

Bee County Wildlife Management Association



Enhancing Quality and Quantity of Wildlife Habitat and Populations in Bee County, Texas

July 2005 Newsletter

Did you know...

...fire plays an important role in most ecosystems and in habitat management?

...fire was a natural beneficial factor in most of Texas before Smokey Bear and man gave it a bad name and significantly curtailed it?

...native Texas vegetation and wildlife are well adapted to fire and benefit greatly from it?

...fire effectively suppresses many woody plant species while encouraging grass and forb growth that is beneficial to wildlife?

...prescribed burning is one of the most effective habitat management tools and is less expensive than many other methods?

...different types of prescribed burns are utilized depending on the specific objectives of your management plan?

JULY MEETING REPORT

Jason Hardin, Quail Initiative Coordinator with Audubon Texas, was our speaker this month and he put on an exceptional program about Quail. Key points from his talk are summarized below:

Audubon's Mission in Texas is to conserve and restore natural ecosystems focusing on birds, other wildlife and their habitats for the benefit of humanity and the earth's biological diversity.

Why focus on Quail & Grassland Birds?

Birds are an ecological litmus paper. Because of their rapid metabolism and wide geographic range, they reflect changes in the environment quickly — they warn us of things out of balance — sending us signals whenever there is deterioration in the ecosystem. (*Roger Tory Peterson*)

Bobwhite quail management has the potential to improve habitat for numerous grassland bird species.

Status of the Northern Bobwhite U.S. autumn population

- 1980: 58,857,000 Birds - 1999: 20,141,000 Birds
- Decline of 65.8%, annual rate of decline = 3.8%

Status of the Northern Bobwhite Texas autumn population

- 1980: 20,000,000 Birds - 2002: 5,000,000 Birds
- Decline of 75%, Annual rate of decline = 5.6%

The Game Plan for Recovery is guided By:

- Northern Bobwhite Conservation Initiative (NBCI)
- Texas Quail Conservation Initiative
- Research being conducted by universities and institutes across the state
- Texas Quail Council

Why the decline in quail and other grassland birds?

Oceans of habitat have become islands of habitat.

Approximately 6 million acres of Coastal Prairie once supported a healthy population of Atwater's prairie chickens. This area has been reduced to only 200,000 acres or 3% of its original range.

Conversion to agriculture, urban sprawl, "Improved" pasture grasses, and declining range conditions associated with continuous grazing.

Issues Impacting Quail & Grassland Birds

Land use/management practices, Land fragmentation, Loss of native grasses, Introduction of non-native species, Fire suppression

The Habitat Problem is the major limiting factor and can be summarized as

...sound range, livestock and wildlife management need to be combined with fire to achieve maximum benefit?

...some areas of Texas have formal Prescribed Burn Associations that work together to conduct safe and professional burns on member properties?

...even small burns of 5 to 20 acres can provide islands of improved habitat and forage while limiting the expense, labor and potential risk of a large scale burn?

...prescribed burns are usually more effective, longer lasting and beneficial than food plots in our dry area?

...there are specific rules and regulations you must know and follow in order to conduct a prescribed burn?

...you can hire professional Burn Managers and/or Fire Bosses if you do not want to do it your self?

Some interesting research questions...

If someone invented instant water, what would they mix it with?

How does the guy that drives the snowplow get

insufficient nesting and brood-rearing habitat

- The structure of nesting cover should be 9 to 12 inches diameter
- It should be residual grass 16 to 18 inches tall
- 30 to 40 percent of an area should be nesting cover with about 300 to 400 clumps per acre: Indiangrass, Seacoast Bluestem, Broomsedge Bluestem, Little Bluestem, Tanglehead, Switchgrass, Sideoats Grama

Brood-rearing Cover

- Forbs = “Weedy Plants” Sunflowers, Ragweed, Crotons (Dove weeds), Broomweed.....and more.

These plants provide diversity which increases insects needed by incubating adults and chicks, cover from predators, shade to assist with thermoregulation, seeds for fall and winter forage, and bare ground for mobility.

Restoration Practices

- Increase acreage devoted to a mixture of native warm season grasses and forbs interspersed with low growing woody cover
- Habitat restoration can be accomplished by using a combination of brush control methods, prescribed burning, and rotational grazing

Audubon’s Initiative is directly connected to implementing the Texas Quail Conservation Initiative

- Assist the Technical Committee of the Texas Quail Council
- Leverage relationships to create Co-ops and ID demonstration sites
- Assist in orchestrating landowner workshops and events

Quail Co-ops & Quail Conservation Areas are platforms to launch the Texas Quail Conservation Initiative.

