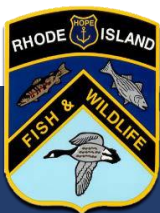
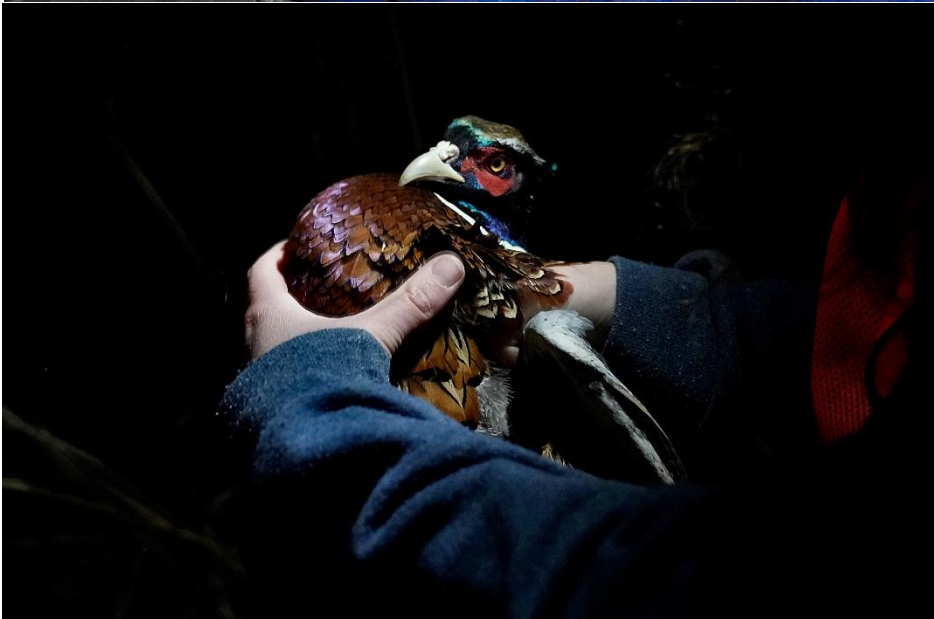


State of Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management Division of Fish & Wildlife

2023–2024 Pheasant Program Summary



Acknowledgements

Prepared by the Rhode Island
Department of Environmental Management

Division of Fish & Wildlife
277 Great Neck Road
West Kingston, RI 02892
Phone: (401) 789-0281
Fax: (401)783-7490

Lizzi Bonczek, Upland Game Bird Biologist
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Introduction

The ring-necked pheasant is native to Asia and was first brought over to the United States in 1881. Since then, pheasant releases occurred throughout the United States and wild populations became established in suitable habitats. In Rhode Island, pheasants became well established in the early 1900s from historic releases. At this time Rhode Island’s landscape was dominated by open farmland, pastureland, and grassland. Pheasants could be found statewide, but the largest populations were in southern Rhode Island (e.g., Washington, Bristol, and Newport counties).

State sponsored pheasant stocking began in the 1950s to supplement declining wild population and to provide additional opportunity for upland bird hunters on state land. At present, the only pheasants occurring on mainland Rhode Island are stocked by the RIDEM Division of Fish and Wildlife or private hunting clubs. The loss of mainland wild pheasant populations in Rhode Island primarily occurred due to landscape changes, with most farmland, pastureland, and grasslands being converted to housing developments and mature forests. This loss of early successional habitat and pheasant nesting cover has similarly caused declines for other species that rely on early successional habitats, including New England cottontail, northern bobwhite, American woodcock, bobolink, prairie warbler, and savannah sparrow. The only remaining wild pheasant population is on Block Island (New Shoreham).

This document provides a summary of the 2023–2024 pheasant hunting season and pheasant hunter survey results, with additional stocking updates for the 2024–2025 season.

