

Your Side of the fence



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Gear up for Quail Season: DIY fall covey counts

By Jena Donnell, Quail Habitat Biologist



Prior to the mid-November quail hunting season opener, sportsmen are busy with time-honored preparations.

Pointers and setters get out for conditioning and newly accessed lands are scouted. One's hunting season outlook is typically based on the number of birds seen during these scouting trips, but the number of coveys often remains unknown. To get a better idea of the quail population on your property or favorite hunting spot, consider adding DIY (do it yourself) covey counts to your pre-season ritual this fall.

Good Morning or “Koi-lee”

Coveys call in early morning; most likely to let neighboring coveys know where they will be located for the day. This “wake-up” call can be heard 30 minutes before sunrise until dawn. The clear “koi-lee” whistle is brief — averaging 30 seconds — and the daily greeting is given by a majority of the coveys within a few minutes. Calling is seasonal; beginning in September and continuing into November with a noticeable peak in mid-October. Clear mornings with low

winds are the best time to hear calls. Passing cold fronts that bring high cloud cover, wind, and lower barometric pressure often lead to a decrease in calling.

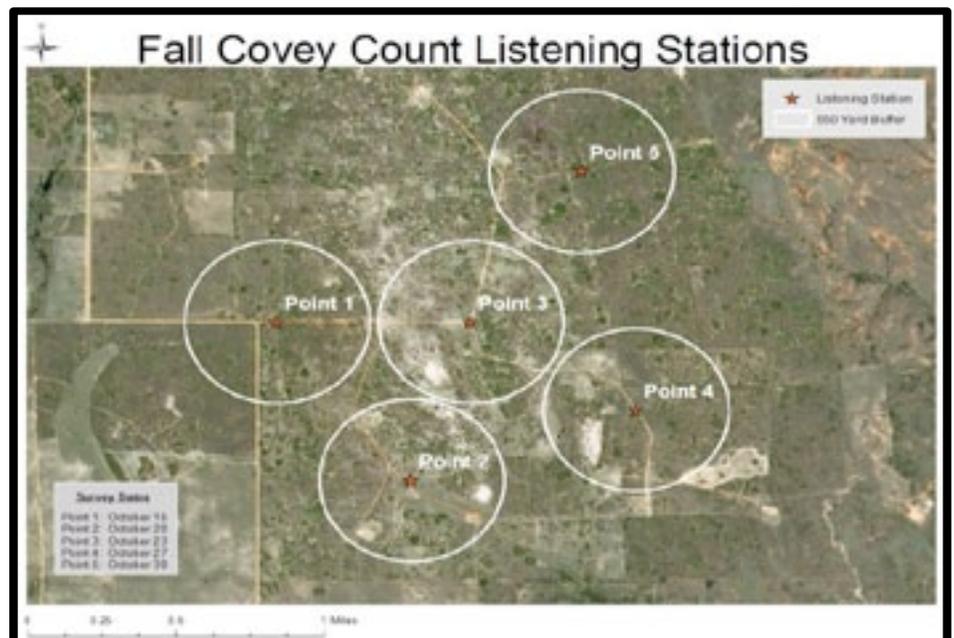
Counting Quail

The survey is as easy as 1, 2, 3.

Step One: Establish listening stations at least 1,100 yards from each other. This ensures coveys are not counted more than once, since most calls are not audible beyond 550 yards. Mark these listening stations on your property map so you survey the same area year after year.

Step Two: Arrive at your listening station 45 minutes before sunrise

and listen for each covey's morning greeting until sunrise. Mark the approximate location of the covey on your map, along with the time of the call. Often, multiple birds will call from the same covey while facing different directions. This can give the impression of multiple coveys, so be conservative in the number of individual coveys you record. Once the survey is complete, you might attempt to walk up to the coveys to verify multiple coveys, gauge distances and obtain a count of individual birds. Only one listening station can be surveyed per morning because the calling session is so short. If other hunters are conducting surveys during the same time on adjacent points,



Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation Mission Statement:

Managing Oklahoma's wildlife resources and habitat to provide scientific, educational, aesthetic, economic, and recreational benefits for present and future generations of hunters, anglers, and others who appreciate wildlife.

