



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

Spring 2000
Volume 3, Issue 1

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Well we did it again...captured the spotlight. I believe the mission of research is fulfilled when it reaches the general public and our professional peers. The Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute encourages us to do both. Through newsletters, we attempt to reach the community. Through presentations and publications, we update our peers. The South Texas Quail Project (STxQP) recently was in the spotlight at the annual meeting of the Texas Chapter of The Wildlife Society. Two events highlighted the meeting for the STxQP. First, Danny Vasquez, our research technician, did a great job of presenting research on bobwhite broods. Also, our poster entitled "*The Effects of Hurricane Bret on Northern Bobwhite*" won the award of **Best Undergraduate Poster**. A big thanks to Danny Vasquez and Fernando Holschneider, a wildlife undergraduate at Texas A&M University-Kingsville, for all their hard work put into the poster. These highlights would not be possible without your dedicated support. Thanks!

BIRD DOGS: THE BLIND LEADING THE BLIND

Have you ever wondered what the world looks like through the eyes of a bird dog? Would it look different? I think it would. You see, dogs have an amazing olfactory sense. Believe it or not, dogs now are being used to sniff out human cancer cells. Canids (wolves, coyotes, etc) evolved with a long rostrum (nose region) and enlarged nasal chambers that gives them their remarkable sense of smell. The reason why bloodhounds find missing people and bird dogs point quail. To an extent, dogs "see" the world through their nose. Thus you could say bird dogs are "blind," and hunting is a case of the blind leading the blind. But how well can bird dogs "see"?

This past hunting season we monitored the effi-

ciency of bird dogs. We had radio-collared coveys in hunted areas that allowed us to determine what percent of the coveys were being pointed. The hunting party proceeded ahead, while we followed in a separate truck about 30 yards behind, monitoring bobwhites with radiotelemetry. We also mapped our route using global positioning systems to help us "visualize" the hunt on a map. We assumed a 100 yard "pointing zone", meaning that coveys within 50 yards on either side of the hunting party were close enough to be pointed by the dogs. We were interested in several questions. Did the experience of the driver influence the number of coveys found? Under what weather conditions were coveys pointed?

We monitored 10 hunts producing a total of 88 covey encounters, of which 27 were radio-collared coveys. Thus, our results only are based on these 27 encounters. Bird dogs pointed 36% of the coveys with experienced drivers compared to 14% with inexperienced drivers. Experienced drivers were familiar with the area being hunted and had worked for the camp for some time.



Photo by Fidel Hernandez

By monitoring radio-collared coveys during hunts, we were able to document the efficiency of bird dogs at pointing bobwhite coveys.

Thus, they could conduct more systematic hunts over an area compared to inexperienced drivers (student interns) who were just learning the ropes. We also were interested if larger coveys (> 10 birds) were pointed more often than smaller coveys. It is intuitive that the more birds that are in a covey, the more scent that will be produced. We found 38% of large coveys were pointed, while bird dogs found 20% of small coveys.

Regarding weather conditions, 45% of the coveys were pointed under slight wind (>3 mph), while calmer conditions resulted in 10%. Bird dogs pointed 38% of the coveys in cool temperatures (< 75 F), compared to 13% in warmer temperatures. Lastly, low humidity (\leq 55%) resulted in 33% of the coveys being located, while dogs pointed 25% in higher humidity.

After some number crunching, we found that none of the results were statistically different. Because the number of our observations is low, percentages should be viewed cautiously. We will not be able to draw solid conclusions until after several hunting seasons.

Compared to other observations, Clay Sisson from the Albany Area Quail Management Project reported that high temperatures and low humidity resulted in lower bobwhite activity. Days with lower temperatures, high humidity, and light wind resulted in higher bobwhite activity. Unfortunately, Clay did not state what he meant by high or low, and therefore we cannot accurately discuss the comparison. We found that bird dogs pointed 22% of radio-collared coveys, while Clay reported 47%. Forest Kellogg of the Southeastern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study Group found that 17-71% of coveys were found by bird dogs over 3 years in the late 1970s.

We documented some interesting observations during our hunts. We noticed that as the season progressed, bird dog efficiency declined from 23% to 17%. Forest also noted that percentages dropped from 46% to 32%.

My guess is bobwhites are savvy. We learned in some cases that false points were not false points, the covey just held tight and refused to flush. At other times, coveys kept moving, staying ahead of the hunting party. Both Forest and Clay also reported similar observations.

Before you commit these findings to memory, remember that many variables may influence a bird dog's efficiency: personnel, vegetation, weather variables, etc. Only in a controlled environment could we understand what governs this phenomenon. So what recommendations can we make to improve your hunting? According to Forest, hunters concentrating on the most productive areas will probably flush more birds/hour than one who systematically hunts an area. However, a person hunting systematically will find a greater percentage of the birds that are actually out there. Take your pick!

Until next time--

Fidel Hernandez

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

*Would you like to support the **South Texas Quail Project** ? Send a tax-deductible contribution to:*

**South Texas Quail Project
Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute,
Texas A&M University-
Kingsville
Mail Stop Center 218
Kingsville, TX 78363-8202**



**Caesar Kleberg Wildlife
Research Institute
Mail Stop Center 218
Kingsville, Texas 78363-8202**

Editor: Fidel Hernandez
Layout: Alan Fedynich

THE COVEY is printed on recycled paper

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage Paid
Kingsville, TX 78363
Permit #172