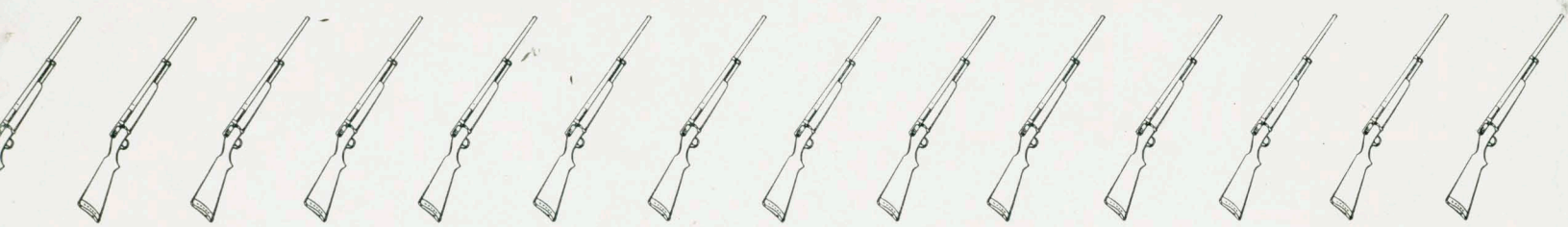


OUTDOOR INDIANA

Indiana's 1946 GAME HARVEST

By WM. B. BARNES, Project Leader
Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Research Project

THE sport of hunting has offered an enjoyable pastime to Hoosiers since the time the first white man set foot on Indiana soil. The 1946 game harvest differed greatly from that which occurred back in the days of the pioneer, yet, when considering the several million pieces of small game taken, it again provided a welcome supply of wild meat.

The modern nimrod should be much more interested in the welfare of wildlife. Therefore, this third annual report is presented for the purpose of comparing last season's hunting conditions with previous ones. It particularly concerns the period from the opening of the squirrel hunting season on August 10, 1946, to the close of rabbit hunting on January 10, 1947. Hunters are given information about the success or failure of their fellow sportsmen, as well as predictions concerning the general outlook for the season now opening.

Mrs. John M. Allen already has done well—in Harrison State Forest—but she is still looking. Mr. Allen is Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Research Project Leader in charge of fox and gray squirrel investigation.

The Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Research Project has collected these kill statistics for seven years through the use of a Sportsman's Questionnaire mailed to a cross-section of the holders of the paid hunting, fishing and trapping license and to holders of the free permit issued to war veterans. The names are chosen in an impartial manner from every county in the state in an effort to reach the average sportsman. The return of 7,420 of these forms was used for compiling the 1946 figures.

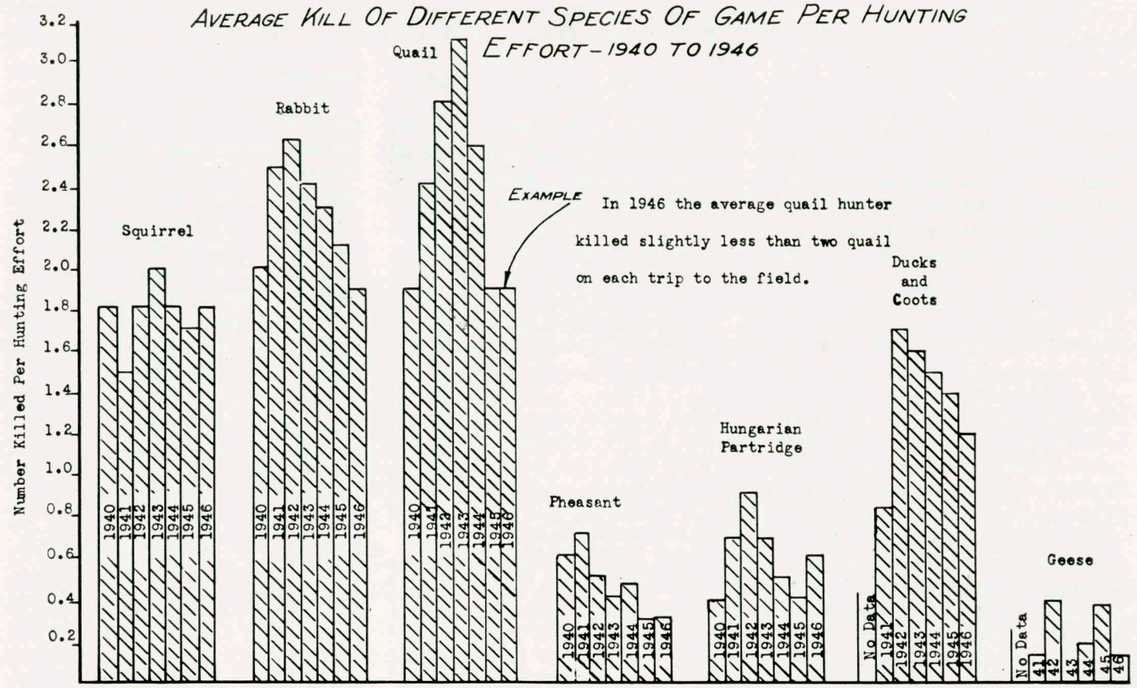
When tabulation of the kill of game in this state is listed in millions, it assumes the proportions of a fantastic hunting tale. If, on the other hand, we consider an army of nearly 400,000 nimrods tramping the woods and fields in pursuit of game, it is fortunate not to be at the muzzle end of the gun. Last year, the number of persons holding paid licenses and free permits reached an all-time high of 677,583. This was an increase of over 200,000 compared with the previous year. Considering total hunting efforts in 1946, there was an increase of 37 per cent over 1945 and 67 per cent over the war year of 1943. It was also greater than the prewar year of 1941.

