

THE WORLDWIDE OUTDOORS MAGAZINE OF TEXAS

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2010

TEXAS SPORTING[®] *Journal*

FEATURING
COVEY
RISING

*****ALITQ#SCH 5-DIGIT 76901
310951 P-44 P96 22
DALE ROLLINS
320 BLUEGRASS DR
SAN ANGELO TX 76903-1168
PERMIT NO. 221
RANDOM LAKE WI
US POSTAGE PD
PRST STD

COVEY RISING

By Tom Stephenson

The Re-creation of a Quail Mecca



There are legions of them still, weathered and creased hunters skittering west down the long highways of our state, maybe churning north a bit through the Panhandle, perhaps veering to an even smaller slab of the Oklahoma prairie. Steadfastly they tug high-dollar trailers housing higher-dollar braces of trained quail dogs.

What they would *really* like to do is travel back in time. Back then—the '50s

into the mid '70s—the bobwhite was the abundant gentleman bird grandly holding for granddad's fine set of pointers on anybody's 40 acres. Today these hunters convene in a torturous landscape of mesquite, stickers, rattlesnakes and prickly pear to hope in vain that this year the birds will make a magical comeback.

But like the last prairie American Indians praying for the return of the buffalo, these modern-day hunters tell

tales of defeat and helplessness in their gaits and countenances. Their quail hunting grounds are still shrinking; forecasts are not good; no scientific wonder awaits to save the day.

My jaw still tightens thinking about the "outfitter" who recently sold a client hundreds of pen-raised quail with the promise that they would "hide" soon before multiplying over the next year. More than 90 years of study prove that releasing tame birds, unable to recognize

Rick Snipes takes aim at some of the fruits of his labor.

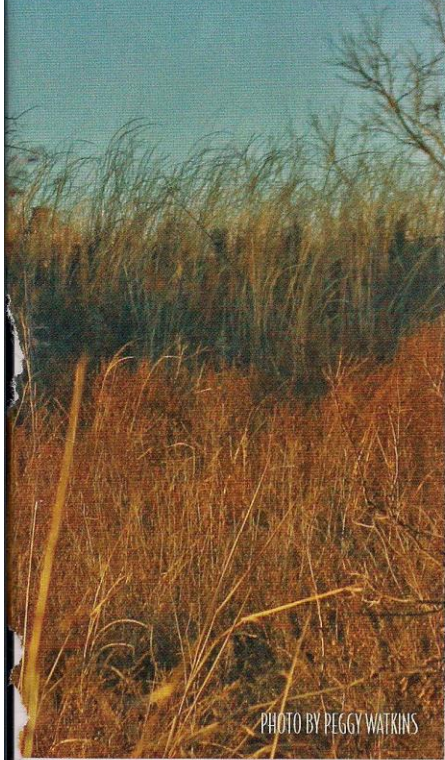


PHOTO BY PEGGY WATKINS

a food source and disinclined to covey for survival, will not result in even one more bird on this gentleman's ranch in a year's time. Stocking the bobwhite is a futile exercise that doesn't work on any scale.

Enter onto this bleak and beaten scene a long sliver of a man named Rick Snipes. Now Texan through and through, the lanky and animated Snipes still carries a twinge of Carolina in his constantly positive resonance.

The 60-year-old rancher sweated his way out of a near-certain sentence of languishing in the mills of South Carolina by excelling on the playing fields and basketball courts at Davidson College. He then forged a successful business career and is now a major actor in what may be the most encouraging and innovative story for modern-day quail enthusiasts.

From the lunch table, Snipes stretches a long wave of his angular hand, meant to include all his 6,000 acres surrounding us about 10 miles from Aspermont and talks a little about how he got here. He originally leased the land for hunting from 1980 to 1993 and then bought it with partners "when I really didn't have the money to buy it," Snipes laughs. "Please understand, this was a great quail hunting place before I bought it, but the property had been abused. There were more cow bones out here than grass. I knew that quail

needed nesting cover, escape cover and cover to rear their broods, and that all that cover can be different."

You are probably thinking that of Snipes here just went out and wallet-whipped these quail with feeders, water lines, varmint traps and all the toys that T. Boone Pickens and his ilk have tried with varying success. Nope. On this expanse, with elevations from 1,700 to 2,100 feet, not a feeder, not a pond or windmill tank or surface water or piped water of any kind exists. Not even a single rock dots this sandiest of soils. Why?

