

BOBWHITE QUAIL

Flight risk

Shrinking bobwhite numbers concern sportsmen, biologists

On March 10, about 800 sportsmen attended the Park Cities Quail 2011 annual dinner and auction. When the gavel fell on the last auction item, more than \$450,000 had been raised for quail research and education.

That's a pretty good economic indicator of the desperation quail hunters feel toward the continued plight of their favorite game bird. And make no mistake, bobwhite quail are in free fall. Some estimates indicate a 20-year, 65 percent quail decline throughout the bird's home range.

In portions of West Texas, the downturn has been precipitous. West Texas is the largest ecosystem of quail habitat in America. One veteran hunter at the March 10 event lamented the state of his 9,000-acre hunting lease.

"It's always been pretty good quail country," he said. "You know how many coves we found on 9,000 acres? We found one covey. I guess it could have been worse."

It may be worse if dry weather persists. A Texas crop and weather report issued on March 22 by Texas A&M indicated critically dry conditions in both South Texas and West Texas, the top quail regions.

A quail forecast released by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department just before the hunting season began in October 2010, said biologists were cautiously optimistic about the quail outlook.

That's despite the fact that quail counts in the Rolling Plains were eight birds per census route (the long-term average is 21.5) and counts in South Texas were 8.61 birds



Ray Sasser/Staff

Sportsmen are increasingly concerned about the plight of the bobwhite quail throughout its range.

per route (the long-term average for this region is 18.6).

Portions of South Texas were better than expected, while most of West Texas was much worse than expected.

Texas and Oklahoma are the strongholds for wild quail, but bird hunters in neither state are feeling comfortable about the future. In fact, Oklahoma recently announced a comprehensive initiative to investigate the issues affecting bobwhite quail and other upland birds.

"Quail are a big deal in Oklahoma," said Doug Schoeling, upland game bird program leader for the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation. "When ODWC biologists visit the capitol, what they [legislators] ask

about is quail."

Schoeling said nobody really knows what's wrong with quail in Texas and Oklahoma, which still appear to have vast areas of good habitat. They plan to look at aflatoxin from deer corn and other sources, disease, parasites, predators, herbicides, pesticides and habitat fragmentation.

Meanwhile in Tennessee, hardly the epicenter of wild quail, the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency is offering a one-time incentive payment of \$100 per acre for landowners who enroll in a federal program called Conservation Practice 33 and who improve habitat for bobwhite quail.

The payments are capped at \$5,000 per landowner, but that's better than nothing,

says Dallas businessman Charles Hodges, a supporter of Quail-Tech, a research group from Texas Tech.

"Tennessee should not be more progressive than Texas in quail funding," Hodges wrote in an e-mail.

TPWD has budgeted about \$4.2 million this year for upland and migratory game bird projects, some of which overlap. The agency has a growing pool of money that's been left unspent, however, and that bothers conservationists like Stan Graff.

The Dallas businessman serves on TPWD's Upland Game Bird Advisory Committee and is concerned that money generated by the state agency's upland and migratory game bird stamps is not be-

ing properly used. The stamps cost \$7 and are required of hunters, in addition to a hunting license.

"The good news is that over \$14 million has been accumulated in the last few years," Graff said. "The bad news is that money is not being spent at a time when quail and quail hunting are on a steep decline. A portion of these monies for quail research and habitat improvement projects could make a real difference."

Graff said the Legislature has not appropriated conservation stamp money, instead using conservation funds to balance the state budget.

"This is not right, it is not honest and it is not what open government is supposed to be about," Graff said.

Pickens named honorary chairman

Dallas businessman Boone Pickens has been named honorary chairman for National Hunting and Fishing Day 2011, observed Sept. 24. Pickens' predecessors have been entertainers or athletes.

Pickens said conservation is something he learned from his father at a very early age and continues to practice. Two quail hunts for 12 people to his 68,000-acre Mesa Vista Ranch in the Texas Panhandle raised \$260,000 for the Park Cities Quail auction March 10.

Considered one of the world's leading authorities on energy issues, Pickens is also a noted philanthropist with contributions exceeding \$800 million.

"I love the time that I get to spend hunting with friends, or even sitting on a pond bank with a fishing pole," he said. "I'm thankful that I have those activities as an escape from my business life."

Breaking down Park Cities Quail donations

Park Cities Quail will write checks to quail research and education next month for \$451,000. That includes \$10,500 for the Bobwhite Brigade youth program, \$8,500 for Quail-Tech (Texas Tech research program) and \$432,000 to the Rolling Plains Quail Research Ranch, which PCQ has adopted as its funding priority.

