

Alberta Conservation Association
2023/24 Project Summary Report

Project Name: Upland Game Bird Fall Forecast

Wildlife Program Manager: Doug Manzer

Project Leader: Samuel Vriend

Primary ACA Staff on Project: Easton Fritz, Jalen Hult, Doug Manzer, Kelly Riehl, Phil Rose Layne Seward, Mike Uchikura, and Jaclyn Vanderfluit

Partnerships

Government of Alberta

Landowners

Pheasants Forever – Calgary Chapter

Volunteer survey participants

Key Findings

- Since 2019, volunteer hunters and their bird dogs have increased the distance covered during upland game bird flushing surveys.
- The encounter rate of flushes per hour (and kilometre walked) for pheasants was similar to the past couple years, although the number of birds flushed per encounter was down. We saw 0.95 pheasants for each kilometre walked (62 km) over 17.8 hrs of survey time.
- Partridge numbers were higher than average in 2023 and within the upper tier compared to the past 12 years. The average partridge covey size per flush ($n = 11.7$) is the highest on record since we began these surveys in 2012.
- We had an average of 2.32 partridge flushes per hour. This translates to 8.08 partridge for each kilometre walked (68.1 km) over the 20.3 hours of survey time.

Details

As in 2020–2022, we reached out to the hunting dog community in 2023 to ask for their assistance with conducting annual upland game bird productivity surveys throughout Alberta. The survey information collected by the volunteers enabled us to expand the geographical areas covered as well as the overall survey effort, particularly for partridge. We anticipate this will provide a broader representation of the annual survey results for pheasant and partridge recruitment leading up to the annual hunting season.

Partridge numbers were higher than average and within the upper tier compared to the past 12 years. In fact, the average partridge covey size per flush ($n = 11.7$) in 2023 is the highest on record since we began these surveys in 2012. On the other hand, the number of pheasant flushed per kilometre walked was down compared to the past few years, although the number of flushes per hour was about the same. Overall, 59 pheasants were flushed while covering 62 km over 17.8 hours of effort, for a flush rate of 1.46 encounters per hour (single or covey). More survey effort went into areas with grey partridge compared to pheasants, with participants covering 68.1 km over 20.3 hours, resulting in 2.32 partridge encounters per hour (singles or coveys).

The information acquired from these surveys helps us understand population trends and brood success for pheasants and partridge, as well as heighten the excitement for the upcoming hunting season as we release the survey results on our website and various social media outlets each fall. More data is required for forest grouse species to understand population dynamics.

Photos



Photo 1. Wildlife biologist, Jalen Hult, with his dog as they investigate a coulee that displays an appealing mix of shrub and perennial grass preferred by pheasants and grey partridge. Photo: Samuel Vriend