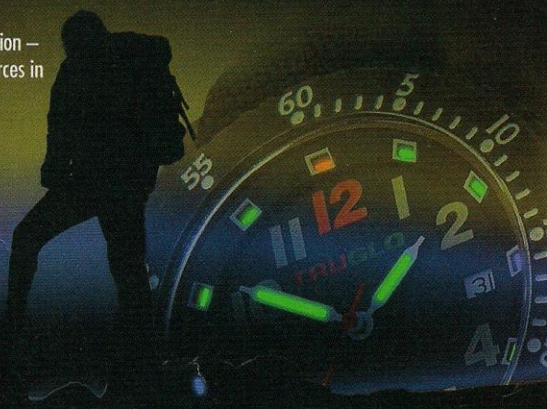
"The quail don't need it," Snipes says firmly, adding, "You know standing water also attracts animals accomplished at depredating the nests, and *that* I worry about. What I really *don't* worry about is the predator that kills quail one at a time. In fact, I'm not sure quail would fly were it not for the Cooper's hawk. Quail learned their explosive

TRUGLO®

WATCH COMPANY

Tri-Color SWISS TRITIUM Illumination — the brightest available light sources in the world!

- 9 Styles to Choose From
- Swiss Movements
- Chronograph & 3 Hand Models



WHEN BRIGHTNESS COUNTS™

Visit us online at
www.truglowatch.com

flight patterns from dodging the Cooper's hawk."

By the time the 1999-2000 quail season came along, Snipes' partners decided that they were not nearly as enthralled with this new quail management plan as the former basketball star, and there was a cordial parting of the ways. Snipes was in full-throttle mode and quickly started by burning lots of diesel and then burning his own terra firma.

He fired up the D5 Caterpillar and went after the cedar with a grubbing blade. A D7 or D8 was enlisted for roller chopping. Crop dusters were recruited and joined the fray. Next came the planting of ragweed, native grasses, forbs and seed plants.

The burning, Snipes explains, forms a "West Texas food plot" and is actually an old Indian trick. "The patch burn produces green that attracts the cows that eat it. They stay there and stomp

Snipes has created
an ideal quail haven.

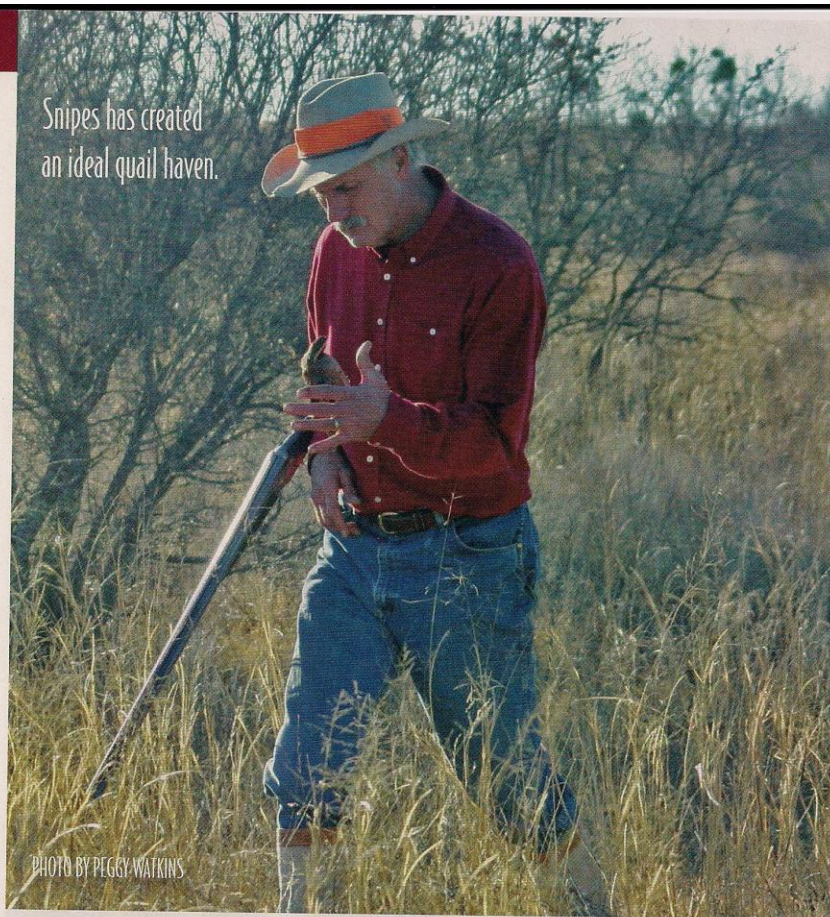


PHOTO BY PEGGY WATKINS

THE DALLAS SAFARI CLUB & JOHN BANOVICH

PARTNERS IN WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

Conserving Wildlife and Wilderness Lands

Now more than ever our natural world is severely threatened—and with this increased pressure, a new paradigm must emerge. Conservationist, sportsmen and environmentalists must come together and join forces in areas of overlapping interests and consider bridges for those areas of similar interests.

