

# Western Birds

The  
Wingshooter's  
Newsletter



Upland Opener Forecast

October 15, 2015

## Outlook for quail and chukar is grim in most of region this year

I hate to be the bearer of bad news on the eve of this year's general quail and chukar season opener on Saturday (Oct. 17), but for the third consecutive year in a row the outlook for hunting is pretty dismal across most of Southern California.

There are a couple of brighter spots in a mostly dark picture, but here is this year's forecast.

**CHUKAR:** The most popular hunting areas for chukar look particularly bad this year.

The Red Mountain region, which in my lexicon includes the Rand and El Paso mountain ranges south of Inyokern and Ridgecrest along with the southern Sierra Nevada south of Olancho, looks very poor with almost no young produced and very low numbers of holdover birds. I have not heard of anyone seeing more than small, isolated groups of mature birds this year in this vast region, a region that can be so good.

The grim news for chukar hunters continues south into the west Mojave Desert region from Barstow to Lucerne Valley and west Highway 14. Production in this closer-to-home region (for most of us) has been as bad or worse than the Red Mountain region. The number of young counted by my friends in Quail Forever chapters could be counted on one hand and total numbers are at very low levels.

The only place there has been fair chukar production is in the far eastern portion of San Bernardino County in the higher elevation desert mountains on the Mojave National Preserve. This area had more holdover birds and those chukar produced a fair number of chicks this season.



I have had decent reports of chukar in the Hackberry Mountains (north of Goffs off Lanfair Road), in the rugged country around Wildhorse Canyon and Columbia Mountain (near Hole-In-The-Wall campground), and in the New York Mountains. The Ivanpah on the south side of Interstate 15 at Mountain Pass and the Clark Mountains on the north side have some chukar, but reports from this area have been mixed.

I also had a late report this week that the area north of Bishop (the east side of the Glass Mountains and that region) also had some production this year.

(For those of you who hunt out of state, northern Nevada, eastern Oregon, and southern Idaho all had  
(Continued on Page 2, See *Outlook bleak....*)

# Opener Forecast

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## Outlook bleak....

(Continued from Page 1)

pretty good production and all three state game agencies are predicting better hunting than last year. You can find good information on the state game websites.)

**VALLEY QUAIL:** Valley quail news is also poor throughout most of the Southern California, with just a couple of minor exceptions where the production of young was decent and hunting should be a couple of steps better than “dismal.”

The entire southern Sierra Nevada from Olancho south is going to be very tough, just like chukar in this region. Rainfall was scanty and came at the wrong times to help quail production this year.

Very poor production was also the case through the southern San Joaquin Valley, Carrizo Plain region, and most of the Los Padres National Forest areas from Ventura to San Luis Obispo to Bakersfield to Frazier Park.

The west Mojave desert continues to have few quail thanks to several years of poor production, and bird numbers in the foothill regions on the north side of the San Gabriel and San Bernardino mountains remain very depressed. Production was a little better at the higher elevations in these two mountain ranges, but because of low holdover numbers from last year, the hunting will be difficult.

Valley quail numbers, while below well average everywhere else, too, have improved a little in pockets of habitat across San Diego County (mostly higher elevation lands or where rainfall was better) and the Santa Ana Mountains.

**GAMBEL'S QUAIL:** Gambel's quail that live in the vast Mojave and Colorado River deserts are one of the few bright spots in this dismal upland bird hunting

forecast. But even that good news is tempered.

In the far eastern portions of their range, especially in the higher elevations on the Mojave National Preserve, and in the corridor along the Colorado River, holdover numbers and production of Gambel's quail have been fair to good. These areas have had better monsoon rains and decent winter rains for two years in a row, which have allowed the bird numbers to recover from a long downward trend. But even in this vast region, the improvements have been spotty due to rain patterns.

Hunters who stay above 4,500 feet in the Mojave National Preserve, or those who stay closer to the Colorado River (or agricultural fields along the river) will see the most birds.

With heat of the past few weeks and cooler but still warm weather forecast into the weekend (and even chances of rain on Sunday), I suspect most birds will still be visiting water sources daily, so hunting within a mile or two of water will be critical to finding quail and chukar in these desert areas.

**MOUNTAIN QUAIL:** Mountain quail, which live in higher elevation habitat in Southern California and the Sierra, have populations that remain stable in most of the southern part of their range, slightly less impacted by the drought, but still below ideal levels.

These quail occur in smaller numbers than valley or Gambel's quail, but there will be huntable numbers of these birds – the largest quail in the state – in the San Bernardino, San Jacinto, Santa Ana mountain ranges, and most of the higher ranges in San Diego county. In the southern Sierra, mountain quail numbers are still depressed, even though there was a little better production this year. Those of you who have hunted the early mountain quail season in the Sierra have found this out.

**[Your October, 2015, issue of *Western Birds* will be going in the mail next week. Please give me a call if you have any questions.]**