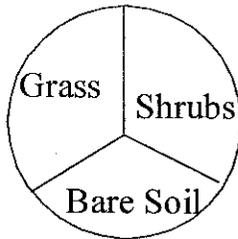




# THE COVEY HEADQUARTERS

Volume 12 Issue 1 Spring 2013

This newsletter is aimed at cooperators and sports-people in Missouri to provide information on restoring quail. This is a joint effort of the Missouri Department of Conservation, USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, and University of Missouri Extension. If you would like to be removed from this mailing list or have suggestions for future articles please contact [jeff.powelson@mdc.mo.gov](mailto:jeff.powelson@mdc.mo.gov) or 816-232-6555 x122 or write to the address shown.



The name of this newsletter is taken from an old concept....that a quail covey operates from a headquarters (shrubby cover). If the rest of the covey's habitat needs are nearby, a covey should be present. We are encouraging landowners to manage their quail habitat according to this concept. Use **shrubs** as the cornerstone for your quail management efforts. Manage for a **diverse grass, broadleaf weed and legume mixture and provide bare ground** with row crops, food plots or light disking **right next to the shrubby area**.

## Late Winter Management Activities

Besides a match, nothing provides quail habitat faster than a chainsaw. Try the following management options before warm weather arrives –

**Trim hedgerows** – dropping trees in an old hedgerow allows shrubs and diverse grasses underneath to get the sunlight they need to thrive. It also removes perches that avian predators could use as roosts. Be sure to treat thick understory grasses like fescue and bromes with herbicide. This creates bare ground that will allow quail to move under the dropped trees to escape from predators and get out of the heat or cold.

**Edge feathering** – Cutting trees in a strip at least 30 feet wide around the perimeter of your woody draws and woodland edges is one of the best ways to improve quail habitat. The downed trees will provide immediate escape cover for a variety of wildlife. Within a few years, briars, weeds and shrubs will grow through the downed tops, creating ideal habitat. Download a video demonstration of edge feathering.

**Downed tree structures** – create 30'x50' downed tree structures by cutting 10-15 well branched, durable trees (oak, hickory, osage orange, cedar). The trees you cut should be a minimum of 20' in height (not counting the un-branched trunk). These structures are intended to be "open" for quail use, so trees should not be packed together in a dense brush pile but still must be placed so that branches intertwine to provide adequate overhead cover. Place downed tree structures on bare ground or on areas where perennial herbaceous vegetation is controlled.

**Timber stand improvement** – TSI is the process of thinning the forest of poor quality trees, leaving less competition for the remaining trees. Many landowners utilize TSI to obtain firewood and improve timber quality, but it also creates small gaps in the forest canopy, providing growing conditions necessary for quail-friendly plants. Download a video demonstration of timber stand improvement.

## **New Voice in D.C. for Wild Bobwhites**

The National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative (NBCI) has hired a certified wildlife biologist from Texas, Kyle A. Brazil, as its new agriculture policy coordinator based in Washington, D.C. Brazil's job is to be a voice in the Beltway for wild quail to help NBCI and allies effect national agriculture policy that is more favorable to wildlife and wildlife habitat on private agricultural lands.

Brazil previously worked as the quail & grasslands birds program leader for Audubon Texas, where among his many responsibilities was the implementation of the Texas Quail Conservation Initiative and the NBCI with other partners in the state. He also served stints with Texas Parks & Wildlife Department (TPWD) as a regulatory wildlife biologist, with the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute at Texas A&M as a graduate research assistant (studying the relationship of habitat structure and bobwhite productivity at the landscape scale in south Texas) and as coordinator of the South Texas Quail Associates Program, and with the Samuel Roberts Noble Foundation as a research technician and research intern.

Brazil also served on the TPWD's Upland Game Bird Advisory Council, the USDA/NRCS Texas State Technical Advisory Committee and as a member of the Oaks & Prairies Joint Venture technical committee. He earned a BS in wildlife & fisheries ecology from Oklahoma State in 2002 and an MS in range and wildlife management from Texas A&M, Kingsville, in 2006.

NBCI is a project of the National Bobwhite Technical Committee (NBTC) to elevate bobwhite quail recovery from an individual state-by-state proposition to a range-wide, policy-level leadership endeavor. The committee is comprised of representatives of state fish and wildlife agencies, academic research institutions and non-governmental conservation organizations. Headquartered at the University of Tennessee, NBCI is funded by the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation, two dozen state wildlife management agencies, the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and Southern Company. For more information, please visit [www.bringbackbobwhites.org](http://www.bringbackbobwhites.org)



Brazil (center) visited Missouri in early February.

