

General Populations for Hunting

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SPEAKERS

Christa Hartsook, Adam Janke, Olivia Hanlon

Christa Hartsook 00:15

Hello, and welcome to the small farms podcast, a production of the small farms program at Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. Our podcast covers the opportunities and challenges associated with rural life.

Olivia Hanlon 00:29

In this episode, I visit with Adam Janke, wildlife specialist with Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, and we are talking about general hunting populations. I'm Olivia Hanlon, education extension specialist, and we hope you enjoy the show. Adam, welcome. We're glad to have you back on again. It's been a while.

Adam Janke 00:46

Yes. Thanks for having me. As always, I always enjoy joining your podcast.

Olivia Hanlon 00:50

Yes. So like I said, You're a wildlife specialist. But for anyone who has not listened to one of your episodes before, could you tell our listeners what exactly it is you do here at Iowa State?

Adam Janke 01:00

Sure. I'm the statewide wildlife extension specialists, which means I'm the like, wildlife guy, I always say we could probably have a dozen or so wildlife extension specialists doing all sorts of things like wildlife conflict resolution and wildlife conservation in different ecosystems and wildlife disease and all those things. But since we only have one, I tried to do a little bit of all of

that stuff in my interests are, especially in managing wildlife habitat on farms. That's kind of what I primarily do my research and a bunch of my thinking in. And then I also do what I just kind of catch halls like high priority wildlife issues. And that's basically like stuff that we're like kind of worried about are really keeping our eyes on. And that can be stuff like threatened and endangered species emerging challenging diseases like white nose syndrome and bats, Chronic Wasting Disease and deer or like sort of large societal challenges that relates to wildlife habitat, like the challenges that invasive species pose, both as they're introduced in urban environments, and then spread out into rural environments and how landowners can manage those and things like that. So that's kind of my elevator speech of like the types of things that I do. I kind of think about birds all the time, too. So I've been on the podcast before talking about birds.

O Olivia Hanlon 02:14

Yeah. And I think we had you on for coyotes not too long ago.

A Adam Janke 02:17

Oh yeah, yeah, that was kind of a that's like kind of a high priority thing to lots of people interact with coyotes and have lots of questions. So that was our last episode. So yeah, it's kind of everything, wildlife. i This is like the most amazing job in the world. I mean, I just do like all the wildlife things. And then yeah, always excited to get an opportunity to come and talk to your listeners about those things.

O Olivia Hanlon 02:38

Absolutely. Adam, you're our go to guy for anything wildlife. So I'm sure you are for everyone else as well. As I mentioned today, we're talking general hunting populations or general populations around the state. So we'll start out with the obvious one, we'll start out with deer. How is the population looking for deer around the state Adam?

A Adam Janke 02:55

Yeah, so this is the big one. This is certainly the one that we get the most participation in the Iowa DNR course checks, like how many deer harvested every year and Iowans harvest over 100,000 deer a year, which is pretty remarkable. So it's really important. Lots of families go out and participate. Lots of people feed their families for a year with Iowa's whitetail deer, myself included. And so this is a big one. How are white tailed deer populations doing pretty good? Sure some listeners think they're doing too well. But I also know many listeners think they're not doing well enough. And we always say in wildlife management. If everybody's mad, then we're doing our job. And so you know, white tailed deer populations are pretty stable. They're not necessarily like seeing drastic increases not seeing drastic declines. And that's been the management goal for the Iowa DNR. And they've really been successfully doing that through their science based management for the last couple of years and setting county based harvest quotas and things like that, that keep deer populations at a level that's basically socially tolerable. And I don't remember exactly how many deer we estimate there are in Iowa, I want

to say the numbers between like four and 500,000 deer. And that's of course, hard. You know, we just finished every 10 year census and we struggled to count humans and may have cell phone addresses and speak our language. And so it's really hard to estimate deer or any wildlife species abundance because they don't have cell phones and they don't speak our language. But we do estimate around that number. And again, that's kind of like with public input, the number that professional wildlife managers in the state have kind of identified as a tolerable level.

O Olivia Hanlon 04:29

Okay, so every time we talk about deer here, Adam, we always have to mention Chronic Wasting Disease. So what does that look like around the state this year? Are there any new counties that it's spread to things like that?