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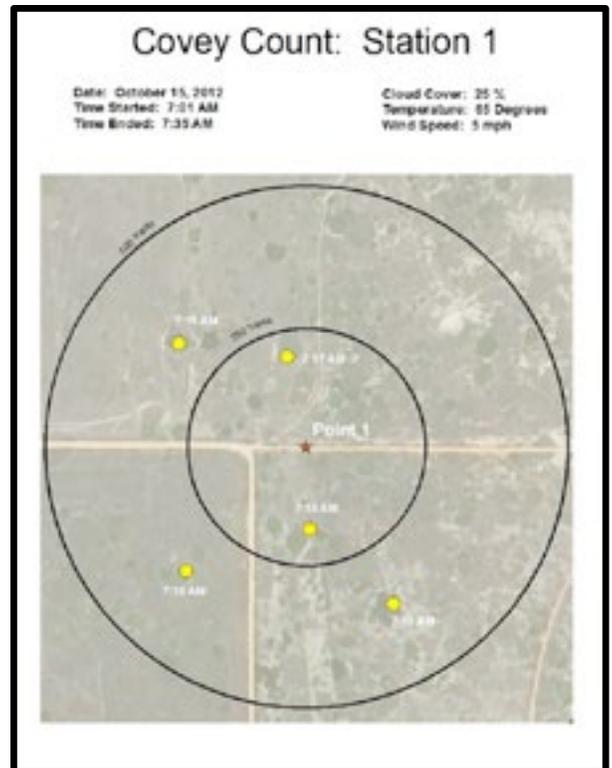
compare covey locations and times to ensure each covey is only counted once.

Step Three: Analyze your results. You can obtain a crude measure of quail density by assuming the survey area for each point is equal to 196 acres, a 550-yard listening radius. If you were able to get an average estimate of covey size by walking up coveys, multiply that number by the number of coveys heard to get a total number of individual quail. If you were unable to get a reasonable estimate of birds per covey, we recommend using 11. For instance, if 4 coveys were heard, the density would be: 196 acres ÷ (4 coveys x 11 birds/covey) = 4.5 acres/bird.

Calling behavior is not always consistent due to weather variations and the number of coveys present. To control influence of weather, we recommend not surveying during times of high wind and/or cloud cover. Because calling is a social behavior, there may be more coveys on your property than you document. Coveys will be more vocal if they hear a nearby covey, and are less likely to call when they do not hear other coveys. Because of these variations, relating density estimates to hunting success is difficult. Interpretation of covey call data may represent a low (three or fewer coveys per point), average (five coveys per point) or high (more than 8 coveys per point) number, as per beef, brush and bobwhites.

Conducting fall covey counts is a great way to estimate the density of quail on your property or favorite hunting spot. Although covey counts require early morning trips to the field, the results are valuable and can help you decide your opening morning hunting location. Covey counts can also be taken from the deer stand. As with all surveys, accuracy is improved with multiple points and at least two observations per point. Repeating the survey annually should show population trends on your property, and may even help focus your management activities.

Visit the Landowner Assistance page under the Wildlife and Land Management tab on www.wildlifedepartment.com to print a Fall Covey Count Data Sheet.



Landowner Spotlight

Ghost Buck Ranch: Changing perspectives on wildlife management

By Rosalee Walker, Farm Bill Technician



Dan Ham has wonderful outdoor memories spending time hunting and fishing with his dad and uncle. Ham lost his hunting leases due to new property ownership several years ago, so he decided it was time to own his own property.

“Before owning property, I was focused on hunting with the mentality of how big and how many can I harvest,” Ham said. “I wanted a place where I could bring friends and family to observe wildlife in a restored, native habitat.”

In 2008, Ham purchased 560 acres in Pontotoc County, which he named Ghost Buck Ranch, and has been diligently working to improve the habitat.

After working his land and being able to observe wildlife in a way he had never been able to before, his views on hunting transformed to an overall wildlife management view.

“Now, I focus on land stewardship and providing beneficial habitat for wildlife on my property,” Ham said. “My main objective is to increase enjoyment of our recreational property and provide food, shelter and water resources for our local wildlife. I want



A “ghost buck” found on Ham’s property. Photo by Dan Ham.

to provide a place where deer and turkey are not pressured.”

Ham has implemented prescribed burning and timber canopy thinning to improve his property. Another notable activity is the eradication of the invasive and non-native sericea lespedeza. Prior to Ham’s purchase, the property had been neglected and the once open, native range fields were taken over by this invasive, and hard to eradicate species. After three straight years of vigilant and intense management, all of the fields have been restored to healthy, native vegetation. The fields are now flourishing with high-quality native vegetation.

