



The Habitat Corner

While other factors certainly influence wildlife populations, the cornerstone of having abundant wildlife is to have enough of the proper habitats. This new feature in Tennessee Wildlife is intended to offer advice and examples of how you can manage habitat for wildlife on your property.

For Bret and Doug Fincher, bobwhites and bird dogs have always been a passion. So when the idea of managing their 200-acre Lawrence County farm for the benefit of quail came to mind, several years of poor results made them re-think their management strategies. In the past, a great deal of emphasis was placed on planting food plots and releasing pen-raised quail, but little improvement was made in reaching their objectives.

So Bret contacted Chris Wolkonowski, NRCS Biologist, to help develop a sound wildlife management plan for their property. The importance of improving the amount and quality of quail nesting and brood-rearing cover on the property was stressed under this new management philosophy. With this in mind, Bret and his father went to work on removing all of the non-native grasses such as fescue through the use of herbicide treatments and replacing them with wildlife-friendly native grasses. Additional practices such as prescribed burning and annual disking were also utilized to restore various native forbs (broadleaf herbaceous plants) in order to create the plant communities that quail require for their daily and seasonal habitat requirements. Food plot acreage on the farm has been greatly reduced, and is now only viewed as a way to attract other wildlife species such as deer and turkey.

To help offset their personal expenses to implement this new habitat approach, 75 percent cost-share was provided through the NRCS's Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program and TWRA's Farm Wildlife Habitat Program. Clint Borum, TWRA Private Lands Biologist, also provided technical assistance during this process to ensure that Bret and his father were installing these wildlife practices using the correct procedures.

Prior to starting this process, the Finchers estimated that the property held only one or two coveys of quail on a yearly basis. Through their habitat work over the last three years, they now estimate that there are at least 5 to 6 coveys on a regular basis, and pen-raised quail are no longer being released. This success story is a direct result of two quail enthusiasts who decided to put forth the extra effort to do quail management the right way.

HABITAT TIPS

Improving wildlife habitat is not often complicated or expensive. Merely avoiding mowing on odd corners, ditches and other areas can save fuel costs and allow grasses and weedy plants to provide cover and produce seed for wildlife to utilize. Don't mow all your available cover – leave some standing for wildlife.

HABITAT PROGRAM OPPORTUNITIES

Enrollment for landowners interested in establishing new bobwhite or pollinator habitat or conducting management practices on existing native grass stands of at least 5 acres can apply for the EQIP or WHIP program at their local USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service office. See www.TWRAPrivateLands.org for more information.

ASK THE BIOLOGIST

- Q: Do I have to be a farmer or livestock producer to receive cost-share through USDA conservation programs?
- A: No. While some programs are certainly targeted to provide assistance to producers, programs like the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program are open on lands that may simply have the potential to produce agricultural (including forest) goods or are capable of maintaining wildlife or wetlands habitat, or have a past cropping history.



"Helping Landowners and Wildlife Through Habitat Enhancement"

The Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency has Private Lands Biologists that will assist you in developing a management plan for your property and a strategy to implement it. See www.TWRAPrivateLands.org for who to contact for technical assistance and other useful information on habitat management and programs.