A Adam Janke 04:39

Yes, thank you for bringing that up. That is something that we always think is really important to do. When we talk about whitetail deer management that we talk about this really big challenge that we're facing in Iowa and other Midwestern states with this disease called Chronic Wasting Disease. Chronic Wasting Disease affects whitetail deer and members of the deer family like elk and moose and caribou and mule deer, and it's 100% Fatal neurological disease that's caused by this misfolded protein called a prion. It's very complicated. It's not like our more familiar like bacteria and viruses and things that we're typically accustomed to with diseases, these prion diseases are pretty complicated. And because of that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention suggests that humans don't eat deer that have chronic wasting disease, like deer that are infected with chronic wasting disease. And the only way you can determine whether or not you have a deer with Chronic Wasting Disease is to have it tested in a lab. And so it is very important that we manage CWD. And mainly what we're trying to do right now is slow the spread of chronic wasting disease across Iowa's landscapes so that fewer populations of deer are exposed to this disease that once it's in a population, it's basically impossible to get rid of. So where do we have CWD? Today, we and we have talked about this before on the podcast and the science of the disease kind of remains the same but the distribution of the disease in the state is spreading. We have it today in three different clusters of counties in western Iowa, we have it just in Woodbury County, and that is associated with a cluster the disease across the river in Nebraska as well. In southern Iowa. We have it in Decatur, Wayne and Appanoose County, and that is also associated with a cluster the disease in northern Missouri. And then in the eastern part of the state. That's where we've had chronic wasting disease and wild deer detected for the longest period of time. And we find it in Winneshiek, Allamakee, Clayton, Fayette, Dubuque and Jackson all associated also, with clusters of the disease in Wisconsin and Minnesota. And so what we want to encourage people that live in those areas live or hunted in those areas is to have their deer tested to make informed consumption decisions. And then what's really important for everybody is to never move deer carcasses around Iowa, never shoot a deer in one county and move it to another county. And then also to sort of participate in the management of this disease by for example, allowing hunting on your land if you don't hunt yourself to try to keep deer populations manage that appropriate levels, and then also to collaborate with the Iowa Department natural resources in their testing efforts to sort of try to keep up with where the disease is found across Iowa.

O Olivia Hanlon 07:21

Okay, and next week, we will be talking to Kevin Anderson with the Iowa DNR. And we will be talking about hunting from a landowners perspective. So we'll talk about finding people to hunt your land and things like that. So tune in next week for that. Yes, so thank you for that information. Adam. So if people live in a county that they have not found CWD. And yet, is it still appropriate for them to submit for testing? Or is that something they don't need to worry about?

A Adam Janke 07:49

That's a good question. You know, if you live in a county that hasn't yet had CWD detected, it's, of course, less probable that you'll find CWD in your deer, but you can definitely submit them for testing, if you want to make informed decisions. And then also if you want to contribute to the Iowa DNR surveillance efforts, because we are trying to pick it up. And that's how it is that we know it's in those 10 counties. And so there's a couple of ways you can do that one. The DNR is often out there trying to find samples during the hunting season. And you can find a regional wildlife biologist with the DNR and submit a sample that way, just part of their routine surveillance. They do have quotas on that. So I mentioned 100,000 deer harvested a year and they're not testing 100,000 deer for CWD. And so they have quotas that they're trying to reach in different counties. And so if you happen to be in a county that's reached its quota or you don't want to hassle with trying to find a wildlife biologist with the DNR, then you can use what the DNR is called the hunter submission pathway, which is to take a sample of a lymph node around like these are the lymph nodes that your doctor feels in your neck when you're sick, take a sample of the lymph node from the deer that you've harvested and submit that to the Veterinary Diagnostic Lab here at Iowa State and they'll run the test for you information about that is available on DNR website if you just search Iowa DNR Chronic Wasting Disease Hunter submission pathway and then we have a video that we put out in partnership with the DNR last year showing you how to find those lymph nodes up there in that deers neck. It's relatively easy but it you know you have to know what you're looking for. And we hope that video is helpful with that.

O Olivia Hanlon 09:23

Okay, so Adam deer are everywhere in the state, but where are we most likely to find them this year? What habitats will we find them in? What kind of areas should we be looking for them?