BECOME INVOLVED

Call: 1-888-486-3160 or Email: banovich@johnbanovich.com
to receive a complimentary partnership packet. | www.bigggame.org



Portrait of a King
Oil on Belgium Linen
by John Banovich

The Snipes Ranch offers pointing dogs a target-rich environment.

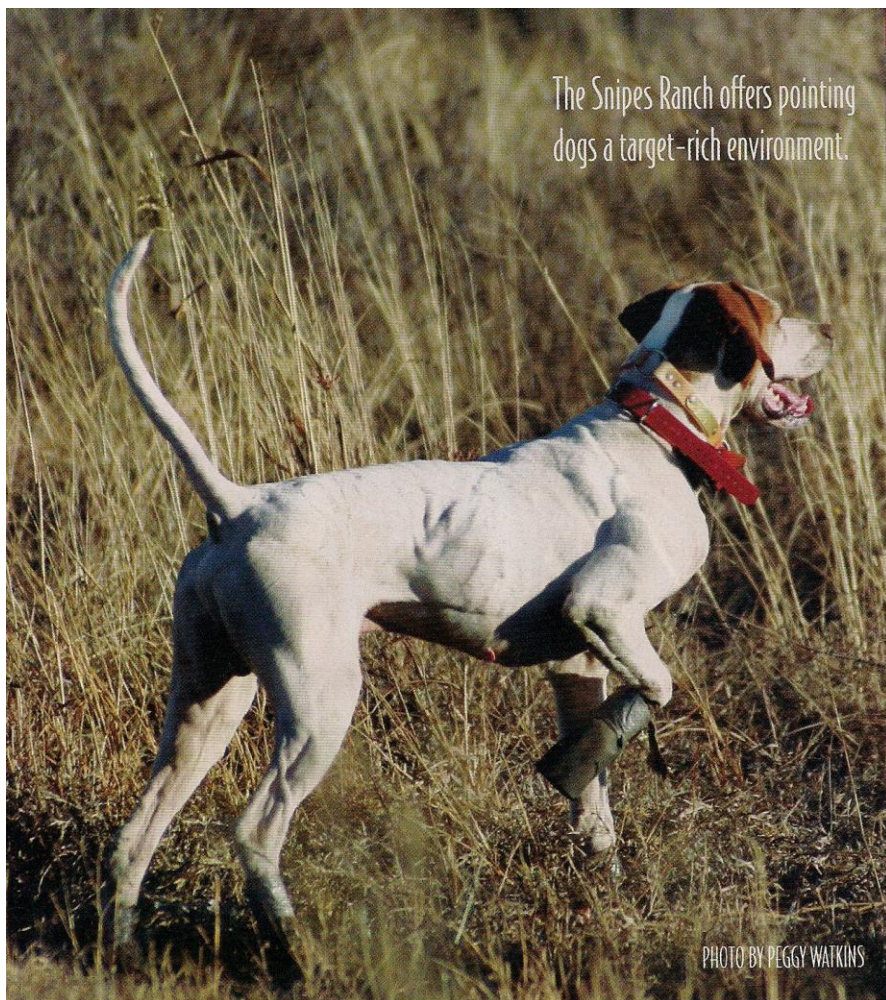


PHOTO BY PEGGY WATKINS

around, and now you have new growth and fertilizer. For me it is the final cleanup and precisely what the Indians did to attract buffalo." It's also why one tribe came to be known as the Blackfeet from running through charred soil.

To turn wild acreage like this into what Snipes calls "a place where every single acre is huntable and gives the birds a little food and a little cover" takes a lot of effort—and a good deal of money. But the fecund landscaping for little bluestem, clump grasses, sunflowers, shinnery, mottes of mesquite trees and plumb thickets—to protect from hawks and hunters—can prove more than a little rewarding.

