

Rollins' wild ride

Key Points

- Dale Rollins' connection to Texas starts from the day he was born.
- Rollins' fascination with bobwhite quail goes back to his youth.
- The great orator once was afraid to speak in front of an audience.

By J.T. SMITH

DR. Dale Rollins is no stranger to longtime readers of *The Farmer-Stockman*.

His "Wildlife by Design" column is ever popular. Some of you may have heard him address overflow crowds or met him on one of his many field days.

While the Texas AgriLife Extension wildlife specialist in San Angelo reveals his wildlife management philosophy in his many writings and talks, let's straighten out some facts.

The wildlife guru often is introduced as a poor country boy who grew up at Hollis, Okla., and eventually found his way to Texas, where he "made good."

But if you want to be technically correct, Dale was born on Texas soil on April 13, 1955.

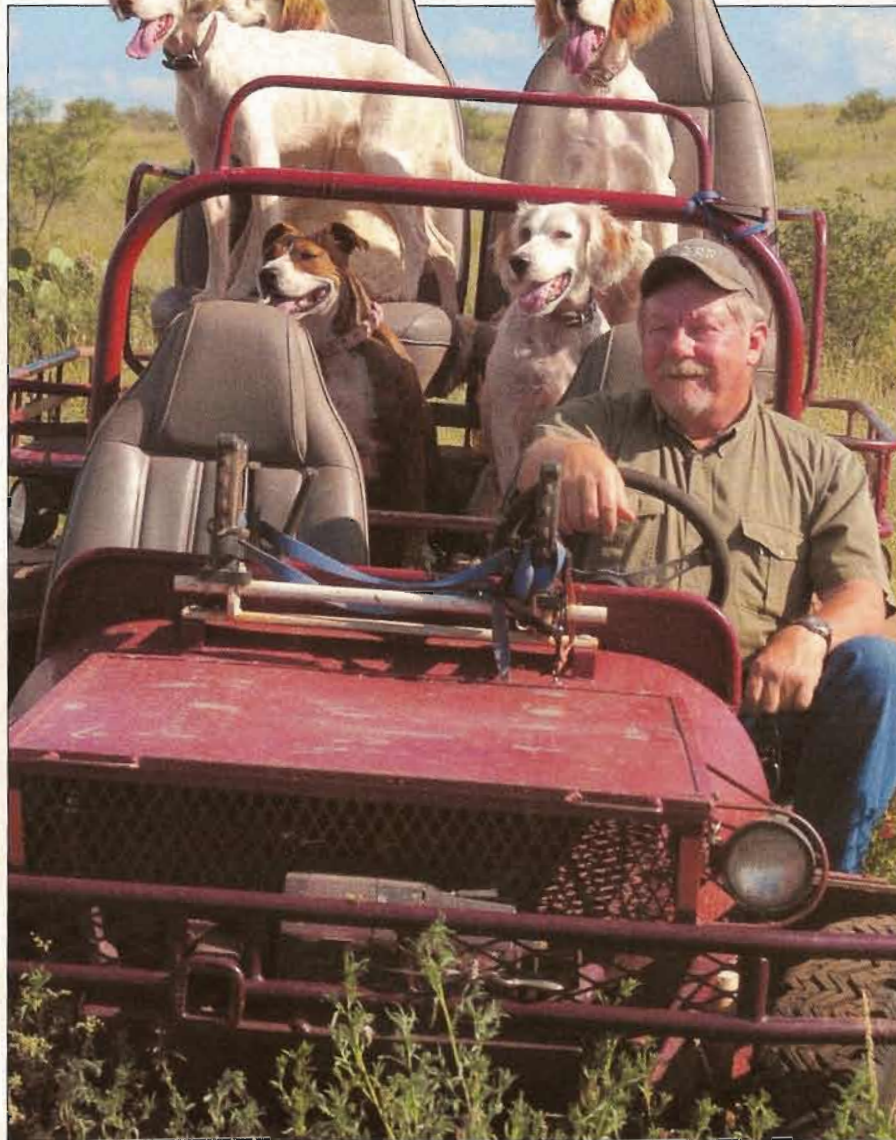
"My parents, Wash and Joy, lived at Hollis," he notes, "but I actually was born at Wellington, Texas."

Dale suspects his folks went over into Texas because of the hospital facilities at Wellington. Then they returned home to Oklahoma with their newborn.

His dad's actual name was Ernest Rollins, but few folks around Hollis knew that. From childhood, Ernest's nickname was "Wash," and it stuck.

"When he was a little kid, Dad was crying because he didn't want to 'wash' his face," Dale says. "From then on, everyone called him 'Wash.'"