A Adam Janke 09:32

Yeah, well, deer are quite a generalist species. So we'll find them anywhere. Of course, they're relating primarily to forested areas, which is why we find that farms and cities and elsewhere, the places where we have the highest annual harvest of deer like the most deer harvested in a county is the areas with the most forested landscapes and picture like Madison County, rolling hills, trees and fields and pastures in Madison County every year, I think it's something like almost 10,000 deer are harvested. And then the same is true in northeastern Iowa in Allamakee, and Clayton County are also rolling hills, forest and fields provide a lot of habitat for deer and we see large proportion of the annual harvest up there, I think in the neighborhood of

around 10,000 deer as well. But that doesn't mean if you're in Clay County or, Palo Alto county or anything like that. It doesn't mean you can't find deer. They're just a little bit lower density there. And of course, you're looking around places where they have Natural Cover wetlands, shelterbelts, wood, lots, grasslands, things like that. And then they got to find food nearby too. So they're looking for waste grain or broadleaf plants like in soybean fields or prairies or forests, of course.

O Olivia Hanlon 10:42

Okay, Adam is there anything on deer that we missed that you'd like to add in here?

A Adam Janke 10:45

I don't think so. I guess one. One thing I always I always say no one that I always say yes. We get a lot of questions about this other disease called Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease EHD. People will say and sometimes we will call it blue tongue too they're technically a different disease, but they have similar symptoms. Okay, so EHD epizootic. Hemorrhagic Disease is a common question we get when we do CWD education, EHD is like a more of a fleeting challenge, like you can have an EHD outbreak on your land. That means a bunch of deer may die in one year, but it doesn't sort of have like the long term risk that Chronic Wasting Disease poses. And so we educators actually struggle sometimes with CWD and EHD. Education, because we say EHD has a body count, like you can walk into your forests during, particularly during a drought year, because that during the late summer, that's when EHD is most prevalent, and deer get concentrated in areas where the disease spreads. And you find a lot of dead deer in that that's what we mean by a body count. But the good news is, is like that isn't like a long term, lasting challenge. And those deer get that disease quickly and succumb to it quickly. Whereas Chronic Wasting Disease is sort of like a long term challenge that we face. Once Chronic Wasting Disease in a population, it's almost impossible to get rid of it. It's like constantly increasing in its prevalence among deer in our population. And then it's 100% Fatal among deer that become infected. And so I'm not dismissing the impact of EHD of episodic hemorrhagic disease, it's definitely a challenge, especially on small scales, like maybe your farm was hit by an EHD outbreak. And that can be problematic. But it's not something that keeps wildlife biologists up at night in a way Chronic Wasting Disease does. So it's important to kind of understand those two distinctions and do what you can to try to help deer through those EHD outbreaks. But really, we want to make sure that we're doing smart things like allowing hunting, not feeding deer or concentrating them around mineral or artificial food sources being vigilant in our observations of deer populations to address the challenge of Chronic Wasting Disease.

O Olivia Hanlon 12:51

Okay, next we'll move on to another common one Adam, and we'll talk pheasants what is the pheasant population like this year? Is there anything contributing to the population that we need to worry about for pheasants?

A Adam Janke 13:02

Yeah, so pheasant populations are on like a decades long decline, like there used to be a lot more pheasants in Iowa than there are today. And then annually from year to year we see sort of like fluctuations, but these aren't like sort of systematic trends. That's driven more by like winter weather conditions. It happens that it looks like last year, the change in pheasant population from last year and this year was pretty minimal. And so we think that there will probably be pretty decent pheasant populations out there for hunters here and a few weeks to enjoy in Iowa those annual variation and pheasant populations generally driven by snow accumulation or by spring rain and temperatures during their primary nesting season. And so like snow accumulation if you get a really heavy winter it covers up all the food in the cover we may see lower winter survival and thus lower populations the following fall, the spring breeding thing is more like cold wet springs can tend to suppress production like the hens aren't as successful incubating their nests or raising their young and again, it seems like the weather conditions recently were pretty favorable. Those decade long declines in pheasant populations are related more to loss of habitat in our rural landscapes. And so pheasant habitat of course, is like grassy areas in agriculture, so not grassy areas in forested landscapes but grassy areas in agriculture. And we have seen the loss of a lot of those grassy areas in agriculture, like weedy fence rows or weedy barn, lots pastures that are that have some residual cover left in them or potential good nesting spots, and even things like the conservation fields enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program. We've seen sort of decades long declines in some of those metrics that has had a negative impact on pheasant populations in Iowa. And then one other factor is the loss of like small grain production, like a lot of pheasants historically would have nested in like oh wheat fields and we don't have very many of those, of course in Iowa anymore. And so that's contributed also to some pheasant decline since like the 60s or so. So I always say long term pheasants are down. Short term pheasants fluctuate annually and right now we're on pretty decent positive trend and there should be a decent number of pheasants out there for people to enjoy this fall.