95% of Texas is privately owned so Co-ops and conservation areas are essential for sustaining and rejuvenating Texas Quail.

Six Key Components:

- Wildlife Management
- Range/Cropland Management
- Water Management
- Research
- Economics
- Education

Overarching Strategic Goals

- Arrest decline in 5 to 10 years, •Restore quail to their 1980 density over the next 20-25 years

Q. What do Quail Need? A. Places to Nest, Rest, and Feed!

Nesting Cover –LITTLE BLUESTEM is best.

–Other locally abundant native bunch grasses used for nesting include:

- Big Bluestem, •Indiangrass, •Switchgrass, •Gulf Cordgrass, •and more.....

Resting Cover (Loafing)

•Woody Shrubs and Vines. These plants should cover between 5 and 25% of total area.

–Closed on top, open on bottom

- Locally abundant loafing covers include: •Mesquite, •Brasil, •Grenjino, •Wild Plum, •Blackberry or Dewberry, •Grapevine, •McCartney Rose, •Yaupon, •and more.....

Feeding Cover

to work in the morning?

If you are traveling in a vehicle at the speed of light, what happens when you turn on the headlights?

If nothing ever sticks to Teflon, how do they make Teflon stick to the pan?

When you are driving and looking for an address, why do you turn down the radio?

Do sheep shrink when it rains?

If a parsley farmer is sued, do they garnish his wages?

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Pat True

•Weeds and grasses –Closed on top, open underneath, and associated with bare ground –Locally abundant feeding cover:

•Sunflower, •Croton or Dove weed,•Broom weed, •Partridge pea, •Cowpen daisy, •Sumpweed, •Ragweed, •and more
all interspersed with native grasses

•Closed on top, open on bottom

–Bare ground

–Seeds

–Insects

–Mobility

–Protection from predators

"... game can be restored by the creative use of the same tools which have heretofore destroyed it - ax, plow, cow, fire, and gun."

Aldo Leopold, Game Management, 1933

The AX: Brush Clearing

•Strips vs. mottes

•Average quail flight distance ~ 45-50yds

•Doze, root-plow, root-rake, stack and burn, IPT, Aerial spray

•Long-term effect, high cost

MAINTAINANCE IS THE KEY (FOLLOWUP)

SHREDDING

•Simulates grazing but w/out hoof action

•Prevents grasses from becoming rank

•Removes small woody encroachment

•Avoid shredding during the nesting season

•Does not discriminate against 1st choice plants or locations

• Relatively low cost and low headache

AVOID SHREDDING ENTIRE PROPERTY EACH YEAR. Residual cover is very important.

AERATORS / CHOPPERS

•Choppers: Blades < 6", up to 5 passes necessary

•Aerators: teeth > 8", 2 – 3 passes

•Divots allow filtration of water and sunlight

•Less expensive than complete dozer treatments but needs maintenance via stocking rate and fire

The Plow: FALLOW DISKING

•Tandem / offset disk plow, 2-4 inches deep

•Lightly breaks up the soil /sod

•Promotes seed producing plants (forbs)

•Do not disk same strip in successive years

•Long and narrow strips

•More cost-effective than food plots

The Cow

•Over-grazed?

•Under-grazed?

•Rotational system

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*(ex-officio, non voting)
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Newsletter

Larry Jones
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ljones@hrbizmall.com

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* Buddy Turner -
OGT Program
Director *



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- Native bunch grasses vs. exotic
- 250 - 500 clumps per acre
- Differing stages of succession

The Fire: PRESCRIBED BURNS

- Removes ground litter and rank grasses
- Temporarily ↑ percent bare ground
- Patchwork of burned / unburned spots
- Slows brush encroachment
- Invigorates native warm-season grasses
- Stimulates forb growth
- Low cost vs. liability

The Gun: Hunting

- Typically quail hunting is self-regulating. When quail are plentiful, people hunt and when quail are limited, people watch the game.
- Many corporate hunting leases go above and beyond regulations set by TPWD.
- Compensatory or Additive, probably both (would they die anyway or are we harvesting birds that would have nested? Birds alive during February will probably make it to the nesting season).