2023–2024 Season Dates, Bag Limits and Additional Requirements

The 2023–2024 pheasant season started on October 21, 2023, through February 29, 2024. Pheasant stocking occurred from October 21, 2023, through December 30, 2023. A gamebird permit is required to hunt pheasants (outside of RI shooting preserves) and the daily bag limit is 2 either-sex birds. Legal hunting hours are sunrise to sunset.

A youth season occurred the weekend prior to the opener, October 14–15, 2023. Fifty pheasants each were stocked at Nicholas Farm, Eight Rod Farm, and Great Swamp Wildlife Management Areas.

Due to the risk of EEE at the start of the pheasant stocking season, management areas were closed in the northern part of the state. Pheasants that were scheduled to be stocked at Durfee Hill management area were redistributed to Nicholas Farm management area for the youth pheasant hunting weekend and Black Hut, Buck Hill, and Nicholas Farm management areas during the regular season. Durfee Hill management area re-opened, and the normal pheasant stocking schedule resumed November 4, 2023.

2024–2025 Regulation Changes

There are no regulation changes for the 2024–2025 pheasant hunting season.

2024–2025 Pheasant Stocking Locations

Note: The number of birds and locations stocked are subject to change

Each [\(MAP\)](#) is linked to an updated georeferenced map detailing pheasant stocking location on each wildlife management area.

Providence County

Black Hut Management Area, Burrillville ([MAP](#)), 340 birds/season, stocked 2x/week

Buck Hill Management Area, Burrillville ([MAP](#)), 490 birds/season, stocked 2x/week

Durfee Hill Management Area, Glocester ([MAP 1](#)) ([MAP 2](#)), 440 birds/season, stocked 2x/week*

Kent County

Big River Management Area, West Greenwich ([MAP](#)), 370 birds/season, stocked 2x/week

Nicholas Farm Management Area, Coventry ([MAP 1](#)) ([MAP 2](#)), 470 birds/season, stocked 2x/week

Washington County

Arcadia Management Area, Richmond/Exeter ([MAP 1](#)) ([MAP 2](#)) ([MAP 3](#)) ([MAP 4](#)) ([MAP 5](#)), 1590 birds/season, stocked 2x/week

Carolina Management Area, Carolina ([MAP 1](#)) ([MAP 2](#)) ([MAP 3](#)), 840 birds/season, stocked 2x/week

Great Swamp Management Area, West Kingstown ([MAP](#)), 840 birds/season, stocked 2x/week *

Newport County

Eight Rod Farm Management Area, Tiverton ([MAP](#)), 340 birds/season, stocked 1x/week*

Sapowet Management Area, Tiverton ([MAP](#)), 240 birds/season, stocked 1x/week

Simmons Mill Management Area, Coventry ([MAP](#)), 40 birds/season, stocked 1x/week**

* Additional stocking for youth weekend not included in total birds/season

**No December stocking at this location

Special Hunt Opportunities, 2024–2025

A youth pheasant hunt will be held on October 12–13, 2024 at the Great Swamp, Durfee Hill, and Eight Rod management areas. Each site will be stocked with 50 pheasants prior to the youth weekend. Youth pheasant hunters must have either a Junior Hunting License (aged 12-14) or Hunting License (aged 15) and a Game Bird Permit. Junior hunters must be accompanied by a 21+ adult with a valid Hunting License and youth hunters aged 15 must be accompanied by a parent, guardian, or qualified adult 21+.

There may be additional opportunities for family and/or women’s pheasant hunts through the Rhode Island Hunter Education Program. Please monitor the RI hunter education social media or website for details at <https://dem.ri.gov/natural-resources-bureau/fish-wildlife/outreach-education/hunter-education/events-course-schedules>.