Olivia Hanlon 15:20

Okay, so you kind of hit on the habitat area a little bit earlier. Adam, are there certain parts of the state that were more likely to find pheasants this year? And can you go over again, kind of the habitats that we're more likely to find them in?

A Adam Janke 15:32

Yeah, so just across the state where we see the most pheasants are in those big open sort of grassy areas so like picture like Northwestern north central Iowa, southeastern Iowa, not like far southeastern Iowa, but like Washington keokuk, Poweshiek, Iowa counties like those kinds of areas, that's where we tend to see the most pheasants those are the landscapes where there's not like a bunch of forests and a bunch of trees and there tends to be in some places a lot of grass, and that's the sort of best pheasant habitat and the pheasants are pretty winter hardy so they survive better in the north, and then there's fewer trees in the north too. So there they tend to be sort of a more northern population, in contrast to that is northern Bobwhite. So I'm just going to jump us there because I know that was maybe the next question you're gonna ask northern Bobwhites are almost like a mirror image of what pheasant populations are Bobwhites like forested landscapes a little bit more. I mean, they don't like really forested landscapes, but

they like trees and shrubby vegetation so they're more abundant in southern Iowa and they're also less winter hardy, so like, northern Bobwhite has no interest in a Dickinson County, winter. Like

O Olivia Hanlon 16:39

I don't either, Adam.

A Adam Janke 16:41

Yeah, I don't either. I used to live in South Dakota. I don't blame those Bobwhites for wanting to live in Missouri. And so they they're more abundant in southern Iowa we always say to southern three tiers is kind of the core Bobwhite distribution, and then they do manage to kind of go up the flanks of the state to along the rivers where there tends to be a lot of that woody vegetation, so pheasants big open Ag in grassland complexes Bobwhites interspersed forested grassland agriculture landscapes picture Ringgold County, Van Buren county like Southern southeastern Iowa is sort of the core of the Bobwhite range.

O Olivia Hanlon 17:20

Okay, Adam, I'm gonna make you rewind just a little bit back to pheasants because at your field day on Wednesday, I learned something very interesting. You were telling us about how pheasants are like less likely to be in like prairie areas between two groups of trees. Could you explain that to me a little bit more to me.

A Adam Janke 17:37

Okay, well, let's set the stage for the listeners. We were at Brushy Creek State Recreation Area, which is this beautiful complex of forests and grasslands. And we were in a really pretty grassland that they had restored something like three years ago and you asked me like, is this a good spot for pheasants? And yes, it like, if you just look at that patch, that grassland was good for pheasants, and I'm sure there would be a couple of pheasants that were out there. But pheasants loathe to move through landscapes with a bunch of trees around them. And so we actually find that there's not really high pheasant densities like in river bottom areas, areas where there's like a lot of forest like up on the bluffs or along the rivers and things and then intersperse grasslands instead we find pheasants much more abundant in just like wide open expanses like big, continuous tracts of grass in an agricultural context. And you know, I can't really like claim to like, understand the minds of a pheasant but what I think is going on is like they're not going to walk through a forest for sure. I mean, I I'm sure I can already picture the hate mail, like I saw underneath my deer stand like Yes, me too. I've seen a pheasant in the forest, but it is definitely the exception. They're not dispersing through forested landscapes. And then we also think that maybe there's like a predation pressure thing like there tends to be a few more predators in these forested grassland landscapes just because there's more habitat diversity or variety out there for a predator. And so it may be that like those areas that I'm picturing that are like wide open ag country, not a tree in sight and a big patch of grass is better for a pheasant just because no raccoons, no skunks, no possums, very few foxes, very

few coyotes and very few avian predators that would harass pheasant are found in those landscapes, whereas the areas that have that forest grassland ag kind of mix tend to be a little bit more attracted to those species. So yeah, that's a hill I'll die on like that area that we were in was not particularly good pheasant habitat. If you gave me that grass in an agricultural landscape, I'm sure that it would have more pheasants than it did there nestled amongst all those wooded bluffs.