Small upland game and migratory species provide sport for the greatest number of Indiana hunters, and the kill for the 1946 season was 7,174,903. It was next to the record of 1940 as shown on the accompanying table giving the calculated kill for each of the past seven years.

In compiling the Sportsman's Questionnaire, there are two factors of significance. First is the calculated total kill of each species. Second is the average kill per hunting effort, or, in other words, the average number of pieces of game taken on each trip afield by the individual hunter. Using this method, what was the success of the average nimrod in bagging game last fall? A glance at the chart showing the average kill of different species of game per hunting effort between 1940 and 1946 reveals the past hunting season as similar to the poor one of 1945. Rabbits and quail remained poor; however, squirrels, pheasants and Hungarian partridges exhibited some improvement.

Most hunters appear to have a favorite sport. Because of the abundance of Mr. Cottontail and relative ease by which it can be hunted, this animal has carried off top honors ever since inception of the Sportsman's Questionnaire. In 1946, the calculated kill was over 3½ million, thus returning to the magnitude of the prewar kill figures of 1940 and 1941. If you have your doubts about these figures, there were about 340,000 Hoosier nimrods who either hunted the cottontail or shot it while pursuing other game. They showed an average kill of nearly 11 rabbits per hunter during the 1946 open season. At an average dressed weight of 1½ pounds, this animal provided 5½ million pounds of delicious meat.

It is interesting to note on the chart that the average take per hunting effort has been decreasing since 1942 and reached a record low in 1946. Because of the high breeding potential of the cottontail, it continues to provide large numbers of animals for the gun even at such a low point in the cycle. It is widely distributed over the state, and hunting for it is most popular in northern Indiana, particularly near the larger cities. After reaching this low population level, the rabbit cannot be expected to exhibit any great comeback this fall. As in the past, it will continue to provide plenty of hunting, but remain rather scarce.



The aggregate kill of 2½ million fox and gray squirrels held second place. In fact, it was the record kill for the seven-year period and occurred as a result of good squirrel production and increased hunting. A bountiful mast crop and an open winter preceding the 1946 open season contributed to this big harvest.

With the closing of the present 1947 squirrel season, a prediction regarding hunting conditions is not necessary. Kill figures will not be available until next year, but it is evident that the bushytails did not come up to par in southern Indiana and provided spotty hunting in the north. These expectations were pointed out by our squirrel investigator prior to the open season. In the south central hill section, where gray and fox squirrels are both found in goodly numbers, he noted that there was a mast crop failure last winter. As a result of the food shortage, many animals became mangy; some died, while others pulled through. However, normal breeding, which produced young squirrels in February and March and tender full-grown animals when the season opens, did not take place. This shifted the burden of bringing off young to the summer breeding season, which is generally of secondary importance. As predicted, when squirrel hunting began in August the limited number bagged were predominantly old animals. Females were suckling young and continued to do so well up to the close of the season. Under such abnormal circumstances, the only way to have avoided this problem would have been postponement of hunting until October. A majority of our squirrel hunters prefer this sport when the leaves and nuts are still on the trees. This fall there is a fairly good mast crop in southern Indiana, but a rather spotty one to the north, with the exception of beechnuts. If normal temperatures are experienced this coming winter, we may expect squirrel hunting to be better in the south next fall, but spotty in the north.