Pheasant Hunter Survey Results, 2023–2024

A total of 1,498 game bird permits were sold during the 2023–2024 hunting season. This is a decrease from the 1,564 permits sold during the 2022–2023 season. All hunters who purchased a game bird permit and had a valid email address in the online licensing system were sent a pheasant hunter survey and we obtained 713 responses. Based on the hunter survey, 78% of respondents who purchased a game bird permit hunted during the 2023–2024 season, while 22% did not hunt. This equates to an estimate of 1,174 pheasant hunters in Rhode Island. Pheasant hunters harvested an average (mean) of 4 birds during the 2023–2024 season (n= 478 responses), the same average harvest as the last 2 seasons. Pheasant harvest ranged from 0–34 birds, with 33% of respondents harvesting > 4 birds. Although we expected a steep decline upon the cessation of pheasant stocking on December 31, pheasant hunters chased birds from opening day until the close of the season on February 29 (Figure 1). More than half of the pheasant hunters in Rhode Island hunted over dogs (70%), and over one-quarter of respondents mentioned, at least in part, that incorporating a dog into their pheasant hunting is a reason why they hunt pheasants. Furthermore, pheasant hunters that hunted with a dog harvested over 3 times as many birds as those that hunted without a dog (Figure 2). Rhode Island pheasant hunters have on average 16 years of pheasant hunting experience with a range of 0–65 years. Just shy of 50% of hunters responded that they were either very satisfied or satisfied with the 2023–2024 pheasant season, while only 21% of pheasant hunters responded that they were very dissatisfied or dissatisfied.

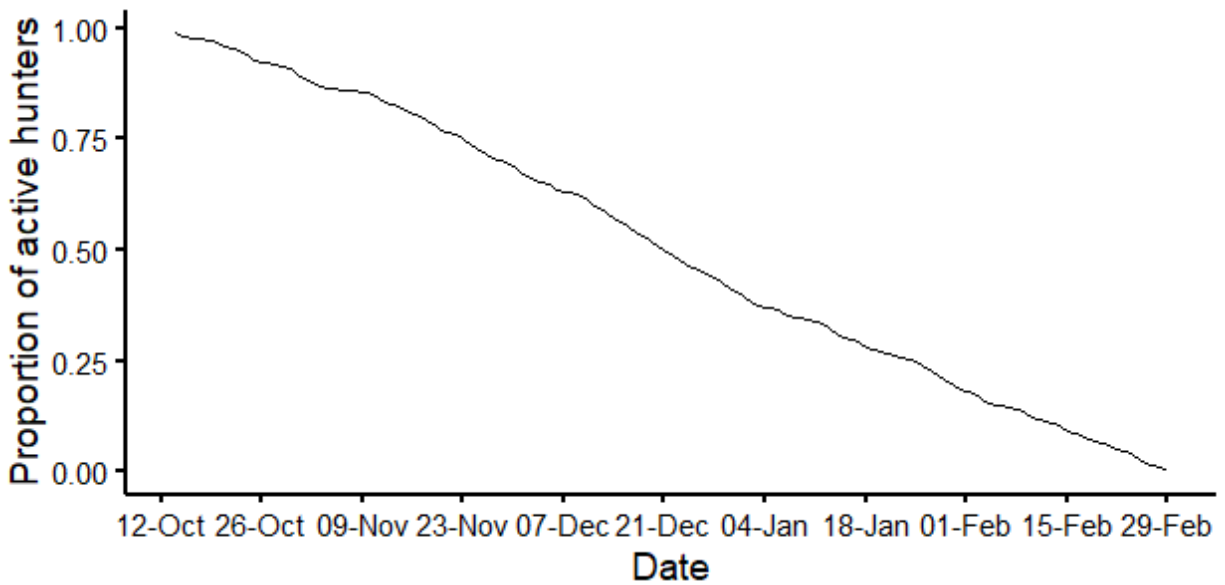


Figure 1. Pheasant hunter activity throughout the 2023–2024 season from self-reports of the last day hunted. Figure based on 459 respondents.



Figure 2. Based on self-reports of the number of birds harvested, hunters that hunted with a dog harvested significantly more pheasants than those that hunted without a dog. On average, those that hunted without a dog harvested 1.6 pheasants and those that hunted with a dog harvested 5.3 pheasants during the 2023–2024 pheasant season. Figure based on 477 respondents.