O Olivia Hanlon 19:49

Okay, I had found that very interesting. So I thought that that was something that we needed to cover today, Adam, so thank you for indulging me. Yes, so now we can fast forward I guess to what we were talking about before bobwhites, is there anything else that we need to be thinking about for Bobwhites?

A Adam Janke 20:03

Yeah, I mean, maybe just to reiterate, just sort of a basic thing that I hadn't thought about with Bobwhites, pheasants and deer that's unique is that these are resident species. So we have to provide everything they need for getting through the year and for Bobwhites perhaps more than anything else. They are a different animal during the spring and summer than they are in the wintertime. And that's owing primarily to the fact that during the wintertime, they need to need shrubby cover they need woody vegetation like picture a plum thicket or dogwood thicket brambles and raspberries, things like that, that they can escape, especially during snowfall, they can escape in there and be safe from predators and warm and then during the rest of the year, they build their nests and grasslands or they raise their young in grasslands or areas with a lot of wildflowers or even soybean fields. And so Bobwhites need, they're rather picky, like they need a lot of variety in their relatively small annual home ranges. And these home ranges can be like 60 acres, I mean, they're they live their whole lives in a relatively small area, and they need all that stuff within that small area. So they're rather fine scale bird like they need. They need a lot of variety within a small area. Now our old has like the way we sort of used to farm with smaller equipment and more livestock was really hospitable for Bobwhite. So we had Bobwhites, basically throughout the state because everybody had a pasture and woody fence rows and in idle fields, and you know, fallow barn lots and stuff like that, that created all of that diversity in a small area. And now today, we find that fewer fewer areas around the state, but we do find it in southern Iowa where, you know, cropping practices tend to be less extensive.

O Olivia Hanlon 21:52


Absolutely. Adam, is there anything else that we should cover today that we have not talked about yet? I'm sure that we could go on and on for days, right. But is there anything else?


A Adam Janke 22:02


I could go on about these I, you know, I guess we've talked a lot about hunting one, one thing that would just be fun to point out is like there's lots of cool things going on. If you're not a hunter, it's a fun time of year to observe wildlife, you should start to notice who's coming and

going because lots of things are going right now. And then soon things will be coming. I've noticed the dark eyed juncos have all of a sudden shown up which is exciting. They've spent their summers in the boreal forest. And now they'll spend their winters here with us and around our bird feeders and other places, the turkey vultures will be gone soon, you know, the crows are flocking up, the bald eagles will be descending on our rivers, especially in eastern Iowa. As things start to get cold, lots of geese will be moving through I mean, there's lots of exciting things to observe. You can observe them from your windshield, you can observe them from your backyard, you can observe them from the combine lots of cool stuff going on, if you sort of just like tune in to the show of what these what these all these different critters are doing. And then of course, it's a good time of year to remind folks that deer are getting really active. And they're only going to get more active for the first couple of weeks in November as they engage in their annual breeding ritual that we call the rut. That's the type of stuff that deer hunters like me get really excited about. The insurance companies absolutely loathe and we hope everybody's safe. And you should you know, remember to slow down especially at dawn and dusk because there's a lot of deer out there being really reckless because they're in a part of their annual cycle where they're not thinking very clearly. And we want to make sure that people are safe out there on the roads too. So

 Olivia Hanlon 23:34
absolutely. And thank you for adding that in Adam.

 Adam Janke 23:37
Always appreciate you haven't me on and letting me talk about some of this exciting wildlife stuff in the state.

 Olivia Hanlon 23:42
Adam, we really enjoy having you on one last question for you. If people are looking for more information on general populations and things like that, where should they look? Or who should they talk to?

 Adam Janke 23:52
Yes, the Iowa DNR does a great job of tracking all this stuff. So I would look at the Iowa DNR population trends websites. They have specific websites for deer and waterfowl and some other species. So tune in to some of their monitoring efforts. They're certainly doing the best job in terms of tracking those things year round. If you're interested in that stuff I was talking about with chronic wasting disease. The DNR has some great web resources on that. And then we also have some on our website at Natural Resources dot extension dot iastate.edu. In there you'll find all sorts of resources including a new program that we're doing on educating landowners and community members about chronic wasting disease in Northeastern Iowa.

 Olivia Hanlon 24:32



Christa Harmon 24:38

Okay, well thank you very much, Adam, for joining us today. We always love it when you come on and talk to us and we look forward to I'm sure having you on in the future.



Adam Janke 24:40

I will look forward to that as well. Thank you.



24:42

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