Ham applied for, and was granted, a federal Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program contract in 2009. He has greatly enhanced the quality of wildlife habitat on his property with this incentive.

It’s not all work and no play on the Ghost Buck Ranch. A favorite activity is “shed hunting” with grandkids after a prescribed burn. The sheds are more exposed and easier to locate after burns.

Dan Ham was chosen for his dedication, hard work and belief in the need for wildlife habitat management, as well as passing on knowledge and creating wonderful memories for future generations.



Ham and granddaughters. Photo by Rosalee Walker.

Grubs be Gone: Controlling parasites in your pond fish

By Steve Spade, Byron Hatchery Manager/Supervisor



A variety of pond-related questions to fisheries personnel within the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife

Conservation. A common one regarding yellow grubs in farm pond fish (largemouth bass, channel catfish and bluegill). In addition to yellow grubs, pond owners often deal with white and black grubs. Fortunately for pond owners, they all have similar life cycles making prevention easier.

These large grubs are mainly found in small impoundments or ponds where fish are more concentrated. Grubs live in the muscle tissue of fish (the edible portion), which explains why they are initially noticed when the fish is cleaned.

Although this parasite is not harmful to humans, the thought of eating it is not appealing.

Like any undesirable plant or animal, the key to controlling the problem is to break a link in the grubs life cycle - typically, the weakest link in the cycle is a good place to start. The problem with

the yellow grub, and grubs in general, is that there are really no weak links in its life cycle. It does not just evolve in the fish, but has two other hosts, the snail and a bird (i.e. Blue heron). The grub's lifecycle must first be understood to get the most effective control methods.

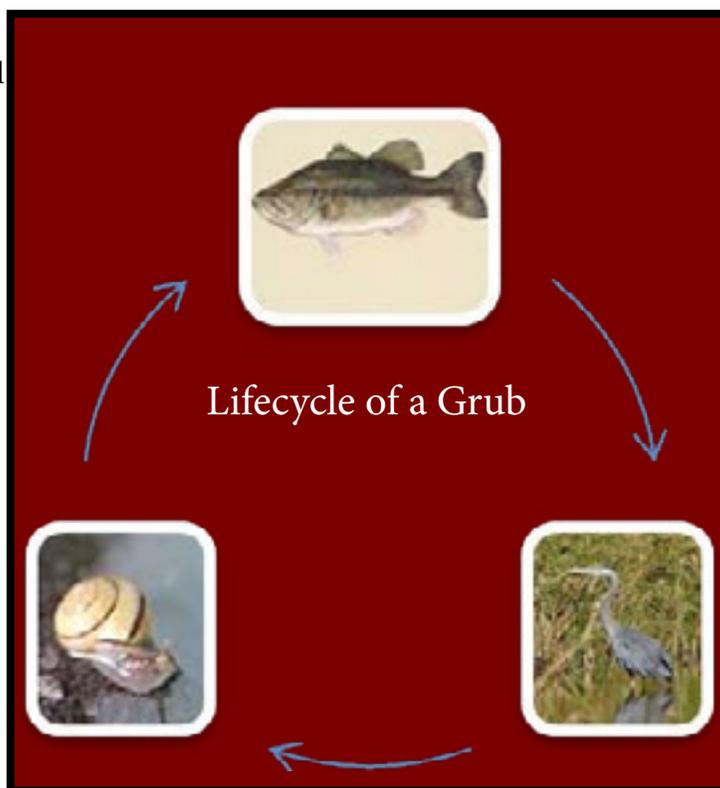
snail and enters the fish and forms cysts. The cysts in the fish are then known as a grub. A fish-eating bird then eats the fish. The fish passes down into the stomach of the bird where the cyst walls are digested by enzymes. The grubs are then free to migrate up the esophagus into the upper trachea area. Here, the grubs become sexually mature. When the bird feeds with its beak in the water, eggs laid by the adults are released into the water. The cycle starts over when the eggs hatch.

Preventing Grubs

Prevention is often overlooked, but is by far the simplest and most cost effective method to controlling parasites such as grubs. With this in mind, always be careful to avoid the introduction of infected snails and fish into a pond. However, assuming the stage of prevention has passed, there are other ways to

help stop the occurrence of grubs in your pond.