COVER MANAGEMENT (Quick Fixes)

- Prickly pear can be a quick solution to lack of cover
- Blackberry/dewberry is another quick fix.
- Half-cutting – labor intensive
- Brush shelters / tee-pees – short term
- Brush recovery can take 10 to 15 years
- Faster under fence posts or other perches
- 50 feet in diameter, as low as 20% brush

HERBICIDES

- Foliar: Reclaim, Remedy & diesel, Remedy & Tordon
- Basal: Velpar, Remedy & diesel
- Eradicate?
- Some aerial applications stop forb growth for 2 seasons

OTHER "METHODS"

- Food plots are like bank loans, don't count on them.
- Feeders: A "no effect"
- Road feeding: may increase chance of over-harvest (ethics?) Could be beneficial during drought periods.
- Waterers: only if a green spot occurs, not really cost effective on a broad scale

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

- INTERSPERSION
- INTERSPERSION
- INTERSPERSION

Everything quail need to sustain a population should be provided on each acre of land. Nesting, feeding, and loafing cover. 250-400 native bunch grasses, 5-25% coverage of area in short brush species, and the rest in weeds or forbs.

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SEPTEMBER MEETING

Our September meeting will be a field trip to Arrowhead 7 Whitetails, owned by Board member Van Bruns and his wife Debbie. This is a high fence, commercial deer breeding operation.

DEER SPOT LIGHT SURVEYS TO BEGIN SOON

There are currently five separate BCWMA spotlight surveys planned for Bee County this fall. One is near Hwy 202 from the Medio Creek to the Prison and it extends North about half way to Hwy 59, one is off Hwy 59 in the Cobweb Ranch area and extends South to connect to the Hwy 202 survey area, and three are in the Mineral area. This will be the second year for the Hwy 202 survey. About 8 miles of the Hwy 59 survey was done last year, but that route will be expanded to 15 to 20 miles this year. The Mineral surveys will be the first run in that area. Most of these surveys will be conducted in September. Each survey route is around 15 miles and is run a minimum of three times, starting shortly after sunset.

Survey information is used in determining harvest recommendations. With survey data we determine buck-doe ratios, the number of deer per acre, and fawn survival rates. Comparing deer-per-acre numbers to the condition of the habitat and availability of forage helps set realistic overall harvest quotas and allows us to compare data year to year to measure herd and habitat management effectiveness. Buck-to-doe ratios approaching one to one are desirable (it was close to four to one in the Hwy 202 and Hwy 59 surveys last year). The buck-to-doe ratio information is used to set doe harvest quotas, and to protect certain buck age classes, to improve the buck-to-doe ratios. Improving those ratios typically means a higher fawn survival rate and more deer in following years.

Mature does usually have twin fawns in years when the habitat is in good condition. These fawns are half does and half bucks. Survival depends on many factors, but the sex of the survivors is still about equal. The typical practice of concentrating on shooting bucks inevitably leads to an out of balance sex ratio in the herd. By using good survey data pressure can be shifted to does and removed from bucks, and combined with the higher fawn survival rates resulting from balanced sex ratios, there are more total deer available for harvest in following years. As the sex ratio comes into balance there will be many more bucks present and with selective trigger use those bucks will represent a full range of age classes. At this point the 5 to 7 year old mature bucks will have reached their growth potential and can be harvested without reducing the quality of the deer herd.

Without good information it is not possible to make good decisions about deer harvest levels. Remember the old adage "If you want to change the way things are, you have to change the things you do"? This is never more true than when managing your deer herd. If you really like seeing very few bucks, and even fewer trophy bucks, and like being covered up with does, and having your habitat over utilized, then keep on managing your deer the way you do. On the other hand, if you would like to see more and bigger and healthier bucks, and better habitat, then get your property involved in a deer survey this year, and then work with your neighbors to implement a professionally developed harvest plan that will change things for the better.

For more information, or to organize a spotlight survey in your area, contact Larry Jones, Tom Keller, Bill Frank, Van Bruns or any of the other directors listed in the sidebar on the left. We have the equipment and will be happy to work with you to get something started in your area.

If your property is located in the Mineral area please note that there will be a Mineral area spot light survey information meeting at the Community Room of the Mineral Baptist Church on August 15. The meeting will begin at 7:00 pm and should

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be over by 8:00 or so.

FIRE SYMPOSIUM SET FOR SEPTEMBER - 9 CEU'S AVAILABLE

The Texas Wildlife Association will be conducting a three day prescribed burn symposium on September 14, 15 and 16. The event, "Fire as a Tool for Managing Wildlife Habitats in Texas", will be held in Kerrville at the YO Ranch Hotel and Conference Center with a field trip to the Kerr Wildlife Management Area on the 16th. Sessions start at 1 pm on the 14th and end with the Kerr tour the morning of September 16. Lunch on the 15th is included as is coffee and pastries the next morning.

Fire is an underutilized tool in Bee County, probably due to a general lack of understanding of how they are (safely) done as well as the enormous benefit they provide at relatively low cost. Many of us worry about getting food plots to grow and spend large sums on supplemental protein when we could probably do more good with a lot less money with properly applied prescribed burns. Attending this symposium should be a high priority for all serious habitat managers in Bee County.