Most respondents (55%) who purchased a game bird stamp only harvested/targeted pheasants and did not harvest other small game species while pheasant hunting. A proportion of pheasant hunters also harvested woodcock (10.8%), squirrel (6.4%), cottontail rabbits (5.0%), and mourning doves (5.5%), and coyotes (1.6%); Figure 3). A handful of hunters harvested other

species including waterfowl, quail, crow, and fox.

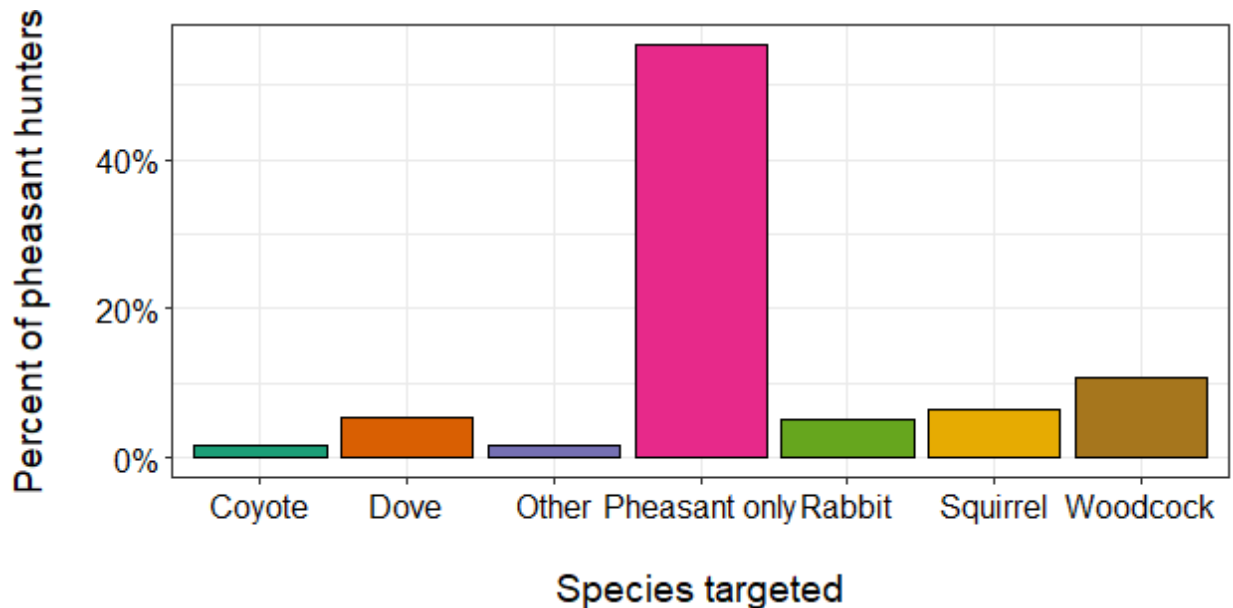


Figure 3. Upland bird and small game species taken by hunters who purchased a game bird permit during the 2023–2024 hunting season in Rhode Island. Additionally, 26% of respondents did not harvest any game. Figure based on 437 respondents.

Although pheasant hunters often participate in other hunting opportunities, a large proportion of pheasant hunters (40%) started hunting in Rhode Island through pheasant hunting. Only 20.8% of pheasant hunters only hunted pheasants in Rhode Island during the 2023–2024 season. Some of these hunters are out of state hunters from Connecticut and Massachusetts and travel to Rhode Island for Sunday hunting opportunities. Pheasant hunters participated in waterfowl (44.9%), white-tailed deer [archery] (42.5%), white-tailed deer [muzzleloader] (41.0%), white-tailed deer [shotgun] (36.3%), spring wild turkey (34.8%), small game (rabbits and squirrels; 31.3%), other migratory gamebirds (doves, woodcock, etc.; 31.0%) and wild turkey fall (11.4%) hunting. A small portion of pheasant hunters, 3.5% and 1.3% participated in trapping and predator hunting respectively.

