with holdover nesting cover and quail from 2022 were the best positioned to take advantage of improved habitat.

South Texas and the Gulf Coast prairies saw the biggest population increases this year.

“We expect bobwhite hunting in South Texas is going to be good to very good across that region,” McLaughlin said in an interview with the [Texas Farm Bureau Radio Network](#).

Unlike other parts of the state, South Texas started the year with residual quail numbers from last year, providing a foundation that allowed the increase in the quail population.

In the Gulf Coast prairies region, bobwhite quail took advantage of early season nesting opportunities, leading to the best survey results TPWD has seen since 2015.

“That region has gotten hot as we’ve gone through the summer, but our roadside counts were up. So, there may be some hunting opportunities there,” McLaughlin said.

On the Rolling Plains of Texas, TPWD’s roadside counts recorded a bump in bobwhite populations.

There was an increase in both bobwhites and scaled quail on the High Plains.

“There are other good signs that birds were able to make some gains, but those were more modest gains, and we expect some probably more limited hunting opportunity in those regions,” McLaughlin said.

Unfortunately, the bobwhite population in the Cross Timbers region remains below other parts of the state.

“I think in terms of hunting opportunity, it’s probably going to be difficult if you’re in the Cross Timbers,” McLaughlin said. “If you’re in the South Rolling Plains region, numbers are up, but it’s going to be more spotty versus going up in the Canadian River watershed or the northern Panhandle.”

TPWD is forecasting below average to fair hunting in the Edwards Plateau.

The best area for scaled quail hunting this year is the Trans-Pecos.

“We had good cover entering the year, and we saw a significant bump in scaled quail populations out in West Texas,” McLaughlin said. “We expect the Trans-Pecos and Edwards Plateau to have good to very good scaled quail hunting if you’re able to get out there.”

There are no regulation changes for quail hunters this year.

The regular statewide quail hunting season is Oct. 28 through Feb. 25, 2024.