

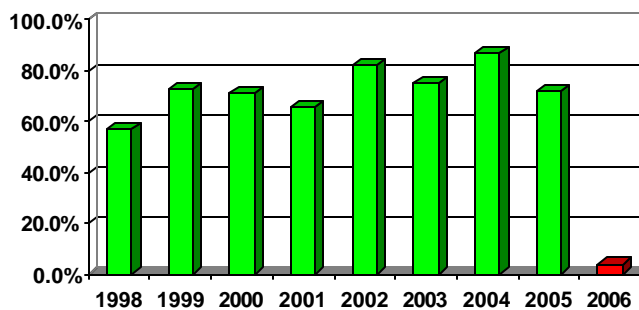


Quail Hunt Cancellations

After consultation with ranch ownership we have decided to cancel all quail hunts after Thanksgiving.

Our decision to cancel the remaining quail hunts was not based upon bird numbers (even though bird numbers are down substantially) but rather on the juvenile-to-adult ratio. We were finding 8-18 coveys per day with most days producing 10-13 coveys. However only about 4% of all birds harvested this season were juvenile.

Juvenile Percentage Since 1998



This means that we were shooting adult birds that were at least 1½ years old. Young birds seen early in the summer and in mid-September did not survive. Extremely hot temperatures and drought conditions killed young and adult birds in the summer. Extended periods of cool, wet weather killed newly hatched birds in September. A population consisting only of adult birds raises at least two serious concerns: First, will these older birds be less likely to survive the winter? Second, will these older birds be less productive breeders next summer? The remaining birds will need a mild winter, plenty of cover, and plenty of food to survive the winter. Heavy rainfall in September and October produced good cover and a bumper ragweed crop. Combining supplemental feeding with native seeds like ragweed, croton, and sunflower should provide the sustenance necessary to endure short periods of cold weather. Timely rains in June and July are required to produce successful broods. A good insect crop is necessary to raise young birds as insects comprise over 90% of their diet through the first 10 days of their life. We feel that canceling all quail hunts and concentrating on heavy feeding will offer the Pitchfork Ranch quail population the best chance to rebound quickly next summer. Ultimately spring and summer rains will determine fall bird densities.

If you are interested in tracking weather data on the Pitchfork Ranch you can visit <http://www.mesonet.ttu.edu> and choose the Guthrie weather station. That unit is located in the River pasture southeast of the headquarters approximately 3 miles. The unit provides very accurate temperature and wind data. Precipitation data is inconsistent, often providing readings 20% less than actual rainfall.