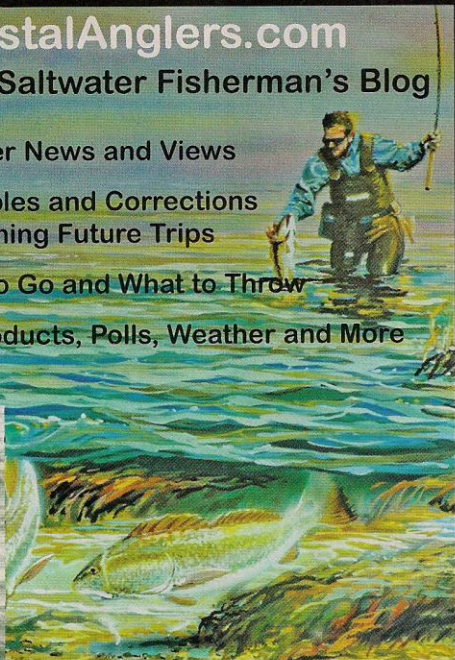
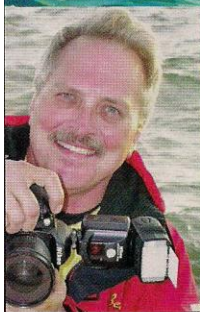
Snipes talks casually about moving 12 or 14 coveys per half-day even in the bad years and vividly recalls the dogs once working 30 coveys between 2:45 and 5:30 p.m. Astounding, but not outrageous, when you consider that Snipes once managed an aerial spray of his property that went poorly. Too much overhead cover soon died, and the

Larry Bozka's

CoastalAnglers.com

The Texas Saltwater Fisherman's Blog

- Saltwater News and Views
- Tide Tables and Corrections for Planning Future Trips
- Where to Go and What to Throw
- New Products, Polls, Weather and More



E-mail: larry@coastalangers.com

All Natural Microencapsulated Bacteria and Enzymes

TARGET Probiotics

Your dog works his guts out for you – *literally*.

Give him back the stuff that over exertion, heat, and dehydration take away.

All of our products are natural, and are combined with Enzymes to promote proper digestion and absorption of nutrients. TARGET Probiotics® will greatly help increase the animals health as well as decrease the death loss of newborn's.

- Helps Establish Gut Microflora (Beneficial Bacteria)
- Electrolyte enhanced products to prevent dehydration
- Use at the first signs of Loose Stool or Illness
- Boosts immune response in stressed animals
- May be used during Gestation and Lactation
- Use during training, hauling, hunting or other stress
- Maintains Normal Digestion and Nutrient Absorption
- May be used During Antibiotic Treatment
- Special Pastes and Formulas for newborns



TARGET Probiotics® products are formulated and manufactured specifically for each particular species of animal in our product line – Dogs, Cats, Horses, Sheep, Goats, Whitetail Deer, Exotics and Zoo animals. Call or e-mail us and we can discuss your particular needs.

FOR PRICING INFO OR TO ORDER PRODUCTS:

CALL 713-545-0955

www.targetprobiotics.com • email: Robbie@BARPRanch.com

Tall grass and a hunting companion are a quail hunter's dream.



PHOTO BY PEGGY WATKINS

Snipes solution was to quickly transplant plumb thickets. "If a group of hunters walks up to a covey and everybody gets a good shot, then you don't have enough cover," Snipes says, matter-of-factly.

Many of this new generation of quail farmers like Folsom Bell, Dick McCallum and James Parkey rave about how government programs can really

help the pocketbook of serious quail managers and have in the past even offered handsome bonuses just for signing up. Snipes agrees to a point. "Sure," he says, "the government offers some really good programs, but they are just too slow for me."

Snipes suggests we should take a tour of the ranch and bring our shotguns along. By the time we move to

the kennels to boot the dogs my heart is pounding faster than any pointer in the ranch's string. Even my antediluvian pal Mickey Tom looks a tad dry in the mouth as we set out in the Jeep. On this property a fellow can walk 4 miles out without ever making a turn, but this day we are just trying to cover as much ground as possible. In fact, I would not define that astonishing afternoon as a *hunt*.