Hunter use was highest at the Arcadia, Carolina, Great Swamp, and Big River management areas during the 2023–2024 season (Figure 4) in both number of hunters which use an area and days afield. Although typically Durfee Hill is among the top 4 most heavily used management areas for pheasant hunting, Durfee Hill was closed for the first 2 weeks of the season due to the risk of Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE). Simmons Mill management area had the lowest use overall, but only has one wildlife opening for pheasant stocking. Hunter use was generally correlated to the size of the wildlife area, with more hunters spending more days hunting at Arcadia wildlife area (Figure 2). Arcadia is the largest wildlife area in Rhode Island and has many fields in which pheasants are stocked.

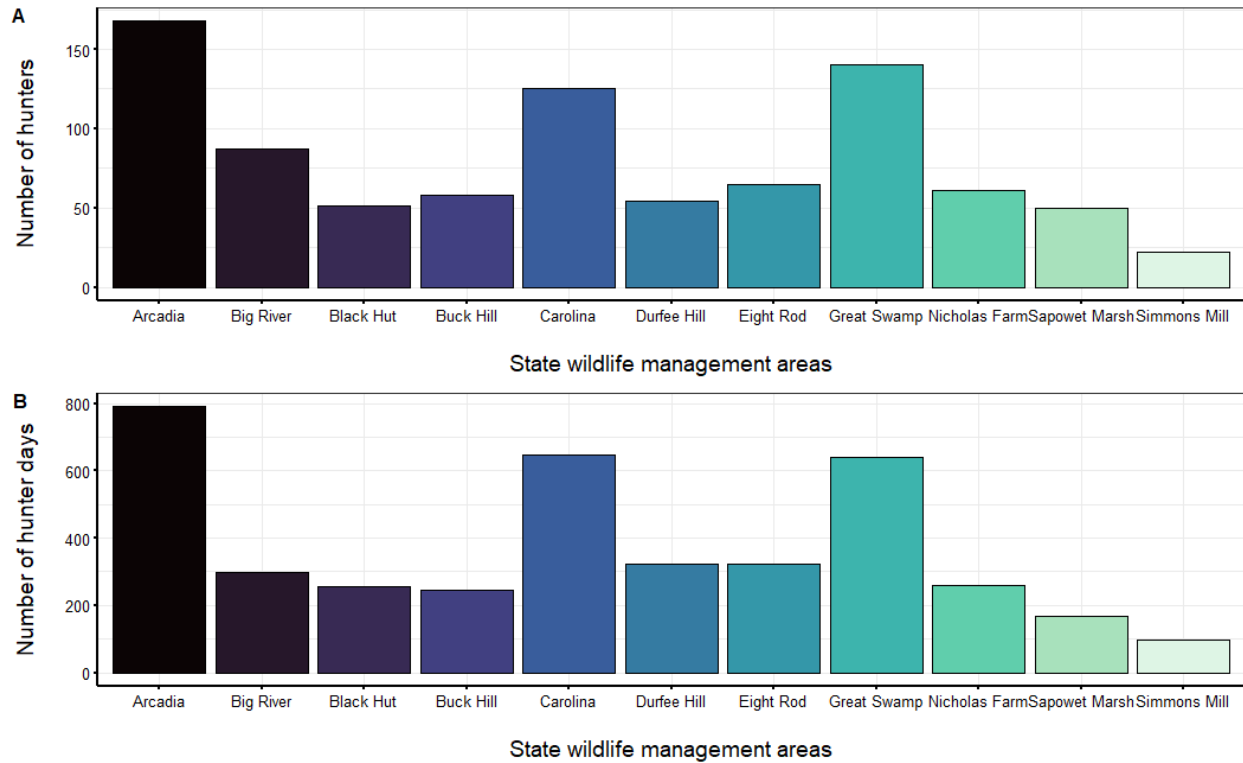


Figure 4. The number of pheasant hunters that used state wildlife management areas during the 2023–2024 pheasant season ranged from 22 to 168 (A), but the number of days hunters spent at each management area varied widely (B), with Arcadia being the most heavily hunted area. Figure based on 467 respondents.