The bobwhite quail remained in third place. The state bag of around one million birds was next to the record low of the previous year. The gain of around 200,000 in the total kill in 1946 can be primarily attributed to the uptrend in hunters. The average kill of a little less than two quail for each trip to the field was at the same level with the poor years of 1940 and 1945. It is believed that had it not been for the increase in hunting pressure, a slight gain would have been registered because the reporters listed an average season's bag of 8.1 quail, as compared with 7.7 in 1945.

Now for predictions for this fall. During the spring, conservation officers and others observed a higher number of adults. Then came the abnormal cold and wet early summer which was far from an ideal nesting season. However, in July the whistling bobwhite count conducted by our quail investigator indicated some increase in whistling over the previous year. We may look forward to a considerable variation in ages and sizes of birds. Some will be full grown, others quite small. Despite weather conditions, the season should show a limited increase in quail, but still remain below normal.

Although hunting for migratory birds in 1946 was poor, the kill of ducks, coots, geese and woodcocks continued in fourth position. The harvest of about 180,000 was 50,000 less than the record established in 1945. Open weather during migration and poor water conditions, as an aftermath of a summer drought, were not favorable. This, coupled with restricted breeding in the north, equalled poor shooting. Although Canada geese were protected, goose hunting was again

INDIANA'S CALCULATED GAME KILL OF IMPORTANT UPLAND GAME AND MIGRATORY SPECIES FOR THE PERIOD 1940-1946

Species	1940 Season	1941 Season	1942 Season	1943 Season	1944 Season	1945 Season	1946 Season
Rabbits	3,682,740	3,786,833	3,516,838	2,196,380	2,350,557	2,766,659	3,666,373
Squirrels ...	1,797,635	1,354,860	1,411,354	1,531,118	1,586,387	1,497,251	2,241,440
Quail	1,502,801	1,251,276	1,406,044	1,173,219	1,019,249	756,048	999,953
Pheasants ..	281,519	206,138	109,026	83,105	91,993	65,426	71,913
Hung. Part..	47,457	34,900	33,019	26,436	17,384	15,256	15,677
Ducks, Coots	166,421	92,955	186,723	196,156	153,733	222,349	170,712
Geese	2,996	1,890	3,481	1,517	2,465	11,735	2,241
Woodcocks .	3,328	4,638	9,263	4,376	4,576	4,225	6,594
Total Kill ..	7,484,897	6,733,535	6,675,748	5,212,307	5,226,344	5,338,949	7,174,903