CALENDAR

THROUGH SUNDAY, MARCH 27 — Annual boat show at Uncle Gus Marina, Lake Whitney. www.unclegus.com or 877-785-1424.
SUNDAY, MARCH 27 — Challenge Bass Northeast Teams Division Tournament at Lake Bob Sandlin. www.challengebass.com or 903-889-3279.
FRIDAY, APRIL 1-SATURDAY, APRIL 30 — Eastern turkey season in 43 East Texas counties.
SATURDAY-SUNDAY, APRIL 2-3 — 28th annual KCLL-FM (95.9) Big Bass Tournament at Cedar Creek Lake. www.kickinworld.com/kcllbass or 903-489-3518.
SATURDAY, APRIL 2-SUNDAY, MAY 15 — Spring turkey season in 111 North Zone counties.
MONDAY, APRIL 4 — Dallas Fly Fishers annual benefit auction, 7 p.m., Addison Conference Center, 25650 Addison Road. Silent and live auctions of fly-fishing equipment and fishing trics. \$20 ticket, includes a light meal. www.dffclub.shutterstock.com or call 469-877-0695.

THURSDAY, APRIL 7 — Grand Prairie Chapter of Ducks Unlimited annual fundraising banquet, Ruthie Jackson Center, 3113 South Carrier Parkway. Details and tickets by calling Randy Chandler, 282-957-2649.
SATURDAY, APRIL 9 — First Bank ninth annual Sporting Clays Challenge at Elm Fork Shotgun Sports to benefit Buckner International, a global nonprofit helping orphans and families. www.bucknerintl.org.
SUNDAY, APRIL 10 — Ignition Bass Team Tournament at Cedar Creek Lake. www.ignitionbass.com or call 972-351-9411.
SUNDAY, APRIL 10 — Sixth annual St. Jude Knights of Columbus Open Bass Tournament at Hubbard Creek Lake. 254-559-1967.
SUNDAY, APRIL 10 — Challenge Bass Tawakoni Teams Division Tournament. www.challengebass.com or 903-889-3279.
THURSDAY, APRIL 14 — Dallas Woods and Waters

Club monthly meeting and dinner, Sheraton North Dallas Hotel, 4802 LBJ Freeway at Dallas North Tollway. Program by Larry Weishahn. Reservations at 214-570-8700.
SATURDAY, APRIL 16 — Plano Marine/Crappie Anglers of Texas Qualifier Tournament on Lewisville Lake. www.craaplanoanglerssoftexas.com or 972-836-2481.
SATURDAY-SUNDAY, APRIL 16-17 — International Bowhunter Education Program Student/Instructor Course in Roanoke. 972-523-4374.
SATURDAY-SUNDAY, APRIL 16-17 — International Bowhunter Education Program Student/Instructor Course in Farmersville. 284-766-9644.
SUNDAY, APRIL 17 — Challenge Bass Tawakoni Solo Division Tournament. www.challengebass.com or 903-889-3279.
THURSDAY-SATURDAY, APRIL 21-23 — Professional Anglers Association Bass Pro Shops PAA All Star Series bass tournament, Lake Ray Hubbard with headquarters at Garland Bass Pro Shop.

SOLUNAR TABLES

The schedule of Solunar periods, during which there is maximum fish and wildlife activity, is printed below. Major periods begin at the times shown and last for 1 1/2-2 hours. Minor periods are shorter.

TODAY-APRIL 2					APRIL 3-9				
DAY	A.M.		P.M.		DAY	A.M.		P.M.	
	MIN	MAJ	MIN	MAJ		MIN	MAJ	MIN	MAJ
Sunday	12:05	6:15	12:25	6:40	Sunday	4:50	10:50	5:00	11:10
Monday	12:55	7:00	1:10	7:25	Monday	5:25	11:40	5:50	0
Tuesday	1:40	7:45	1:55	8:05	Tuesday	6:15	12:00	6:35	12:25
Wednesday	2:20	8:20	2:30	8:45	Wednesday	7:05	12:55	7:30	1:15
Thursday	3:00	9:00	3:10	9:20	Thursday	7:55	1:45	8:25	2:10
Friday	3:35	9:35	3:45	10:00	Friday	8:50	2:40	9:20	3:05
Saturday	4:15	10:15	4:25	10:35	Saturday	9:45	3:35	10:20	4:05

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