



Arizona Falconers Association

September 2018 Bulletin

Edited by Anne Schnell



Highlights of the 2018 Summer Picnic

At this year's summer picnic, we had many new faces and even gained some new AFA members. Despite the sometimes intense and very loud rain, everyone managed to have a great time and enjoy some tasty food.

A short membership meeting included the following updates from the board:

President, Charlie Kaiser: Welcomed everyone to the picnic and discussed some business and changes coming soon to AFA:

- ❖ Elections will be held soon for officer and board member positions
- ❖ The board is working on increasing communication for/to members
- ❖ Plans to update the website are in the works
- ❖ More social events and workshops to be held around the state
- ❖ Changes are coming to the Apprentice Coordinator position
- ❖ The AFA Board is working with AZGFD on the upcoming Article 4 review and CO25.

Apprentice Coordinator and Director, Matt Hankins: Discussed his role and history as the Apprentice Coordinator and invited pre-apprentices and new members to contact him for help in finding a sponsor.

AFA Secretary, Anne Schnell: Indicated that we will be doing a membership drive soon to increase the number of falconers in the state joining AFA. She also discussed working to increase communication via the quarterly newsletter and hopefully monthly bulletins. Content will be based on suggestions from survey results.

Director, Paul Schnell: Updated the group on one of the AFA conservation projects, the American Kestrel Partnership (article to appear in the next

quarterly newsletter). He also encouraged membership in the North American Falconers Association.

Director, Jamaica Smith: Gave an eye-opening presentation promoting the Arizona Raptor Center, a raptor rehabilitation facility run by Jerry Ostwinkle. The presentation made a very strong case for utilizing this facility and taking advantage of Jerry's vast knowledge of raptors and decades of experience to aid injured birds.





Thanks for the photos Pam!!

Update on Commission Order 25

Charlie Kaiser, President

While speaking to a Department representative recently about the Jamey Driscoll issue, the subject of CO25 came up and I reiterated that we were waiting for the draft, so we could comment on it. As it turns out, the Department had failed to inform us of the release of the draft and the order was being presented to the Commission on September 21st. Needless to say, I was furious. For at least the past 10 years, we have been provided with that draft

order in June or early July, so we could study it. This time, we didn't get it because the Department representative had directed Jamey to have no contact with us due to the ongoing investigation. They tried to fall back on their "it's on the website" position; however, their website is horribly broken; while the doc is there, and I can find it with the direct link they provided, it still cannot be found with their search engine. They did, at least, take full ownership and apologized for failing in the direct communication that has been the de-facto standard for over a decade. They offered us a very brief window to provide input and negotiation. I immediately put together our comments and requests, took them to the board for approval, and presented them to the Department representative. We have gone back and forth over the past week and have hammered out a passable compromise.

Here is a link to the CO: <https://www.azgfd.com/public-comments-sought-on-proposed-commission-orders-on-raptors-amphibians-reptiles-crustaceans-and-mollusks-through-aug-23/>

A few of the major points of the proposed CO...

One, and most importantly, per our previous communications with the department, they did clarify the language around apprentice trapping dates to remove the earlier re-interpretation that restricted apprentices. With the new order, apprentices will be allowed the same trapping dates as other license classes.

Two, the department has proposed changing CO25 from a 2-year to a 5-year revision cycle. We had planned to spend a bunch of time looking at each point in CO25 and providing input, documentation, and recommendations for changes to various points. However, due to the highly compressed time frame (less than 2 weeks), this was not possible. So, our response to them was to list our desired changes and request that the 2-year cycle be maintained for another cycle to give us time to back up our proposed changes.

The Department's response was an agreement to make a floor amendment to retain the 2-year cycle; however, they denied our other changes as expected given the late date. We will need time to provide appropriate data for what we have asked for. The changes requested included the following:

- Removal of location-based restrictions on several species.
- Change of Goshawk take dates to align with other species.
- Change of Goshawk take locations.
- Provide Eya Ferruginous Hawk take.
- Removal of the Harris's Hawk quota system.
- Addition of the Grey Hawk and Crested Caracara to allowed species.

