

Rabbit Hunting Prospects, 2009

Agriculture and Grassland Program Note 09-2

2008-09 Hunter Harvest

Our harvest estimates are based upon results from the 2008-09 Illinois Hunter Harvest Survey. An estimated 40,077 hunters harvested 154,216 rabbits. The number of hunters afield, daily harvest rate, and number of days afield were all much lower than the 2007-08 season.

Table 1. Rabbit hunter participation and success 2003 through 2009.

Season	Harvest	Hunters	Average Rabbits/Trip	Total Days Hunting
2003-04	323,167	64,758	0.85	379,830
2004-05	429,460	78,768	1.14	375,013
2005-06	311,011	60,431	1.07	290,349
2006-07	267,782	49,350	1.13	237,525
2007-08	243,874	49,054	0.9	271,107
2008-09	154,216	40,077	0.71	216,255
Percent change 2008-2009	-36.7%	-18.3%	-21.1%	-20.2%

Winter Weather 2008-09

Last winter was about 3.4 degrees warmer than average in southern Illinois. There were 3 (3.5%) more days of snow cover and 14.2 inches (18.1%) less snowfall than the previous winter. Parts of southern Illinois were struck by a severe ice storm in late January.

Last winter was colder in northern Illinois (about 2.4 degrees colder than average). There were 14 (8.3%) more days of snow cover and 3.7 inches (3.6%) less snowfall than the previous winter.

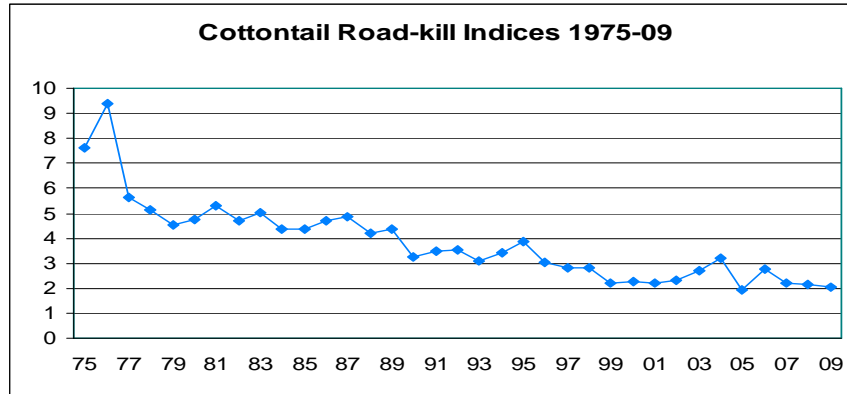
Rabbit Population Index

The method that provides the most reliable rabbit trend data for Illinois is the count of road-killed rabbits. The best available index of the fall cottontail population trends is the June-July road-kill index.

The southern Illinois index decreased by 19.5% and the northern Illinois rabbit index increased 35% from the previous year. Even though numbers are up in northern Illinois, there are still more rabbits in southern Illinois where this year's index was still 28% higher.



Figure 1. Cottontail road-kill indices 1975 through 2009.



2009 Season Outlook

Rabbit numbers will be lower than last year's levels in southern Illinois and higher in northern Illinois. Temperatures during the breeding season were cool with above average rainfall so production may be lower than average.

Due to the wet spring, it is likely that crops may still be in the field during part of the season. This may make hunting more difficult until the crops are harvested.

Best Areas

Look for farms with a mix of row crops, small grain and legumes with shrubby fencerows, old pasture and forest edges. The most productive areas for rabbit hunting continue to be in west-central and southern Illinois. Based on the average annual harvest estimates from 1997 through 2002, some of the top counties are: Bond, Calhoun, Clay, Clinton, Madison, Marion and Wayne.

Season Dates

November 7, 2009 – January 8, 2010 (North)

November 7, 2009- January 22, 2010 (South)

Hours

Sunrise to Sunset

Bag Limits

4 per day with 10 in possession after the 3rd day



*Prepared by Michael Wefer 09/09
Illinois Department of Natural Resources
Division of Wildlife Resources*

Equal opportunity to participate in programs of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) and those funded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other agencies is available to all individuals regardless of race, sex, national origin, disability, age, religion or other non-merit factors. If you believe you have been discriminated against, contact the funding source's civil rights office and/or the Equal Employment Opportunity Officer, IDNR, One Natural Resources Way, Springfield, IL 62702-1271; 217/785-0067; TTY 217/782-9175.