## **Sign up for an e-copy of The Covey Headquarter Newsletter**

Stay in touch with MDC news and events online. Go to the following website - [http://mdc.mo.gov/user\\_mailman\\_register](http://mdc.mo.gov/user_mailman_register) to subscribe to the Covey Headquarters Newsletter via e-mail and get your issue delivered faster. Folks on the e-mail list received this issue by March 5. There are several news releases, newsletters and periodicals listed on this website. Be sure to click "yes" on "Covey Headquarters" to start receiving your issue by e-mail. If you would like to be taken off the print version, please send an e-mail to the address listed at the top of this newsletter.

## **Bradford Farm Field Day – June 20<sup>th</sup> from 1PM-7PM**

Join us for a free summer workshop full of activities to stimulate your thinking skills with hands-on field tours. Landowners, students, gardeners, and conservationists will benefit from attending this workshop! Even if you own a small acreage, there will be plenty for you to see and do at the University of Missouri Bradford Farm Field Day –

- June 20th 1pm – 7pm; MU Bradford Research Farm – Columbia, MO.
- Hands-on field activities from 1pm – 3pm - Dog training demonstrations, sprayer calibration, native grass drill calibration, prescribed burning and more.
- Landowner success stories from 3pm – 4pm - Meet some successful landowners who know how to get it done on their property.
- Classroom programs from habitat experts 4pm – 7pm - Participate in programs like Quail Habitat Management, Predators & Prey, Quail Population Dynamics, and How to Conduct a Whistle Count
- Field Tours from 4:15 to 7pm.
- Free burgers and dogs with a completed workshop evaluation form!

**NEW THIS YEAR - Landowner Habitat Helpdesk.** Work one-on-one with a biologist to evaluate, plan, and design a wildlife plan for your property. Stay throughout the day to experience the processes involved in planning and carrying out land restoration.

Directions to MU Bradford Farm – From the junction of Hwy 63 and AC on the south edge of Columbia, go 5 miles east, at the T go right just over a mile to the Bradford farm entrance on your right. Or visit <http://aes.missouri.edu/bradford/contact.php> for a directions and a map.

## **Spring Covey Headquarter Calendar**

### **March**

Order your covey headquarter shrubs from the MDC nursery through April. Blackberry, shrub dogwoods, and wild plum are best for quail.

Create brood habitat by strip disking grassland fields this month.

Get food plot seed, herbicide, fertilizer and equipment ready for planting season.

Drop honeylocust and hedge trees in fencelines and woody draws for quail covey headquarters. Don't forget to spray the stumps.

Spray fescue and brome in fencelines, woody draws and existing shrub clumps before leaf-out.

Do not burn native warm-season grasses after 3/15.

Use herbicides to set back CRP cool-season grasses 3/15 – 4/30.

### **April**

Do not burn native warm-season grass now unless utilizing for forage or trying to eliminate fescue or brome. Fall and early winter burning are preferred for quail.

Plant shrub seedlings early for best survival.

Burn fescue and brome to severely stunt grass, then strip disk and interseed legumes.

Till and fertilize food plots.

Youth turkey season – April 6 and 7.

### **May**

Listen for quail whistle calls on clear calm mornings.

Nesting season begins for quail and other grassland birds – keep your mower in the barn.

Plant food plots this month for best results.

Conduct breeding bird counts.

## Shrub Planting Tips

Many of you will be planting shrubs this spring. Here are a few tips to get your planting off to a great start.

- Plant shrubs as soon as possible after receiving them.
- If planting for quail, plant an area at least 30x50ft. in size on a 3x3ft. spacing (this will take 167 shrubs). Plant at least three 30x50ft. areas per 40 acres of habitat.
- Always carry seedlings in a bucket half-full of water or wet packing material.
- Don't allow seedling roots to dry out.
- Never leave open bundles of seedlings exposed to the sun and wind, this will dry them out.
- Plant the seedlings at the same depth or slightly deeper than they grew at the nursery.
- Make sure the roots are spread out and are not bent or crowded.
- Pack the soil firmly around the roots to close air pockets.
- Control weeds and grasses in and around your new planting for at least 3 years after planting. Grass and weed competition will inhibit shrub growth and delay your planting from becoming a covey headquarter.



