2026 ANNUAL REPORT

Utah Chukar Partridge Update

Utah Division of Wildlife Resources Upland Game Program

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Wildlife Resources

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Executive Summary

Beginning in 2019, the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR) implemented a survey methodology to evaluate chukar numbers and production using game cameras set at water sources throughout the state. The camera survey allows data to be captured in a wide geographic area and provides data on the year's production and a year-to-year index of abundance. Helicopter surveys were discontinued due to increasing cost and safety concerns related to low-level helicopter flights.

During the initial year, cameras were placed at 20 trend sites throughout the state. Since then, the project has added and removed cameras, resulting in 35 active camera sites, of which 30 produced photos. Since 2024, the UDWR has been employing new Artificial Intelligence technology through Brigham Young University (BYU) to assist with the photo processing. Biologists and dedicated hunters verified the data. As the UDWR continued this process in 2026, the work of volunteers from the Utah Chukar and Wildlife Foundation and BYU was invaluable to completing photo processing and summarizing chukar visits to water sources.

2026 Overview

Habitat conditions for chukars throughout the state have suffered due to ongoing drought, though this has improved for two years. Utah experienced heavy snowfall during the 2022-2023 winter, and optimal winter conditions in most of the state during the 2023-2024 winter. Those two years of precipitation patterns likely resulted in improved nutrition for breeding adults through the growth of grasses and forbs, and increased insect abundance which provide the protein critical for chick growth and survival. Although precipitation in the West Desert is spotty and conditions can differ significantly from one range to another, or even between areas on the same mountain range, the amount of snowfall from two winters ago contributed to an increase in overall quantity and quality of brood-rearing habitat.

However, the 2024-25 precipitation patterns were not as favorable. Chukar production was down that year with fewer broods, or no broods, visible at water sources. To compound that issue, the last winter of 2025-26 was historically dry. Biologists have noticed reductions in both numbers and sizes of broods across most upland game species, including chukars. Chukar hunters can expect to see a below average year across the state, as well as decreased production. While some populations experience factors of density-dependence that stifle brood production, the dry conditions of 2025-2026 may foment lower populations, so some areas with a substantial number of adults have little to no production. See "Figure 2" for camera locations.

CHICKS PER ADULT BY REGION								
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Northern	2.5	1.3	0.1	2.4	0.72	2.98	0	0
Central	4.8	1.0	0.1	3.5	2.23	2.13	0.1	0
Southern	1.9	0.6	0.0	1.5	1.85	1.16	0.04	0
Southeastern	3.0	1.5	0.0	0.7	6.61*	0.34	0	0

Table 1. Chicks per Adult by Region - The average number of juvenile birds per adult birds in the four sampled DWR regions. The number of chicks per hen is an index of yearly production. Artificial Intelligence (AI) was utilized for the first time this year to assist with chukar detections in photos. Biologists and volunteers verified the data manually. Unfortunately, there were no juvenile chukars found at the camera sites this year.

*Due to a substantial amount of data being unavailable, this is an unusually small sample size.

Northern Region

There were four cameras deployed in the Northern Region. One each on the Grouse Creek, Pilot, Hogup, and Hogup South Mountains. These four cameras contributed to the dataset, with the unfortunate occurrence of zero production documented in 2025 and 2026. Last winter's dry conditions coupled with the previous dry year likely contributed to a substantial lack of brood-rearing habitats in many locations. Anecdotally, broods have been observed in various locations in the Northern Region, though the broods have been fewer and smaller in size. The verification done with AI software did not yield any chicks in the photos at the select water sources. Biologists have observed a fair number of adult chukars in Box Elder County, but expect hunting to be slower this year with the lack of recruitment for the past two years. Cache County will likely be more difficult, with fewer chukar observations.

Figure 1. Image from the Hogups camera in the Northern Region, depicting four adult chukars at a guzzler. Chukar visitation to guzzlers may be highly variable year to year. This is an example from the 2026 camera survey showing how the AI detected chukars at the guzzlers. These photos were reviewed by BYU to help train the AI software, and to decipher the correct number of total chukars, as well as the number of juvenile vs. adult chukars. The average AI detections of photos encompassing chukars per region were as follows: NR = 797, CR = 5,643, SR = 2,818, SER = 5. As the software is trained via manual review, the AI detections will become more accurate [DT1].

Central Region

Much of Utah's chukar habitat is within the Central Region. The area also receives the majority of the camera monitoring effort with 15 cameras in 2026 deployed on the Cedar, Deep Creek, Desert, Dugway, Fish Springs, Gilson, Grassy, Lake, Lakeside, Long Ridge, Silver Island and Thomas Mountains. Twelve of those 15 cameras contributed to the dataset. In 2025, the average juveniles per adult chukar was 0.1, which has now declined to zero. Despite this continued recruitment decline, Tooele and Juab counties still have average chukar numbers in the West Desert. However, anecdotes from the Wasatch area indicate nest initiation was high, but that recruitment was low due to poor chick survival in the dry summer months. Hunting conditions will be less desirable than last year.

