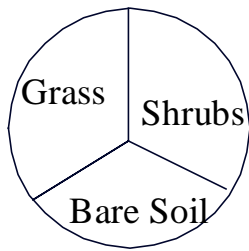




THE COVEY HEADQUARTERS

Volume 9 Issue 2 Summer 2010

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 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.

Bobwhite Quail Brood Biology

The greatest mortality of young quail occurs in the first four weeks after hatch. This is a critical period that often determines whether the fall population will be a bumper crop or less than desired. Quail chicks have only a few requirements, but these are a must! Chicks need freedom of movement at ground level, overhead concealment and a diverse assortment of green plants or plant parts within pecking height – which for a baby quail is only about two inches. The diverse plants will attract the insects that young quail need to survive. The ground cover must be very open with only 30-50% vegetative cover. This means that as much as 70% can be bare ground. Bare ground is needed because quail are not strong scratchers and are incapable of reaching food that is buried in the soil or in a heavy accumulation of dead vegetation. Recently burned fields, idle food plots (pictured at right), weedy strips, and small grain/legume mixes are ideal brooding areas.



Create brood cover within 70 feet of shrubby cover or stands of taller dense weeds. The quail broods will loaf in this cover between feeding periods.

Predation Revisited

The issue of predation always comes up when anyone mentions the decline of a game species. Predation is a normal part of any wildlife population cycle, but sometimes it gets more than its fair share of the blame. Let's examine predation in relation to upland bird declines:

What eats quail and pheasants? *Basically anything with a beak or teeth.* From raccoons and possums to hawks and snakes, predators are a major mortality source of any ground nesting bird. Egg predators like skunks and possums take out whole broods at once compared to 1 bird at a time with hawks and owls. Weather, predators, hunting, and accidents all take their share of birds each year. Over 50% of adults, chicks and eggs are lost from just PREDATION each season. The bottom line is quail don't live very long because they are at the bottom of the food chain.

So what can we do to reduce mortality? Many people think that heavy control of predators will increase upland bird populations. Evidence shows that predator control doesn't increase upland bird populations unless it is constant and intense, but even then Mother Nature finds a loophole. Take out all the hawks, and snakes and rodents become a problem. Get rid of all the coyotes and fox populations explode. Low population densities of many mammals stimulates survivors to produce larger litters more often which leads to more predators overall.

So what do we do to improve the chances of nest success? One thing we can do is improve habitat. More and better upland habitat will allow those surviving birds to have a chance at proliferating. There are many mortality factors we have little or no control over, however habitat management is one thing we can change.

For landowners who have maximized habitat management, starting a trapping program for egg predators such as raccoons, fox, and opossums is a money maker, so even if it doesn't increase quail populations it is worthwhile. The most important point to remember is that when high quality habitat is available, upland birds have the best chance at producing high numbers of chicks and achieving high survival rates.

Alleger named Grassland Bird Coordinator

Max Alleger was recently selected the Missouri Department of Conservation's Grassland Bird Coordinator. In addition to some duties of MDC's previous Upland Game Coordinators, Aaron Jeffries and Elsa Gallagher, Max will take-on issues related to managing for all early-successional birds, with emphasis on implementing practical, ecosystem-based approaches that fit the needs of public land managers and private landowners.

Max has coordinated the Department's greater prairie-chicken recovery effort and led the Missouri Grasslands Coalition since 2005. He brings a strong background in grassland and upland bird management, as well as production agriculture, to this position. Max is a Fair Grove, Missouri native who earned the FFA American Farmer Degree while in high school and served as Secretary of the Missouri FFA Association in 1984-85. He holds B.S. degrees in Agricultural Education and Fisheries and Wildlife Management from the University of Missouri-Columbia and a Masters in Wildlife Sciences from Texas A&M. Max worked with the Texas Agricultural Extension Service, the Pettis County SWCD and as a full-time farmer before coming to MDC as a Wildlife Management Assistant at El Dorado Springs in 1995. He was selected at MDC Wildlife Division's Employee of the Year in 2007.

When asked about his aspirations for this new position, Max said "I hope my efforts bring more attention and more resources to the truly important work of our public and private grassland managers and that collectively we improve the health of our grasslands and stability of quail and other grassland bird populations".

