



THE COVEY



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

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

Spring 1999
Volume 2, Issue 1

About this Newsletter

The primary goal of this 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 it has been awhile (last December) since you were last updated on the progress of the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute's 4-year radio telemetry study on northern bobwhites in southern Texas.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

(1) Fall nesting (Oct-Dec). Probably due to poor nesting conditions caused by severe summer drought, bobwhites were nesting from October-December 1998. The mid-September rains may have provided better habitat conditions and/or stimulating the hens to lay.

(2) Spring nesting (March-June). Not much rest, for me or the birds! Incubation of eggs started the last week of March 1999. Therefore, using back calculations, the first few birds started laying prior to the rainfall events that month. Number of radioed birds nesting remained constant during the spring months.

(3) Nest selection. Gulf cordgrass ("sacahuista" *Spartina spartinae*) was a preferred plant type for nesting. This perennial grass also provided excellent escape and loafing habitat. Sacahuista grows in low-lying or poorly drained areas, often forming uniform stands. Bobwhites tended to nest near the edge of these stands probably so they could find suitable brooding habitat when the chicks hatched.

(4) Quail movements. Bobwhites moved less than expected during summer, probably due to the drought conditions. Most quail were found in areas of woody vegetation, especially during loafing periods,

because grass and forb cover was almost nonexistent. Interestingly, the preferred loafing site was slightly elevated. After the October rains, birds within several coveys would move 1-3 miles (indicative of "fall shuffle") and began using cordgrass areas. However, it was apparent that bobwhites moved these long distances to find suitable nesting cover since birds were incubating shortly thereafter.

(5) Nest success. Hatchability was 90 % during the 1998 fall nesting, which is similar to the 1999 early spring nests; most eggs within clutches hatched. It appears that the late spring nests are less successful and fewer eggs are laid. Male bobwhites incubated 8 % of radio-collared nests during the late season and so far, it is similar this spring. Mean clutch size contained 12 eggs during fall nesting compared to 16 for early spring and for 14 late spring nesting.

(6) Quail mortality. Mortality was classified as mammalian, avian, or trap/accidental based on evidence at the site. Predation by mammals was 75 %, birds 17 %, unknown 4 %, and trap stress 1 %.



Photo by Wyman Meinzer

QUAIL PROJECT TECHNICIANS

Ashton Hutchins was hired in March to assist in the field work. Ashton is from the Dallas area and is a 1997 graduate from Texas A&M University. Danny Vasquez was hired in June. Danny is from Big Lake and is a 1999 graduate from San Angelo State University.

SOUTH TEXAS QUAIL PROJECT CONTRIBUTORS

The following individuals, companies, and organizations provided financial support in 1998-99.

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BOBWHITE TRANSLOCATION STUDY IN SOUTHERN TEXAS: A PILOT PROJECT

This pilot project is a joint study between Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute, Texas A&M University-Kingsville, Kingsville, TX and the King Ranch, Inc. The primary objectives were to measure the survival rates and reproductive performance of translocated northern bobwhites captured during early spring (March-April) in southern Texas.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

The translocation pilot study was successful in that both bobwhite survival and reproductive success were higher than expected. Although not well documented, translocating wild bobwhites is a common practice in southern Texas. Information gained from this study will provide landowners and researchers with recommendations on using translocation techniques to maintain or enhance bobwhite populations.

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Editor: Andy Radomski
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U.S. Postage Paid
Kingsville, TX 78363
Permit #172