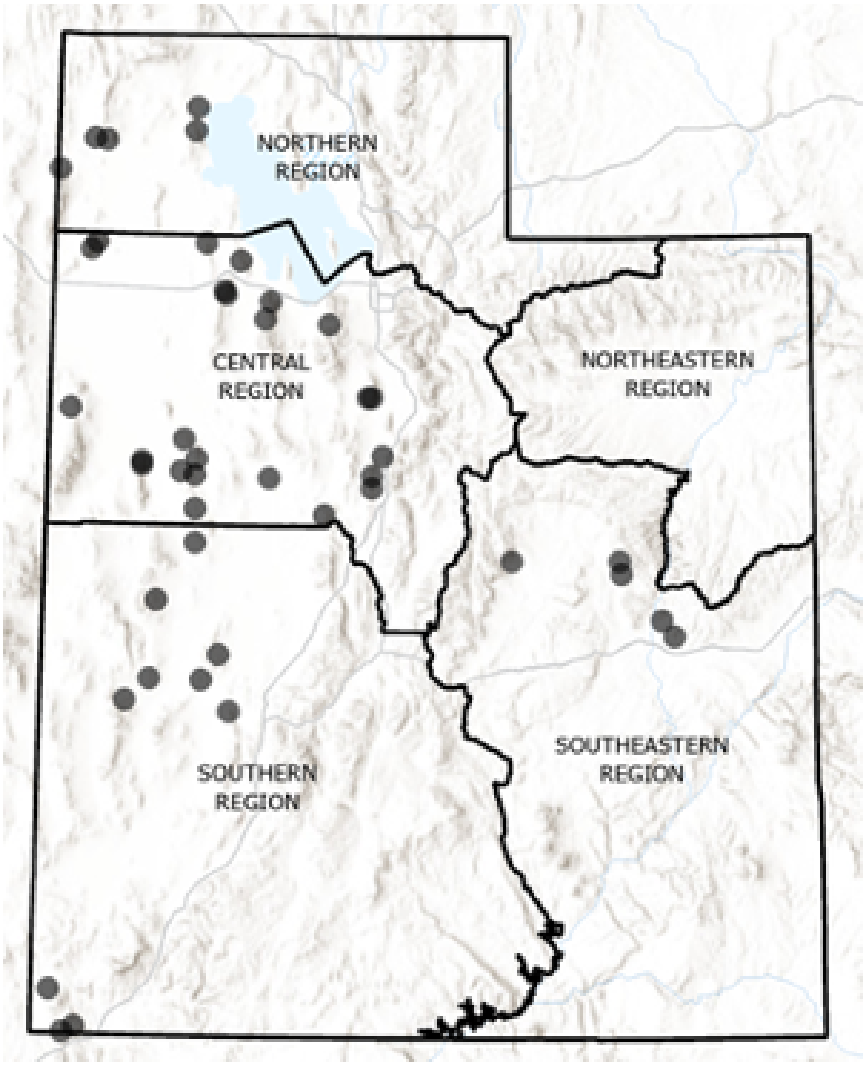

Figure 2. Regional Boundaries and Monitored Locations
Regional boundaries referenced in this document with approximate locations of monitored water sources.

Southern Region

The Southern Region encompasses the West Desert ranges south of the Millard-Juab County line. Ten cameras were placed on the Beaver Dam, Crickets, Grey Hills, House, Minerals and Oak Creek Mountains. All cameras contributed to the dataset. Overall production decreased again this year from 0.04 to zero chicks per adult in these areas, though some juveniles have been detected in some of these areas outside of the AI protocol. Because other locations in the Southern Region (outside of the survey areas) demonstrated fair production last summer, we expect that some locations will still provide decent hunting opportunity, such as Monroe, Fishlake, and other areas in Beaver and Millard counties. Overall hunting conditions will be less favorable than last year.

Figure 3. Adult chukars at the Grey Hills site in the Southern Region.

Southeastern Region

The Southeastern Region cameras are located along the Book Cliffs, Nine Mile, and Manti East Slope Mountains. Of the five cameras placed, four were active this year, contributing to the dataset. Because most cameras were active, and based on trends throughout other sample sites, the cameras should accurately portray production. This is the second year with no juveniles detected on the survey guzzler sites. Two of the active cameras did not receive any chukar visits, with the other two only detecting adults. Outside of this sample area, biologists observed smaller numbers and sizes of broods. Less hunting success can be expected in the Southeastern Region.

Summary

Production has declined drastically throughout the state, and hunters will likely encounter smaller coveys with substantially fewer young birds this year. Chukar populations can be spotty throughout the state, with some areas receiving more desirable precipitation patterns, creating mesic habitat for chicks (i.e. grasshoppers for growth and development). Because averages are presented here, there are always places performing considerably better or worse than the average of the camera locations. There are still populations with some production and a fair number of adults. Search for areas that provide food and cover during the hunting season. Steep, rocky slopes with brush and grass can be a great place to start. First-time chukar hunters should visit wildlife.utah.gov for more tips, view the UDWR hunt forecast here, or go to learnhunting.org to find a mentor.

Figure 4. Adult chukars at the Fish Springs in the Central Region