General CRP signup expected

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack has announced that a general signup in the Conservation Reserve Program will be held later this year, with program details and signup start date as soon as an Environmental Impact Statement is completed. As of this writing, a summer signup is expected. Contact your local USDA Service Center for more details.

Integrating Beef, Bobwhites and Biofuels
“Managing Wildlife and Native Plants In Agriculture Field Day”
2:00 PM to 8:00 PM - June 17th 2010
MU Bradford Research and Extension Center
Columbia, Missouri

Designed for landowners, students, quail & native plant enthusiasts to hear the latest information, meet exhibitors, and see new products. Open to the Public – No fee and No

Reservations Required. Drinks and Hamburgers Provided

2:00 and 3:00 PM - Indoor Workshops	-Introduction to Quail Ecology
	-Patch Burn Grazing
6:00 PM-Indoor Workshop	-Advanced Quail Management

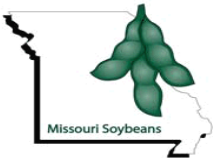
4:00 PM – Field & Wagon Tours Begin

Six All New One Hour Wagon Tours Include:

- ✓ Landscaping with Native Plants - *Backyard Habitats, Plant Id and Rain Gardens*
- ✓ Patch Burn Grazing, Native Warm Season Grass and Forb Management For Livestock
- ✓ Biofuels and Wildlife – What are the Keys to Success for Conservation and Livestock Production
- ✓ Enhancing Quail Habitat and Crop Field Management - *Field Borders and Edge Feathering*
- ✓ Forage Management Options for Wildlife and Livestock–*Native Cool Season Grass Alternatives to Tall Fescue*
- ✓ Back Forty – Implementing Wildlife Practices on Your Farm

Sponsored by:

**University of Missouri, MU Extension, USDA NRCS,
Missouri Department of Conservation
Missouri Soybean Association**



Directions: From the junction of U. S. 63 and Hwy AC on the south edge of Columbia, go 5.5 miles east on New Haven Rd, turn right (south) on Rangeline Rd. and go just over a mile to the Bradford Farm entrance on the right.

<http://.aes.missouri.edu/Bradford>

For More Information Contact:

Tim Reinbott: 573-884-7945

Bob Pierce: 573-882-4337

Summer Covey Headquarters Calendar

June

Quail are nesting – stay off your mowers!
Spray actively growing Johnsongrass.
Plant milo, millet, and forage sorghum food plots before June 30.
Contact NRCS or MDC for burn plan assistance this month.

July

Quail continue to nest – stay off your mowers!
Disk CRP firebreaks to prepare for August and September burns.

August

Mow or burn fescue and brome to prepare for fall herbicide treatments.
Burn your native grass CRP to reduce grass pressure and increase wildflowers.
Treat sericea lespedeza now through September with labeled chemicals.

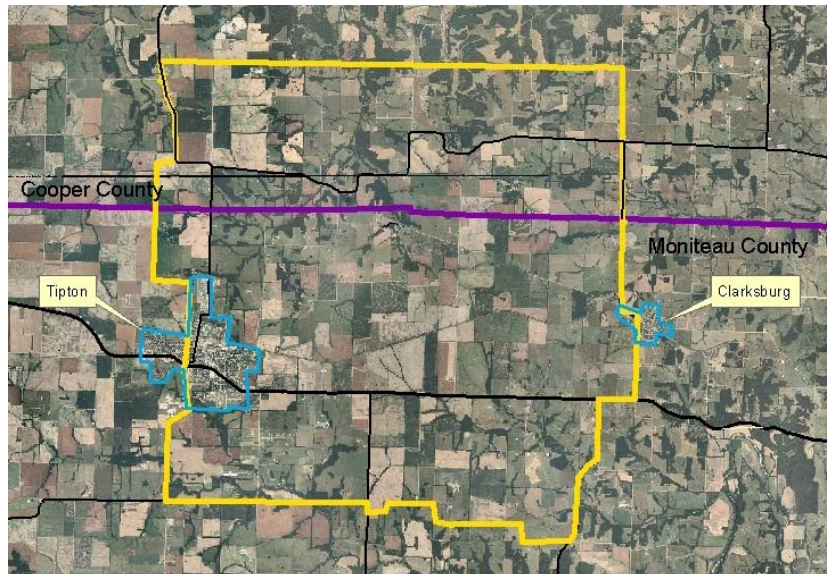
Quail Focus Areas – Targeting private land habitat work

