



THE COVEY



A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER FOR LANDOWNERS, QUAIL HUNTERS, ENTHUSIASTS, AND SCIENTISTS

A publication of the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute at Texas A&M University-Kingsville

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About this Newsletter

The primary goal of this monthly newsletter is to let you know more about current information on quail in a digestible, yet scientifically-sound format. And I do mean digestible! I realize that your busy schedules prevent you from obtaining the latest information from the numerous outlets that are available in-this-day-and-age (web sites, books, magazines, and meetings). The information you will obtain from *THE COVEY* will synthesize reports of published information I have 'downloaded' from scientific journals and meetings, updated research and information that I and my colleagues at CKWRI have collected, or comments that I receive from you, the reader.

Meet the Author

My name is Andy Radomski, a newly hired Research Scientist for the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute (CKWRI). My educational training in quail studies are from here in south Texas (from Laredo to Refugio) through Texas A&M University and TAMU-Kingsville; and unofficially from many of the landowners, hunters, and hunting dogs that I have met.

I have spent the past few years studying Texas bobwhites. Specifically, I was trying to determine what makes them 'tick' using advanced human medicine techniques. I studied the stress hormone (corticosterone) that bobwhites secrete as a result of the conditions they endure every day out on the 'back 40.' I then attempted to mimic these conditions and raised bobwhites within an environmental chamber to determine reproductive effort and physiological condition. Some interesting findings resulted from my studies but I will save those stories for upcoming issues.

So with that introduction, let me continue with the CKWRI tradition of writing the quail newsletter and

allow me to keep you informed on the latest scientific findings in quail research. The following article will describe my first assignment in conducting field research in south Texas with CKWRI.

THE SOUTH TEXAS QUAIL PROJECT

We are conducting a 4-year radio telemetry study on northern bobwhites to learn more about the ecology and management of this important game species in south Texas. The objectives of this study are to determine: (1) if bobwhites alter their use of habitats in response to hunting; (2) if bobwhites change their activity patterns during the hunting season; (3) if hunting is adding to the annual mortality rate; (4) which hunting patterns are bad for quail; and (5) if there is an index to gauge hunting intensity on bobwhite populations.

Although the northern bobwhite has received much research attention, questions still remain concerning their population dynamics and responses to a variety of conditions. The driving force behind this research will be to provide answers and solutions about bobwhites to landowners, biologists, quail hunters, dog handlers, and quail enthusiasts. During the first year, we will fit 100 bobwhites with radio transmitters and follow their movements. By understanding movement patterns, we will address important questions.

Two sets of questions will center on bobwhite management and



hunting-related concerns. Our goals will be addressed using radio telemetry, which allows us to follow bobwhites within their habitats. Knowledge of which habitat management tools (burning, disking, chaining, root-plowing, etc.) help maintain a stable population will assist landowners in making decisions about quail management plans.

Since this study will be conducted over 4 years, we will gain information on the environmental conditions that contribute to bobwhite survival. We will be able to determine changes in bobwhite habits, movements, and preferences over time. Knowledge gained from this long-term study will contribute to our understanding of the ecology and management of this important game species in south Texas.

Albany Area Quail Management Project

One of the most intensive quail telemetry studies is being conducted in Albany, Georgia by researchers from Auburn University. Over the past 6 years, biologists have radio-tagged more than 2,000 birds! Their findings pinpoint exactly the habitat that bobwhites use for feeding, loafing, roosting, nesting, and brood raising.

The South Texas Quail Project will use this study as a model and expand their research questions, such as what changes bobwhite habits, movements, and preferences over time. Specifically, our study will determine how bobwhite populations in south Texas differ from those in the southeastern United States. Obtaining answers to these research questions may provide solutions in maintaining a more stable bobwhite population in south Texas.

Early Broods

Reports from CKWRI researchers indicate an early quail hatch this spring. Sightings of “bumblebee”

quail were reported in Kenedy, Brooks, and Duval counties during mid May. Mild winter weather may have contributed to such early birds.

Late Broods

Reports of late spring-early summer broods are spotty. Some ranches have been reporting good hatches, however, there are just as many reports of poor or lack of hatches in south Texas.

Long Droughts and Hot Temperatures

Although not a well kept secret, the summer of 1998 is shaping up to be one of the hottest and driest ever recorded in south Texas. Unfortunately, quail populations and harvest record data tend to go in the opposite direction of the rain gauge and thermometer. However, don't let this dissuade you from planning your next quail hunting trip to south Texas.

If you or someone you know would like to receive a free copy of **THE COVEY** Newsletter, please write to the address below.

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