Jones Trailer Company



Many options with the
ATV Dog Boxes

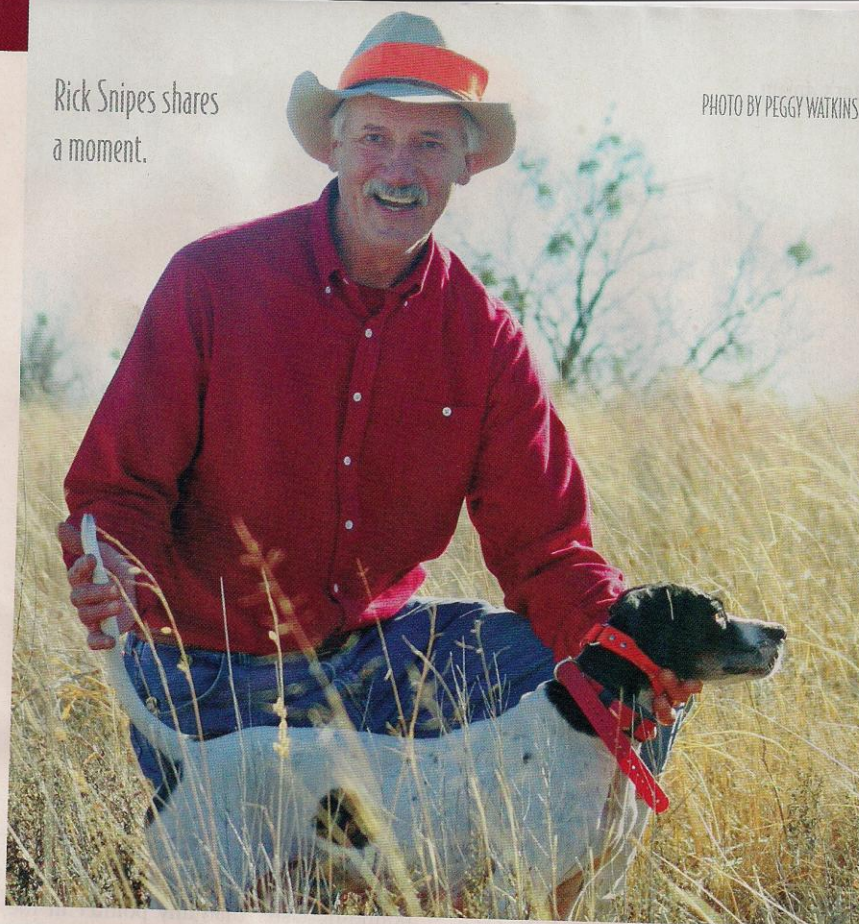


We have the trailer that is
just right for you.

1-800-336-0360 ~ ~ www.jonestrailer.com

Rick Snipes shares
a moment.

PHOTO BY PEGGY WATKINS



I feel more like a character in one of those Xbox 360 games sans Megan Fox. The dog collars double as GPS devices. With ranch manager Raul Lujan driving and my wife, Lana, navigating, Rick peers at his small control panel and witnesses a “tail” going straight to 12 o’clock. Then he dispatches us. “Okay, Bonnie on point 30 yards to the northwest. Oh, look at that: We also have a point from Sugar about 55 yards to the south and east a little.” On the first flush Mickey does not kill a bird. Mickey *never* misses a bird, but no one cares, and I do not even needle him—then.

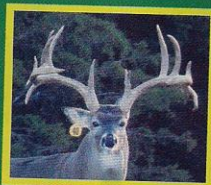
We stay out just long enough for me to make this bet with anyone: You name the wager, and I bet I can go *anywhere* on that ranch with *any* of those bird dogs and find a covey of quail in less than 20 minutes.

So, here is the basic message I left with: It can be done; landowners *can* take control and create the perfect haven for wild quail — they just need to know what the hell to do and be willing to spend the money.

Snipes and the ubiquitous Texas Extension Wildlife Specialist Dr. Dale Rollins are at the forefront of a small corps of Texas volunteer quail soldiers, and they are all doing pretty much the same thing now: grubbing, burning, adding brush, utilizing cows, spraying, and planting wonderful wild beans, croton, buffalo burr, Texas bull nettle, etc. They are light years—and dollars—ahead of the quail programs in Thomasville, Georgia, and plantations near Tallahassee, Florida.

It is about dark when we load up. The dog box does not feel heavy anymore. Mickey, Tom and I are teasing like kids. There is a lilt in our step and the six-hour drive is going to be fun. We have lots to talk about. Maybe this is the year the buffalo return to our hunting grounds. •

RANCHO DE CHAR MAR



**IMPROVE YOUR RANCH HERD WITH OUR SOLID MASS &
6 X 6 MAIN FRAME TOP & BOTTOM GENETICS
BRED DOES AND STOCKER DOE FAWNS FOR SALE
ALL DEER SOLD FURNISHED WITH DNA PROOF OF PEDIGREE**

**CALL FOR PRICING
PACKAGE HUNTS STARTING 2011**

**DAVID & PENNY HILSBERG
(512) 567-3100 CELL (888) 646-2600 OFFICE
DAVID@TROPHYPAPER.COM**

TX2269