In some cases, the data being used by the department to justify these restrictions is well over 20 years old. My goal is to spend the next 12-18 months gathering the necessary information to back up our requests and have them all ready to go for the next CO25 cycle.

The Department representative and I also discussed building more direct lines of communication into the department bypassing Jamey Driscoll, so that is in progress as well.

I will be addressing the commission on September 21st to emphasize our needs and will report back after that meeting.

Directors Reports

Jamaica Smith, Directors Report

2018/2019 Small Game Forecast

According to an article by Wade Zarlingo and Johnathan O'Dell on the AZGFD website (www.azgfd.com/hunting/species/smallgame/forecast/), small game hunting will be a mixed bag this season, which is pretty normal for areas in the desert Southwest. Due to low winter rains, many upland game species are still below the population normal, however, monsoon rains have positively impacted some populations so there is a great deal of variability by location. It's important to get out there and do some scouting. One hundred percent of the state is in at least a moderate drought, with nearly half the state falling into the "extreme" or exceptional" drought categories.

(www.drought.gov/drought/states/arizona)

If you have information on small game populations in your area, and you'd be willing to share that information, please email me at director1@arizonafalconers.com.

Quail

Gambel's quail rely almost entirely on winter rains for reproduction. According to AZGF, this year's lack of winter precipitation across the entire state means the Gambel's quail hatch was scattered over late spring and summer, which usually results in low hatchling survival rates. All the spring call counts were 50% below the ten-year average. AZGF is expecting Gambel's numbers to be down statewide.

Scaled quail can have a longer breeding period and can take advantage of summer monsoons even when winter rains are down. AZGF expects slightly

higher than average numbers south of Interstate 10, and about average north of I-10.

Mearns quail rely entirely on monsoon rains to breed, so the above normal monsoons for much of the state, especially in the east, is good news for Mearns hunters. AZGF expect above average numbers this season and suggest hunting some of the sky islands in the Mearns range to avoid some of the more popular locations.

Mammals

According to AZGF, desert cottontail population patterns are similar to Gambel's quail, so they are expecting a below average harvest this year. In my experience, desert cottontails do take advantage of monsoon rains, so local populations are certainly in huntable numbers. Again, a little scouting will pay off in this area. Personally, I know that cottontail numbers are slightly above average in the Kingman area, but this is highly variable by habitat. I've also heard that cottontail numbers are exceptional in the Skull Valley area west of Prescott.

Jackrabbit populations statewide have been holding steady for several years now, so AZGF expects an average to above average harvest year.

Squirrels are a mixed bag, again due to the last couple of mild, dry winters. In the higher elevations, mild winters are good for Abert's, Kaibab, and red squirrels, so those populations continue to be above average. Lack of rain has been harder on the Arizona gray and Mexican fox squirrels, so they are forecast to be below average this season.

Other Quarry

Waterfowl hunting in Arizona can be hit or miss, even when populations are high. This is because mild winters do not push the birds far enough south to impact Arizona hunting. Breeding populations up north are at the highest numbers seen in over 60 years. If the northern part of the continent experiences an average or colder than average winter, many of those birds will end up in Arizona. Unfortunately, meteorologists are giving El Niño a 70% chance this year, which means a warm winter up north. It could also mean a wetter winter for much of Arizona, so that would be good for local game populations.

Image courtesy of www.msn.com/en-us/weather/topstories/noaa-makes-winter-weather-forecast-for-2018-2019-season/ar-BBLtirI

Chukar hunting on the Arizona Strip is expected to be above average due to mild winters and expanding cheat grass. As far as the rest of Arizona goes, AZGF is asking chukar hunters to provide their email address for an end-of-season survey.