Wash passed away in 1992, but Joy,



CRUISING WITH PALS: If a dog really is man's best friend, then Dale Rollins has good buddies galore. Each knows its specific place in the specially equipped buggy that the Texas AgriLife Extension wildlife specialist drives to roam the 4,720-acre Rolling Plains Quail Research Ranch west of Roby, Texas. Once he walks toward the buggy, his bird dogs already are seated and ready to roll.

who just turned 80, still lives at Hollis.

Dale can speak widely on wildlife, but is known for his tireless passion to save the bobwhite quail in the Southwest. He credits his mother for his fascination that goes back about 50 years.

"When I was about 4 or 5 years old, there was a bird whistling outside the kitchen window," he recalls. "I asked my mother what it was."

Joy told her curious son: "It is a bobwhite, but listen yourself as it sings its own name — bob ... white."

Other family members include his wife, Kay, who teaches third grade at San Angelo. Dale and Kay have two children, Travis, 28, and Krissa, 25.

Dale also has an older brother and sister, Randy and Cindy, who are twins, and a younger brother, Kent, a well-known chuckwagon cook in Oklahoma.

Speeches didn't come easily

You might think Dale is a natural speaker, but he once was pitifully shy.

In 1984, public speaking was part of Dale's job at Oklahoma State University Extension in Stillwater, where he met co-worker Dan Crummett, now a Farm Progress executive editor.

"I was scared to death to get up in front of people and speak," Dale recalls. "But I knew I'd have to learn if I was going to work for Extension."

Dale joined a Toastmasters International club in Stillwater to learn public speaking. After Toastmasters, four years with OSU Extension and 21 years with Texas A&M University, Dale nowadays holds an audience in his hands.

"Be thankful when your vocation and avocation are one in the same," Dale says. "And mine — and the bird dogs — are. And I would do it all again."

■ See Page 6 for more on Dale Rollins.

Rollins walks on wild side

By J.T. SMITH

DALE Rollins just has one gear — high.

The Texas AgriLife Extension wildlife specialist never slows down in his passion to save the bobwhite quail, or help young people and adults.

Rollins can cut through a 16- to 18-hour day like a young man, although he'll soon turn 55.

From the time he was old enough to walk in Oklahoma along the sandy roads in Harmon County, Rollins just wanted to be outdoors. He would squirm in his seat waiting for the final bell to ring at school so he could dash home, get his BB or pellet gun, and make for the woods, pastures and turn rows.

"I would wear out a gun in a year and always want another one for Christmas," he recalls.

Rollins — like just about any other youngster in southwest Oklahoma — always had a dog.

"But I didn't get a genuine bird dog until I was a freshman in college," he says.

When he came home on break from college, Rollins worked at the local livestock sales barn. Eventually, he earned his bachelor's degree in biology from Southwestern Oklahoma State at Weatherford.

"What do you do with a B.S. in biology?" Rollins observes. "You go to grad school. So I wound up at Oklahoma State in Stillwater."

His master's degree focused on a comparative study of bobwhite quail and blue quail ecology. And he overcame a big obstacle to his research — no

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- Dale Rollins' life and career is tied to Oklahoma and Texas.
- Many have made a big impact on the noted wildlife specialist.
- Rollins' terms easily become part of wildlife jargon.

HE'S AT EASE: Texas A&M AgriLife Extension wildlife specialist Dale Rollins feels most at home when he's working in the great outdoors, away from the concrete and steel of the big cities.

money — by taking his work to those sandy back roads near home. "I didn't have any funding at Stillwater," Rollins notes. "So I went back to Hollis and did the research on my own."

Back across the Texas border in August 1980, Rollins pursued his doctorate at Texas Tech University in Lubbock. "I shook hands with Dr. Fred Bryant and became his first Ph.D. student," Rollins remembers. Bryant, a renowned wildlife scientist, is now with the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute in Kingsville, Texas.

Rollins got his doctorate in 1983 studying deer and brush relationships to livestock on the scenic Y.O. Ranch in Kerr County, Texas.

"That was fascinating," he says of his stay there. "If my parents or someone came down, all I had to do was drive them around to entertain them."

Back in Oklahoma, Rollins

went to work for Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension for four years, before going back to Texas as a wildlife specialist for Texas A&M University, where he has worked for 21 years in San Angelo.

Maybe it was destiny

Going back and forth across the Texas-Oklahoma border seems to work well for Rollins — especially in writing his long-time monthly column, "Wildlife by Design," for the pages of *The Farmer-Stockman*.

"I guess I was 'predisposed' to write for *The Farmer-Stockman* when you look at its territory — that Oklahoma-Texas connection," Rollins quips.

Likewise, destiny may have come into play when many years ago Richard Spencer, then a Fisher County Extension agent at Roby, Texas, asked Rollins to present a program on quail management in that cotton

county. Rollins called the program "Prince Quail Meets King Cotton."