The picture above is an 8 year old CP33 shrub planting consisting of wild plum, roughleaf dogwood, false indigo bush, and hazelnut. Three quail were flushed out of the shrubs right before the picture was taken on President's Day.

### Did You Know???

The Missouri Department of Conservation has published the 2012 Furbearer Program Annual Report. It is a great resource for those interested in fur harvest comparisons, fur auction prices, and population and harvest trends of a number of species.

## Strip Herbicide Application

Without some type of management, both warm-season and cool-season grassland fields often become dominated by dense sod or monotypic grassy vegetation. The use of herbicides can improve plant diversity by reducing the vigor and abundance of dominant plants that out-compete and crowd out other desirable plants. Strip herbicide applications are used to provide beneficial food and cover plants for many wildlife species including bobwhite quail, rabbits, deer, pheasant, turkey, and upland songbirds. Apply herbicides in strips to rank CRP, grasslands, and idle areas. The target is to essentially set back succession to the bare-ground stage (50-75%) which encourages high seed-producing annual plants to flourish.

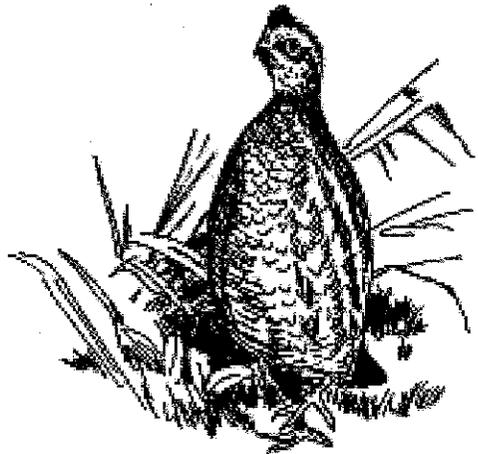
Ideally, strip width should range from 25-75 feet and cover between 1/3 – 1/2 of the field annually. Sprayed strips should be separated from each other by an area of undisturbed vegetation twice as wide as the sprayed strip. Strips should be placed on the contour across fields and next to brushy cover near the edges. This will help reduce the possibility of erosion and furnish desirable habitat adjacent to other cover types, and travel lanes between them. Application timing will vary, but generally should occur when the grasses have approximately 6-10" of new growth and have depleted their root reserves (generally early spring or fall for cool-season grasses, and late spring for warm-season grasses. If you are dealing with really thick grass, (cool or warm season) you should mow the strips first to improve the effectiveness of the herbicide treatment. Allow the mowed vegetation to grow 6-8 inches of new growth before treating.

Herbicides used for strip application should primarily target grass species (such as Select, Fusilade, Poast, Assure), however non-selective herbicides can be used (such as Liberty, Round-Up or generic glyphosate). Consult with your ag supplier for more information and always follow the herbicide registration label regarding proper use, application rates, and timing. Download the Herbicide Application for Plant Succession Management Jobsheet for more information.

Landowners can perform their own strip spraying or they can choose to hire a custom applicator in most areas of the state. Effective applications can be made using small ATV mounted sprayers, but may take more time than truck or tractor mounted units. ATV sprayer units are usually more maneuverable and can get closer to existing cover. Cost-share for strip spraying is available through several agency programs depending on location and eligibility.

## Conduct breeding bird surveys in June –

To get an index of quail that survived the winter and are available for breeding, listen for whistling bobwhite males for 1-2 hours after sunrise during the month of June. Nesting by females is normally at its peak in June, so males are actively calling. Establish permanent listening stations throughout your farm. Establish the stations along ridges or in areas where you can hear a good distance. Whistling quail can be heard about 500 yards away, so listening stations should be spaced 1000 yards apart, or be separated by major chunks of woods or hills. Listen at each station for 3 minutes. Count and record the number of *individuals* you hear in that time span at each station. Be careful not to count the same individuals twice. If you listen every year within the same time frame, you can track how well your birds are surviving winter in relation to your quail management efforts. Along with quail, be sure to listen for Henslow's sparrow, grasshopper sparrow, field sparrow, dickcissel, bobolink, pheasant, and meadowlark as these species respond positively to quail management. Visit the following website to hear audio call examples of several bird species - [www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/bbs/ident.html](http://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/bbs/ident.html)



## **General CRP Signup Announced**

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced at the National Pheasant Fest and Quail Classic that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will conduct a four-week general sign-up for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), beginning May 20 and ending on June 14. Check with your local USDA office for more details. The CRP rental rates have been revised and most counties have seen their average rental rate increase. These new rates will go into effect with the next CRP signup.