For the fourth year in a row, 6,000 pheasants were stocked on state wildlife management areas during the 2023–2024 season. The addition of 2,000 stocked pheasants has increased pheasant hunter participation by 10% with 1,498 hunters purchasing a Game Bird permit in 2023, up from 1,365 permits in 2020 (when 4,000 pheasants were stocked). About 30% of hunters responded that the 2023–2024 pheasant season was their first- or second-year pheasant hunting and of these, about 44% had a mentor help guide them. Furthermore, 28% of respondents said that they introduced a new hunter to pheasant hunting.

Rhode Island has one of the lowest rates of hunting participation with 0.7% of residents purchasing hunting licenses and is tied with California and Hawaii. Only 3.5% of survey respondents identify as female, while nationally between 9-10% of hunters identify as female. Female hunting participation in Rhode Island is less than half of the national average, and female hunting participation is one of the fastest growing demographic groups in North America. Similarly, only 1.0% of respondents were between the ages of 12 to 18 years old and 15.8% were 19 to 30 years old. While there may be some survey bias, with fewer younger hunters participating in the online survey, this general trend indicates that there is little youth participation in the pheasant hunting program. For comparison, 31.8% of pheasant hunters are between the ages of 31 to 45 years old, 24.8% of hunters are 46 to 60 years old, and 25.5% of hunters are 61 years or older.

Spring/Summer 2024 Pheasant Habitat Improvements

March through May, we conducted prescribed burns on 4 wildlife management areas. Prescribed burns help limit the growth of woody species and invasives, burn off the grass thatch layer to promote native, warm season grasses and allow more sunlight to penetrate the ground, and release nutrients to improve soil quality. We conducted prescribed burns of ~4 acres at Pratt Farm off Summit Road within Arcadia management area, ~18 acres in the forested area surrounding the pheasant fields off Nicholas Road within Nicholas Farm management area, ~37 acres of forested area around the pheasant fields near the deer check station within Carolina management area, and ~12 acres of the pheasant fields within Great Swamp management area. We expect these burns to help produce more robust grasslands and pine barrens and improve pheasant cover.

We re-planted 1 field in 1 wildlife management area. The seed mix used contains 6 species which in addition to providing pheasant cover, also benefits pollinators and other wildlife.

As discussed internally among biologists and externally with hunters, we minimized mowed paths within the pheasant fields to increase the proportion of grassland cover for birds. Some mowing is still conducted to minimize encroachment by woody vegetation within fields and provide access for stocking trucks and personnel.

Conclusion

The 2023–2024 pheasant hunting season in Rhode Island was a safe and successful season. Pheasant hunter participating a wide variety of Rhode Island hunting programs throughout the fall and winter. Feedback gathered from the hunter survey combined with hunter use of wildlife



management areas will be used to guide stocking efforts for the upcoming 2024–2025 season. Six-thousand pheasants will be stocked during the 2024–2025 season from October through December. Our goal is to ensure that we are providing hunters with the best opportunities possible while stocking birds in areas of suitable habitat.

During the 2023–2024 pheasant hunter survey we collected demographic information from participants, and we found that both youth participation and female participation were relatively low for pheasant hunting. Youth participation and recruitment is important to replace an aging hunter community in Rhode Island and ensure pheasant hunting remains a strong tradition in the Rhode Island. Additionally, female participation in hunting is growing nationwide and currently Rhode Island’s female participation rate is half of the national average! Pheasant hunters should take advantage of the youth pheasant season

(weekend prior to pheasant opener) to introduce youth to pheasant hunting and should make conscious efforts to create opportunities for more youth and females to participate in pheasant hunting.

Feedback is welcome regarding this report by emailing Elizabeth.Bonczek.ctr@dem.ri.gov

Photo credit: Casey Z