Since then, the area has become nationally renowned for quail. And just 12 miles west of Roby, the Rolling Plains Quail Research Ranch, where Rollins is the director, held its inaugural field day a year ago.

"That just seems predestined, too," says Rollins on Spencer asking him to speak at Roby long ago.

Yet another seemingly destined venture surfaced with the "Brigades" camps for youth. Rollins came up with the idea for the camps while driving through Texas in 1993.

The Bobwhite Brigade camps are in their 17th year, with offshoots such as the Buckskin Brigades, Bass Brigades and Feathered Forces. Garnering national attention, the camps have hosted more than 1,100 students, or cadets.

Various 'Rollinsisms' added to everyday vocabulary

DALE Rollins is noted for, well, making up terms.

Call them "Rollinsisms."

One that caught on like a wildfire is "brush sculpting."

The concept is not new — leaving brush in specific patterns to benefit wildlife and, if desired, still accommodate some livestock.

Appreciation Day."

Rollins was speaking at Chillicothe, Texas, at a field day where attending ranchers made it clear that they wanted to annihilate brush — simply eradicate mesquite trees.

Digging in his heels, Rollins quipped: "What you fellows need is a Brush Appreciation

of launching yet another term — and event. He feels some insects are unappreciated.

Bugs need respect

"Seriously, we need to have a Bug Appreciation Day," Rollins assures.

Knowing the role of things like brush and bugs in the big

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Back in Oklahoma, Rollins

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Rollins also occasionally mentions "Preacher Paul" in both his writings and talks to groups. That's his pastor Paul Shero at San Angelo.

His most frequent quote from Preacher Paul is: "You are free to choose your actions, but you are not free to choose the consequences."

Rollins feels Paul's quote not only sums up a man's direction in life, but also what mankind does to the land, plants, water and wildlife habitat while he's on earth.

Various 'Rollinsisms' added to everyday vocabulary

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One that caught on like a wildfire is "brush sculpting."

The concept is not new — leaving brush in specific patterns to benefit wildlife and, if desired, still accommodate some livestock.

But today, you see the brush sculpting term in mountains of publications and literature, and hear it at multitudes of meetings and seminars.

Even Rollins acknowledges his surprise: "I was amazed at how quickly the term was adopted into jargon."

Another Rollinsism that took off like a rocket was "Brush

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Digging in his heels, Rollins quipped: "What you fellows need is a Brush Appreciation Day!"

Five years after Rollins' remark, the first official Brush Appreciation Day was held. In recent years, having a Brush Appreciation Day has become commonplace.

"We often kill things we shouldn't, and don't kill things we should," Rollins says. And that puts Rollins on the verge

of launching yet another term — and event. He feels some insects are unappreciated.

Bugs need respect

"Seriously, we need to have a Bug Appreciation Day," Rollins assures.

Knowing the role of things like brush and bugs in the big scheme of wildlife management is what the 4,720-acre Rolling Plains Quail Research Ranch at Roby, Texas, is all about.

At the research ranch, all the pastures are named for bird dogs, except for one pasture that is named for Tex Moncrief of Fort Worth, who gave \$1 million for the endowment to launch the ranch.

One pasture is named in memory of "Suzie," the beloved bird dog Rollins got in 1991.

"Suzie made me appreciate the poetry of bird dogs," Rollins says. "She taught me many lessons."

Noted artist Jose Herrera spent many months painting a large portrait of Suzie that was unveiled and presented to Rollins in a surprise ceremony.

"Dr. Rollins wept," Herrera recalls.

Suzie's portrait today hangs in the living room of the Rollins home at San Angelo.

She epitomized another of Rollins most common quotes: "Associate with good people. Always hunt with good dogs."



SHE'S A BABE: Dale Rollins takes time to pamper Babe. She is the granddaughter of his beloved late bird dog Suzie. If Babe has been in the field, Rollins checks closely for any stickers or cactus needles.

Others play major role in specialist's life

OTHER than his parents and a deep faith in something larger than himself, wildlife specialist Dale Rollins has had his fair share of influences on various aspects of his life and distinguished career.

Rollins is widely known — both in writing and speaking — for his quotations.

Although he restlessly waited for the end of the school day in Oklahoma, he still owes many of his "sayings" to his high school agriculture teacher Grady Byrd at Hollis High.

"Mr. Byrd physically was a mountain of a man, and he always lined the walls with positive quotations," Rollins notes.

He gladly admits he still draws upon them to this day.

The Leopold effect

Then there's Leopold.

"I always loved to read Aldo Leopold — a great thinker and great writer," Rollins allows.

He feels Leopold's writings on good land, plant and water stewardship give people something to contemplate and a goal to aim toward.

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