MDC is targeting habitat restoration on two fronts. Quail Emphasis Areas (QEAs) include 19 Conservation Areas where quail management is the focus. Quail Focus Areas (QFAs) are larger and primarily target private land. QFAs were selected in areas where landowners were already managing for quail, near conservation areas with good quail habitat, and/or where conservation partners have expressed an interest in quail management. Today, there are 34 QFAs located throughout the state. Many focus areas are around 30,000 acres in size, but some are even larger because of wide-spread landowner interest and success. Within focus areas, staffs have been working with landowners to improve quail habitat by providing technical and financial assistance. Landowners and conservation partners are also spreading the news about Quail Focus Areas and the benefits of habitat management. Success will come one farm at a time. Every little bit helps! Listed below are highlights of two Quail Focus Areas.

Tipton Upland Plain Quail Focus Area

Person to Contact: Chris Newbold,
Private Land Conservationist
(573) 796-0286 ext. 22
Region: Central
County: Moniteau & Cooper
Size: 24,751 acres

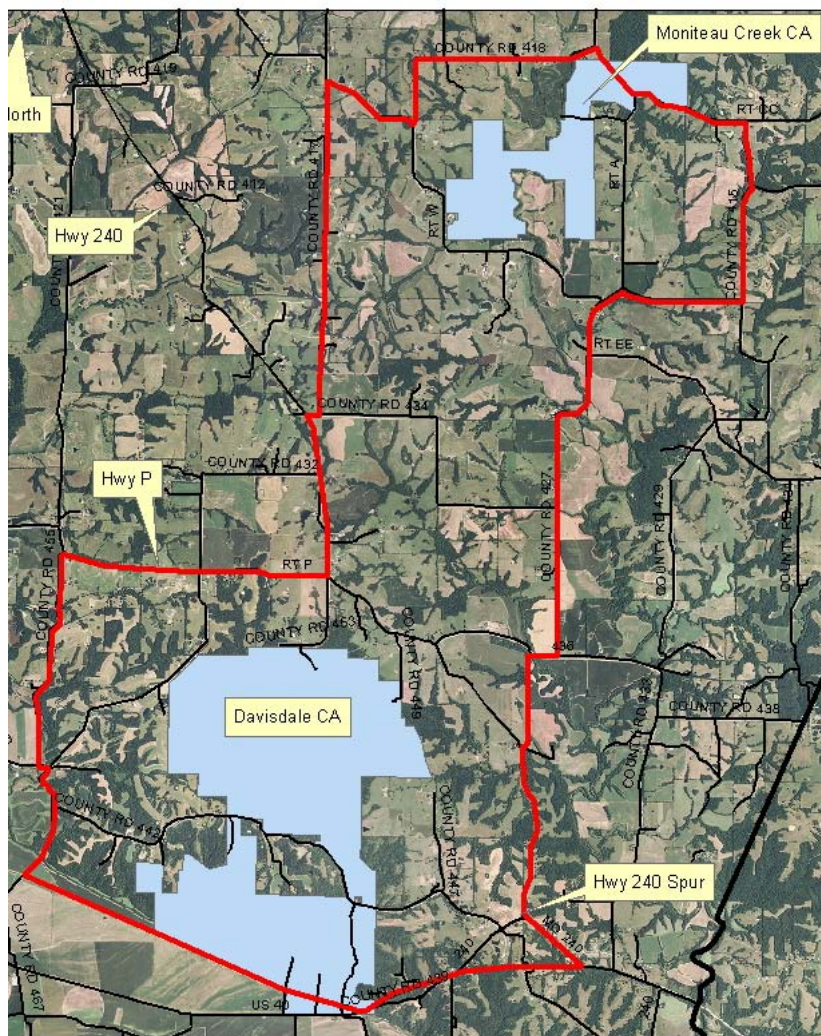
Focus Area Facts: This Focus Area is located between Tipton and Clarksburg in Moniteau and Cooper Counties. Several landowners in the focus area are actively managing CRP grasslands, CRP field borders and other grassland habitats for bobwhites. Landowners also work together to conduct prescribed burns, light disking and establish food plots. Edge-feathering is also a popular practice. Some landowners are beginning to convert fescue pastures to native grasses and wildflowers. Conservation partners like USDA and QF have helped promote this active focus area. A few landowners are also conducting fall whistle counts to monitor quail numbers.



