

Fall hunting season is here

by Hal Spain

This is one of those columns that I have been dreading for months. For the first time in 28 years of writing this pre-season hunting forecast, I can't think of much to be optimistic about, except that we have nearly all survived a horrible 2011 and are looking forward to a better season next year.

We'll start with the drought, which has affected the whole state. A few weeks ago, we had not received any appreciable precipitation since last October. We did get a nice 2 to 3 inch rain about six weeks ago, and another one up to 3 inches during the first week of October. That has brightened our spirits, but with the cooler weather, we won't have enough time to improve any pastures before frost.

Did I mention cooler weather? That is a good thing, because we have also gone through a summer of record high temperatures, along with the rest of the state. I think we hit 100 days of 100 degree temperatures about a month ago.

Add to that the fact that we've lost over 200,000 acres of rangeland just in Coke County this year to wildfires. So you can readily tell that we are ready to put 2011 behind us and hope for some better conditions for

the new year.

How does this impact the upcoming hunting season? Very negatively, I think. I have been feeding deer around the house for the past fifteen years. Some of the does had fawns with them this year and some didn't. I don't remember seeing a doe with twins this year. I have seen several little bucks, but most have been spikes up to little six point bucks.

The good news is that I have talked to two or three ranchers who have seen some bucks with some really nice horns (antlers); so all may not be lost for this season.

From what I have heard from the "so-called" experts this year, this may be the season that you do not want to shoot that spike deer to keep him out of the breeding herd. Biologists are saying that due to the drought, that spike may develop a nice rack in years to come with the proper weather conditions.

The other caveat I hear is that this is the year to reduce your doe herd. Most years this goes in a hunter's ear and out the other one. And most years we can get by with a few extra does. This, my fellow hunters, ain't one of those years. We need to cull a large number of does this year on most of our area ranches. Talk to the rest of your hunting group and see if

you can come up with a plan to reduce your doe herd this year. It won't guarantee you good hunting for next year, but it will help.

Being a quail hunter, I can tell you that the call counts and other surveying techniques I have been reading about from throughout the Rolling Plains have been dismal. I have seen quail pairing up since April, and most gave it up and rejoined the covey. To date I have observed a total of three pairs that hatched little 'uns, and the size of the broods were no more than eight each. This is going to be a good year to leave the natural bird population alone. You may want to consider buying some flight ready birds and hunt them if you have some dogs you need to work.

As to seasons, dove season runs from Sept. 1 through October 23, 2011. The winter short season runs from December 23, 2011 through January 8, 2012, with a daily bag limit of 15 in the central zone, which includes Coke County.

Archery season for deer and turkey will close on November 4, 2011, with no antlerless permit required except on MLD properties. The general deer season will run from November 5, 2011 through January 1, 2012. The special late general sea-



Nice Old Feller! Morgan (McCutchen) Webb brought down this older buck in Fisher County Sunday, December 5, 2010. The 8 point buck had an inside spread of approximately 17 inches.

son will run from Jan. 2 - 15, 2012, for antlerless and spike bucks only. The bag limit for deer is 5, with no more than 2 bucks, all seasons combined.

Turkey season will run concurrently with deer season, Nov. 5 through Jan. 1. Spring turkey season will be March 31 through May 13, 2012, gobblers only, with a bag limit of 4 (all seasons

combined). Quail season will run statewide Oct. 29, 2011 through Feb. 26, 2012, with a daily limit of 15 and a possession limit of 45.

Legal shooting hours for all game animals and nonmigratory game birds are from one-half hour before sunrise to one-half hour after sunset.

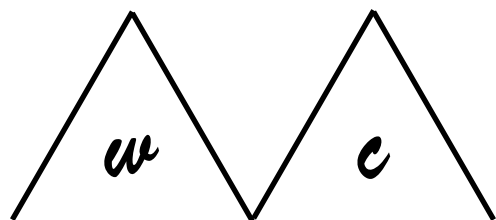
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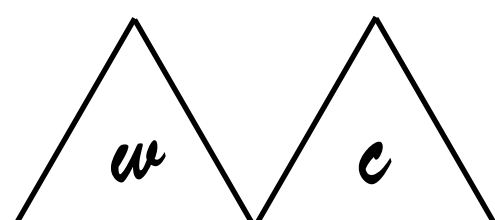


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