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abundance of beans this year and provided a critical source of natural forage for deer in the late summer," Cain said.

Deer appeared to be in poor condition coming out of the winter, without the spring rains, so their access to nutritious forbs were limited.

Although South Texas did receive a substantial amount of rain for two weeks in August, local hunters are still reporting low numbers in dove population and smaller quality and quantity of deer.

"Obviously, we had a dry winter through most of the state," Cain said. "So bucks and does coming out of rut just had a harder time recovering. A lot of them didn't have the good spring green-up that we need to

help them rebuild those body reserves and put on good fat throughout the spring and summer."

Dove season opened a week early for hunters in the south zone, but the extra week did not provide hunters with bag limits.

"I just took my shotgun, sat on the tailgate and drank beer," a local hunter said of a hunt two weeks ago. "There were eight of us and between the group we got, I don't know, maybe ten birds."

The avid hunters are precise and have good aim, he added.

"The bottom line is, the dove just aren't flying," he

said.

Many hunters are placing blame on drought conditions that have caused natural feeding fields to not produce and water sources to dry up.

Others, such as Celeste

Lacey, believe that dove hunting is just off to a slow start due to northern temperatures not cool enough to push the birds south.

Archery season for deer kicked

off Saturday, October 1, across the state and hunters reported average antler and body weight.

Lacey believes the August rains improved habitat conditions which provided native forage for the deer,

and they did not have to travel to a feeder to find food.

Cain said deer densities range from 24-34 deer per 1,000 acres and there has been a stable population that has grown slowly over the past five years.

He believes deer populations are likely to decline this year due to dry conditions and expected lower fawn recruitment.

General deer season opens on November 5 and runs through January 15, 2023, for the south zone. A special youth-only gun deer season is set in both zones for Oct. 29-30 and Jan. 2-15.

At the end of the day, outdoor enthusiasts believe hunting is not about what they have bagged, but about relationships, memories and experiences they will never forget.



"The bottom line is, dove just aren't flying,"



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