Bullseye Quail Focus Area

Person to Contact: Steven Noll, Wildlife Management Biologist
(660) 248-3358, ext. 119
Region: Central
County: Howard
Size: 15,602 acres

Focus Area Facts: Centered around Davisdale Conservation Area, a Quail Emphasis Area, and Moniteau Creek Conservation Area to the north is this landowner focus area. Department staffs have been working with landowners in the focus area and especially around Davisdale Conservation Area to convert fescue pastures to native warm-season grass and wildflowers. Landowners are also edge-feathering and creating brush piles. Department staff have worked to attract landowners within the focus area by hosting workshops, field days, and writing newspaper articles. The Bullseye Quail Focus Area is partnering with two other quail focus areas (Focus Area Incentive Program (FAI)) to provide 90-95% cost share for installing wildlife friendly practices into their management plan. Landowners can receive FAI cost-share, or these dollars can be used to piggy back EQIP and WHIP cost share for selected practices. Landowners may also be eligible for two years of deferred grazing payments of \$60 per ac/year when converting fescue to warm-season grass hay or pastureland.



Greater Prairie-Chicken Translocation

Max Alleger, Grassland Bird Coordinator, Clinton, MO

The Missouri Department of Conservation is trying to bring prairie chickens back from the brink of extirpation, partly for the birds' own sake but also to give meaning to the ecosystem they represent.

Efforts to re-establish a breeding population of greater prairie chickens in St. Clair County are starting to show signs of success. Staff are well into the third cycle of the five-year habitat-use study. So far, they have released 250 prairie chickens. The adults – 198 in all – have been fitted with radio transmitters so biologists can track their movements and survival.

Approximately one-fourth of the translocated birds remain alive on Wah'Kon-Tah Prairie, a landscape in southwestern St. Clair County that is owned by The Nature Conservancy of Missouri and managed in cooperation with the Conservation Department, as well as other nearby grasslands. Biologists see this as a promising sign, as the survival rate of the newly translocated population is roughly equal to that of wild birds in their native habitat. In addition, males have returned to the booming ground established on Wah'Kon-Tah Prairie in 2009. These are positive indications that initial translocation efforts are proving successful and that there may have been reproduction on Wah'Kon-Tah Prairie last year.

Although the relocation program is an important facet of efforts to keep the prairie chicken from dying out in Missouri, it will prove futile unless government agencies, citizen conservation groups and private landowners create a significant amount of habitat for the birds.

“There is no such thing as a little bit of prairie chicken habitat,” said Prairie Chicken Recovery Leader Max Alleger. “These birds need large expanses of open land to thrive. We have only relatively small, isolated patches of prairie left in Missouri in public ownership. That means that public-private partnerships are absolutely critical to success for prairie chicken restoration.”

“You don’t have to build a fence around land and never touch it again,” said Alleger. “Prairie chickens can coexist with farming and other land uses. Sometimes restoring their habitat is as simple as burning small areas each year. We work with farmers and ranchers to find ways to make room for prairie wildlife while still making money. Financial, technical and logistical assistance are available to help landowners in western Missouri create prairie chicken habitat while still maintaining their lands’ productivity”.

Prairie-chickens are only the most spectacular of a whole suite of birds, plants and other prairie life that stand to benefit from more natural management of Missouri’s open lands. Bobwhite quail, secretive songbirds, rare butterflies, unique reptiles and amphibians and a host of other wild things also need healthy grasslands to survive.

UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI
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 NRCS Natural Resources
Conservation Service

The Covey Headquarters Newsletter
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