The dry winter had an impact on dove nesting this year, with approximately 1/3 fewer nests being documented. According to AZGF, this means there will be only about 20 million doves on opening day, instead of 30 million! (www.azgfd.com/hunting/species/smallgame/dove/) In short, if you hunt doves, you should have no trouble locating them for your hawk, even if they are in a below-average year.

Dusky, or blue, grouse, are available in Arizona in limited locations. I spoke to a shotgunner this summer who goes every year to the Kaibab and takes 1-3 per day. It's difficult hunting, with both terrain and elevation working against the average hunter. Furthermore, many of the birds fly down into the Grand Canyon, making that an iffy population at best for falconers. If you are a falconer and have taken a blue grouse with a bird in Arizona, please let me know. I'd love to hear about it. According to AZGF, "Blue grouse habitat on the Kaibab looks good with plenty of tall grass for cover and lots of summer berries to eat. The habitat on San Francisco Peaks also looks pretty grousey. Region 1 (Pinetop) Game Program Manager suggest hunting above 8500 feet in areas with a mixed overstory of aspen and fir and look for ground cover of vetch and wild raspberries. September usually provides more opportunity, before birds move higher into areas with higher densities of fir trees."

Small Game Challenge

AZGF and the Valley of the Sun Quail Forever chapter have partnered to provide the Arizona Small Game Challenge. Please go to this link for details: www.azgfd.com/hunting/species/smallgame/challenge-info/. Be aware this challenge is limited to the first 300 participants, and registration opened on August 1. The registration for the challenge is \$25, and the Valley of the Sun Quail Forever chapter will match those funds specifically for small game habitat improvement.

The AFA has long recognized anyone who takes game at the Desert Hawking Classic, and we will continue to do so. However, I think it would be fun for the AFA to sponsor a similar small game challenge open to falconers only. Look for information on the Arizona Falconer's Game Challenge in the next edition of this newsletter.

Pam Hessey: Director's Report 9/18

Summer seems to stretch endlessly when you are just molting out birds and not working with a new eyass... but between the administrative turmoil with AZGFD, plus the Summer picnic in Prescott, and working with a rehab raptor, our summer has flown by. Game numbers in the Kingman area seem to be down, and we will be working extra hard just to find enough rabbits for all our

birds this year. After scouting six fields for someone trying to start a new Red-tail, I came home kind of depressed; even some of our “sure spots” were pretty barren. The lack of winter rains here plus the excessive summer heat may have had an impact on our rabbit numbers. Plus, cottontail populations run a high-to-low population number cycle - I have seen estimates of 7 to 10 years between the population peaks and the valleys. I have heard the same lack of game from other falconers in Northern AZ... We *always* hunt the one-and-done method; one kill and we are done. I would encourage others to consider one-and-done hunting if your population numbers are down; don't pressure the few remaining rabbits by over-harvesting them. Instead of a hunt with a high-number kill, go instead for that one spectacular flight – one that you will re-live and rave about- for years to come.

Paul Schnell, Directors Report 9/16

Front and center, we want to congratulate Jeremy Hough, a former Marine and wilderness guide for at risk youth, from Paulden on his advancement this month to General Falconer status. Jeremy was an exemplary apprentice and exceeded my rigorous expectations in the trapping, training, practice, ethics and communication required to become a conscientious, well-rounded falconer. If you attended the 2017 NAFA Eagle Meet in WY, AFA picnics and the 2016 - 2018 DHC's each January, then you've met Jeremy. He's the hirsute falconer wearing the huge reddish beard. You cannot miss the guy!... Like many of you, our time spent afield has reinforced other's observations that rabbits, jacks and quail numbers are way down except perhaps in the vicinity of private residences, ranches and pastures where precious water and better forage might be available for thirsty wildlife. As Pam noted in her report, we too strictly follow the 'one and done' method when flying our Harris's Hawks and other birds. Good falconers are good conservationists and always practice 'wise use' when hunting. One and done is good conservation!



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