## **Quail's Eye View – Brood Habitat**



This picture was taken about 8 inches off the ground in an idle food plot. It represents ideal brood habitat for quail. There is plenty of bare ground, weedy plants that attract insects, and an overhead canopy to protect quail chicks from predators and the summer elements. Consider leaving half of your food plots idle this spring to provide perfect brood cover for quail this summer.

## **MDC CRP Incentive Continues**

Do you plan to perform mid-contract management on your CRP acres this year? MDC unveiled a new CRP incentive that provides cost-share for edge feathering, disking, herbicide application, prescribed burning, and legume/wildflower interseeding. Most of these incentives are in addition to cost-share that USDA provides. Additional incentives for new Continuous CRP acres will go into effect sometime this spring. Only a select number of counties are eligible for the incentive. Visit your local NRCS or MDC office to learn more. You can also see more detailed information with a map of eligible counties in the 2012 Winter Covey Headquarters Newsletter.

## **Pilot Quail Study**

A pilot quail telemetry study is currently taking place in southwest Missouri comparing prairie and cropland landscape use by quail. Below is some early information from the study -

- 35% nest success last year.
- Over half of nest failures were attributed to snakes.
- Broods utilized grazed areas.
- Male incubated nests were common early, which allowed the hen to lay a 2<sup>nd</sup> clutch.
- Open landscape (prairie) had double the nest attempts as a cropland area.
- Open landscape quail initiated nesting 3 weeks earlier than quail on cropland area.
- Some birds moved over 1 mile in 24 hours. Over time some birds moved over 2 miles.
- Home ranges were 110 acres for females and 202 for males in open landscape and 77 for female and 120 for males in a cropland setting.

## **Identify Weedy Plants with the Help of Your Phone –**

University of Missouri Extension has a new weed ID website and App for iPhone and Android. The app is called ID Weeds and has detailed photos and information on more than 400 Missouri weeds. Use this new site to identify quail friendly weeds like ragweed, pigweed, lambsquarters, croton, and many others.

To download:

iPhone and other iOS devices: <https://itunes.apple.com/app/id-weeds/id559906313>

Android: <https://play.google.com/store>

A web version is available at [weedID.missouri.edu](http://weedID.missouri.edu) and [weedID.missouri.edu/mobile](http://weedID.missouri.edu/mobile).

## **Mark Your Calendars**

### **Pollinator Workshop**

**March 9** from 11AM-2PM. Location: Avis Farm, 28211 Sunnyside Rd. Warrenton. Lunch provided. RSVP to Warren County NRCS office by March 6 – 636-456-3434 x3.

### **Prescribed Burn Workshops**

**March 7** Two sessions one from 1PM-4:30PM OR 6PM-9:30PM. Location: Southeast Regional Conservation Office, Cape Girardeau. Contact 573-290-5730 to register.

**March 9** from 9AM-4PM. Location: MU Bradford Research Farm, Columbia. Classrooms session in morning with demo burn after provided lunch. Register by March 6. Contact John Knudsen at 573-815-7901 x3483.

**March 12** from 6:30PM-9PM. Location: Lincoln County Health Department in Troy. Contact Jeff Esely at 636-528-4877 x3 to register.

### **Bradford Farm Field Day**

**June 20, 2013** - UMC Bradford Farm Quail and Native Plant Field Day, Columbia

## Food Plot Seeding Rates

Food is seldom a limiting factor to having bobwhites on your farm. Make sure you have adequate herbaceous cover (diverse grasses, legumes, wildflowers and weeds for nesting, feeding, brood-rearing and roosting), and shrubby cover before planting food plots.

Species	Broadcast seeding rate (lbs./acre)	Planting Time
Grain or Forage Sorghum	16 lbs.	May – early June
Corn	15 lbs.	April – early May
Millet	20 lbs.	April – June
Buckwheat	40 lbs.	May – June
Soybeans	45 lbs.	April – May
Oats	50 lbs.	Fall – early spring
Wheat	50 lbs.	September – early November
Sunflowers	8 lbs.	April – early June
“Bobwhite” trailing soybeans	8 lbs.	April – May

- Rates can be reduced 50% for planting or drilling, except for soybeans, which can be reduced to 34-40 pounds/acre.
- Fertilize grain plots according to soil test. In the absence of a test, consider adding 150 pounds of 12-12-12 fertilizer per quarter acre of food plot

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