Pre-registration is \$50 per person and late registration (a postmark after September 1, 2005) is \$75.

Go to http://teamquail.tamu.edu/Fire_Symp_Flyer.pdf for a flyer and registration form. If you don't have web access but have a fax you can call me (Larry Jones) at 361-362-0430 and I will fax you the registration form. You can also call Dale Rollins at 325-653-4576 and get them to mail you a form or make reservations.

A block of rooms has been reserved at the hotel for \$60 a night single and \$70 double. Call 1-877-967-3767 for a room reservation.

As an added comment, for any of you that have not been to the Kerr Wildlife Management Area, you could justify this trip for that reason alone. The Kerr uses an intense rotational grazing program combined with prescribed burning, and the resulting wildlife (deer) forage on the Kerr will knock your eyes out. They basically try to simulate the days of old where huge herds of buffalo ravaged the grass and then left the area for many months, and when wildfires stimulated new forb and grass suppressing the woody plants. You will also enjoy looking at their penned yearling bucks with racks the size of many 3 and 4 year old deer from unmanaged properties in Bee County. It is (almost) impossible to leave the Kerr and still think all this wildlife management stuff does not work!

GATE SIGNS

Members are entitled to one free sign with their initial membership. Signs are available at the County Extension office, at all regular meetings, and from Larry Jones.

WILD HOG AND COYOTE CONTESTS REMINDER

Don't forget to enter BCWMA's Wild Hog and Coyote Contests. Twenty four coyote tails and several hog tails were submitted at the July meeting. Prizes will be awarded at our 2006 annual meeting.

CEU CREDITS BEING AWARDED FOR MANY MEETINGS

You can obtain continuing education credits to maintain your Pesticide Applicators License by attending certain BCWMA meetings. Forms are available at meetings that qualify for the credit (most of them).

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

Property ownership is not required. Anyone interested in improving the quantity and quality of wildlife in Bee County is WELCOME. Annual dues are \$20 and Life Memberships are \$100. Sponsorships include a one year membership and are \$250

per year.

CLASSIFIED ADS - THINGS WANTED AND FOR SALE

WANTED:

Well established, professional guide and outfitter is looking for a hunting lease of up to 2000 acres in Bee, Goliad, Live Oak or Jim Wells counties. Primarily interested in good quail hunting but also wants deer, dove and turkey. For more information contact Ken Langford at 361-643-8878 or email him at liveoakken@ainternet.biz.

WANTED:

Mesquite burls for wood turning. (Burls are the big knotty and swollen areas on a tree caused by insects or parasites) Also interested in native pecan logs 12" or more in diameter. Will cut and haul. Contact Larry Jones @ 361-362-0430 or ljones@hrbizmall.com.

BCWMA REGULAR MEETING SCHEDULE (General meetings are the first Tuesday of every month at 7:00 pm except for December unless otherwise noted)

- July 17, 2005 - 3:00 - 4:30pm, Board of Directors Meeting
- **August** - There is no meeting in August
- **August 15, 2005** - 7:00 to 8:00 pm. Mineral Area Spot Light Survey Informational meeting - Mineral Baptist Church Community Room.
- **September 3, 2005** - **NOTE DATE CHANGE** - Field Trip to Arrowhead 7 Whitetails, Board member Van Bruns' high fence commercial deer breeding operation.
- **October 4, 2005** - "Revisiting Deer Surveys" and "Deer Aging"
- **November 1, 2005** - "2005 Bee County Deer Census Results" and "Deer Harvest and Herd Culling Recommendations"
- **December, 2005** - No Meeting

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BCWMA Member Application

Name: _____ Phone: _____ Cell #: _____

Address: _____ Fax: _____ Email: _____

City/State/Zip: _____ Member's Cooperative Agreement

I own / manage (circle one) land on county/state road _____ containing _____ acres

(Note: This information is confidential. It is simply used to determine total acreage enrolled in the co-op)

I agree to cooperate with the goals and bylaws of the Bee County Wildlife Management Association.

This agreement does not give any unauthorized person the right to trespass on the above property.

I am in no way obligated to the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department of BCWMA. I may or may not agree with the management practices recommended. The only thing I have agreed to is that I recognize the need for wildlife management in order to improve the wildlife on my property.

This agreement is valid as long as I am a dues paying member of the BCWMA.

Enclosed is (circle one) \$20 Member \$100 Life Member \$250 Sponsor

Signature: _____

Make checks payable to BCWMA and mail to P. O. Box 1967, Beeville, TX 78104 Date: _____

BCWMA
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P. O. Box 447
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