

Chukars are a welcome addition to our Nevada landscape

By Larry Hyslop



Chukar keeping a wary watch for danger, NDOW photo

As a bird species, Chukars are doing fine. It is always nice to be able to report a species not suffering a rapid decline, even if that species is introduced.

Ken Gray is the Head Biologist with the Nevada Department of Wildlife. He said “we are not where we were a few years ago,” but describes the Chukar Partridge population as having moderate bird numbers. Lower adult numbers meant fewer chicks this spring, but a good number of these chicks survived.

It would be impossible for NDOW to actually count Chukars so they use hunting results to get population estimates. We are in the middle of this year’s hunt but after the 2010 season, surveys are mailed out to 10% of the Chukar hunters. Their reported success was then expanded out to show approximately 11,220 birds were taken by 1,728 Elko County hunters. This represents 13% of the Nevada kills, taken by 12% of Nevada’s hunters.

It is interesting to compare this Chukar harvest with the sage grouse. Last year’s season saw 2,088 sage grouse taken by 1,072 hunters, which represents 28% of Nevada’s grouse harvest.

Chukars are native birds across the Middle East and Asia. They were first introduced to the U.S. in 1893 from Karachi, India. Nevada’s first release was in 1935, using birds raised in game farms. Further releases through 1954 successfully established breeding populations across Nevada. Elko County’s first release was in 1938 and the first hunt was held in 1955. They have also been released across the West, Hawaii and New Zealand.

Chukars probably do well in Nevada because this landscape is much like their homelands. They like steep, irregular terrain where they can easily hide among brush and clumps of grasses. Their preferred landscapes include rock outcrops where these vigilant birds can keep watch for danger.

They are ground loving birds and often run uphill from danger. If forced into flight, a few wing beats allows them to soar downhill 50 to 400 yards before swinging uphill to land. If a covey explodes into flight, they scatter and quickly begin calling to each other to bring the covey back together.

They offer Nevada sportsmen a challenging hunt, while offering wildlife enthusiasts an entertaining sight. The presence of Chukars adds both to our Nevada landscape and our outdoor life style.

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