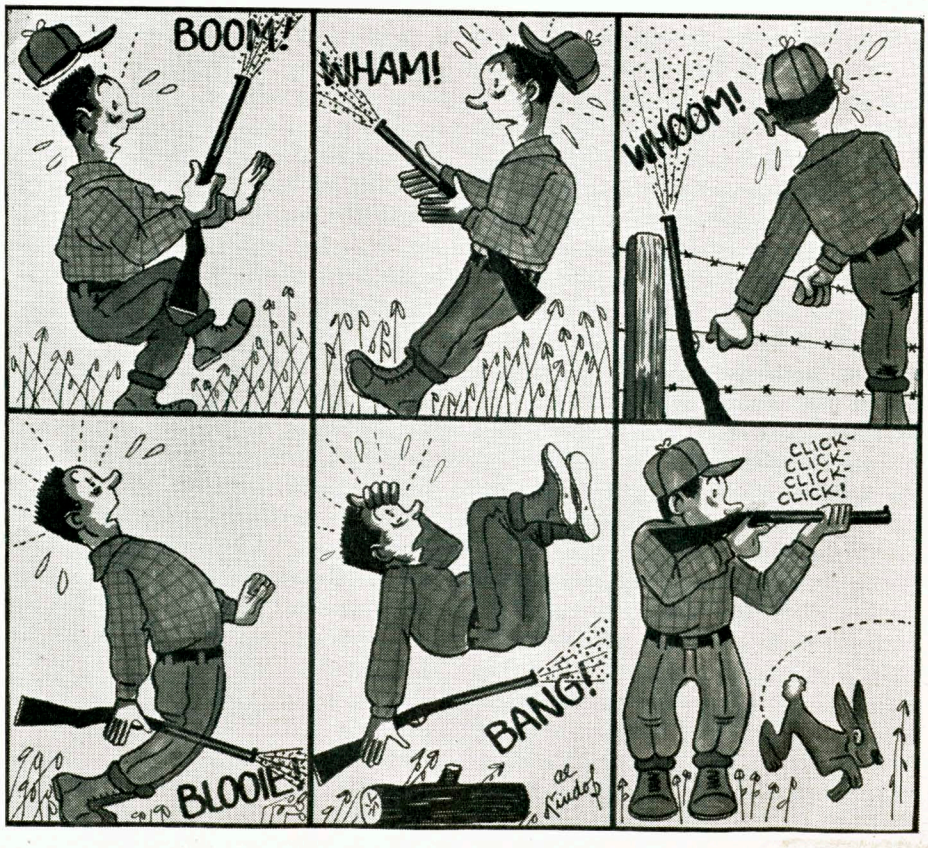
augmented by a welcome flight of blue and snow geese that stopped for a week or two, principally in northwestern Indiana. Woodcocks, of course, provided a limited number of birds for the gun.

According to all reports from the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other cooperating agencies, the prospects for migratory waterfowl in 1947 show further decline. The low brood stock returning to the prairie marshes of Canada failed in producing a good offspring. These facts have made it necessary to reduce to a 30-day open season, with a daily limit of four ducks. A total of four blue and/or snow geese can still be taken daily. One Canada goose can also be shot and substituted in such a bag. Under such circumstances, it is clear that the emphasis has been placed on conserving the waterfowl.

The ring-necked pheasant again held a poor fifth place. The total bag of 71,913 birds slightly exceeded the 65,426 taken in 1945. Thus, pheasant shooting continued to be poor. The chart will exhibit a general downtrend in the kill per hunting effort since 1941. The popularity of this introduced bird has continued downward from a participation of 52 per cent of the hunters in 1940 to 24 per cent in 1946. The drop in population has caused a loss of interest.

The present nation-wide decline in the number of ring-necked pheasant has had its effect in Indiana. Due to the current low numbers, the season will be closed this fall in order to protect the limited brood stock. The annual roadside census, conducted by our pheasant investigator, revealed a count of 49 pheasants on the same routes that produced 168 in 1946. Rural mail carriers gave reports during the second week in July of an average of eight pheasants observed per 1,000 miles traveled. A similar survey made in South Dakota in 1946 revealed 466 pheasants per 1,000 miles. Thus, the current pheasant population is believed to be lower than it was at the time when the first season was declared in the 1930's.

The Hungarian partridge stayed in the cellar position. The total bag of 15,677 in 1946 was almost identical with that of the preceding year. Nimrods reported better success and there was an uptrend in the average number bagged per hunting effort. The range of the Hun is restricted to certain parts of northern Indiana and in popularity ranks at the bottom of the game bird list. Hunting for this species should be normal this fall.

In summary, the results of the 1946 open season revealed that we have again returned to the period of high hunting pressure that existed in the prewar years. The total kill was high and probably out of proportion to game abundance, as indicated by the low average kill per hunting effort. Such a situation is not unique in Indiana. Our neighboring states are having the same experience. Wildlife appears to be subjected to the old squeeze play. The present lineup against it includes adverse weather conditions, increased hunting pressure, absence of idle fields, cleanup of wood lots, fence rows and ditch banks, drainage of marshes and a high predator population. Mother Nature can be expected to offer some relief in an uptrend in the populations of certain cyclic game species. The extent of such a recovery is quite dependent upon many man-made influences. Probably when John Q. Hoosier again settles back to normal living, forgets about shortages and pursuit of the almighty dollar, and initiates a management of our natural resources rather than a mining of them, we can then look forward to some worth-while improvement in wildlife.

"No hits, no runs, no hares."