

Bits and Pieces Fall 2009

Now is the time to be planning for next spring. Some of the things you should have already done (at least in NW Il) include planting winter wheat, soil testing your food plots and fields, and mow/spray your sod fields for legume or native grass conversion. Soil testing and spraying (if the weather stays warm) can still be done if you hurry (I am writing this on Oct 20). At this point you are too late for winter wheat or any fall plantings. Legumes and switch grass can be frost or dormant seeded once the soil temps get to be 45 or lower.

As I write this essay archery deer, Woodcock (a fascinating bird that migrates as far as Louisiana on short stubby wings and eats worms), and duck /goose season are all open in Northern Illinois. Hopefully you will have a chance to enjoy a hunt or two this fall.

Speaking of ducks with as wet as it has been here this year I have noticed a lot of young “local” ducks that were produced in Illinois. With any of the wetlands I design I require the land owners to install at least of 100 foot buffer of grass to protect the new wetland and to provide needed nest cover. From the research I have read the 100 foot minimum is needed to protect nests from ground predators such as raccoons and cats. Most land owners don’t have a problem with this 100 foot buffer as they are putting several acres in CRP.

The above paragraph brings up a point that I have heard bantered around about wetlands in Illinois for several years. Several wildlife folks I interact with have stated that Illinois is nothing more than a mid migration stop over for migrating birds, in other words the birds rest and feed but move to other areas for nesting, I disagree. I have no scientific data to support my opinion just 20 years of observations of a variety of wetlands so take it for what is worth.

Given the correct amount of moisture and an adequate amount of grass buffer ducks will nest in Illinois as they do in Iowa, Minnesota, and the Dakotas. The problem in Illinois has always been habitat. Getting the ducks to stop in the spring then having proper nesting habitat has kept nesting numbers suppressed. The loss of wetlands in Illinois has been huge (98%).

Within the last 20 years this trend toward habitat loss has been leveling out and in some areas been reversed. With programs such as CRP, WHIP, WRP, Partners for Wildlife and Fish, and Acres for Wildlife wetlands are being restored and grass buffers are being planted. Agencies such as Soil and Water Conservation Districts, NRCS, US Fish & Wildlife Service, and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources have partnered to get projects on public and private lands. Non governmental groups such as Waterfowl USA, -

(con't.) Ducks Unlimited, Nature Conservancy, and Pheasants Forever have also added monetary support.

One final thing, do not forget to clean out and open up your blue bird and wren houses. You should try to open these boxes as soon as possible to keep mice from taking up residence. Around the first week in March or when you start seeing the male blue birds coming back close the boxes.

Make sure your Wood duck boxes are also cleaned out and the wood chips are replaced (about 4 inches deep) this winter, once again by March 1. If you have not seen a male Wood Duck up close take a look, they are beautiful birds.

Well there you go should you have any comments or questions please contact me by e mail as I can get back to you easier that way versus a phone call.

Thanks for your time.

Dave Harrison