- Reduce the amount of vegetation in a pond to reduce snails' food supply.
- Create steep pond edges to discourage birds that feed in shallow water, which will also reduce aquatic vegetation.
- The use of chemicals is an



Lifecycle of a Grub

The mature egg hatches in the water. It is then known as a miracidium, a free swimmer in the water column. The miracidium then enters the snail's body and forms a sporocyst. The sporocyst then produces several stages and produces what is called daughter cells, known as cercaria in the snail. The cercaria then leaves the

option, although it is not a preferred method. Use Copper Sulfate to control algae and reduce snail populations. Chemicals are also hard on young fish of the year, so please use with caution.

- Controlling birds will also reduce parasites. Propane canons can provide some control; however, it will be a short-term and less effective solution. Many birds are federally protected and the killing of these birds, and their nests, is illegal.
- Draining and drying out the pond is also effective. However, this will create new problems of lost production (i.e. lost reproduction, etc.) time, not to mention, the impracticality of draining large bodies of water.
- The most practical and preferred control method by fisheries biologist is the introduction of redear sunfish. They eat snails and provide a secondary benefit of adding to the forage base of the pond. They also provide additional angling opportunity and great table fare.

It is common to find a few grubs on most wild fish, and when these fish are concentrated into a small impoundment, such as a pond, the cycle becomes harder to break. As you can see, grubs have a complex life cycle involving birds, snails and fish. Because their life cycle is so complex, it makes it practically impossible to eliminate them from farm ponds. But, they can be controlled and kept at an acceptable level. Keep in mind that grubs cannot infect humans, but as a rule of thumb, you should always clean and cook fish properly.

Landowner Events

Stay in the Know: Electronic News

By Kristen Gillman, Lands and Minerals Coordinator



Stay in the know with the Wildlife Department's newly redesigned website. Get updates on the latest landowner news and events to enhance your land. Sign up today for the free *Weekly Wildlife News* reports and *Your Side of the Fence* electronic newsletters to receive information directly to your email.

Log onto wildlifedepartment.com, click the Wildlife and Land Management tab and then click the landowner assistance link. You will find a list of programs available, along with information on who to contact, program eligibility, how to enroll and more.

News releases and newsletters are able to notify landowners of meetings and workshops on property management and wildlife in a timely manner. If you are particularly interested in the Wildlife Department's quail management initiatives, sign up for the *Upland Update* newsletter.



Landowner News

Annual Field Tour: Pushmataha WMA

Presented by Jack Waymire, John Weir, Dwayne Elmore and
Terry Bidwell

Take a free fire, wildlife, timber and cattle grazing field tour with biologists at Pushmataha Wildlife Management Area (WMA) in southeastern Oklahoma Tuesday, Oct. 2 from 1:30 p.m. to 4 p.m.



Pushmataha WMA annual tour group 2011. Photo by presenting committee.

Tour Topics:

History of Pushmataha WMA; Utilizing Prescribe Fire, Timber Harvest and Cattle Grazing to Meet Your Management Objectives; Integrated Timber, Livestock and Wildlife Management; Stocking Rate and Carrying Capacity for Cattle; and Forest Health.

Directions:

Pushmataha WMA is located two miles south of Clayton on Hwy 271. Turn west on County Road, and go approximately 3.1 miles to the Management Area Headquarters.

Sponsorship:

This event is graciously sponsored by the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service and OSU Department of Natural Resource Ecology and Management.

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Sam Noble Foundation Workshops: Register Today!

Presented by The Samuel Roberts Noble Foundation

The Samuel Roberts Noble Foundation will host two White-tailed Deer Management workshops to help producers better understand and manage Oklahoma's primary wildlife resource.

The first workshop will be held on Thursday, Sept. 20, at Don Ritter's Freedom Rock Ranch near Atoka. The second workshop will be held on Tuesday, Sept. 25, at the Noble Foundation Oswalt Road Ranch near Marietta. Both workshops will take place from 10 a.m. to 5:15 p.m. and are open to the public. Registration begins at 9:30 a.m.

During the workshops, consultants and researchers from the Noble Foundation will discuss deer habitat, food habits, population management and management associations. The workshop will include demonstrations and presentations with in-class discussion. There will be several reference publications available to attendees as well.

"These workshops provide key insights into the behavior and biology of deer," said Ken Gee, Noble Foundation senior wildlife researcher. "Most producers understand the methods for managing livestock. We're going to help provide a knowledge base so that they can actively manage this wildlife resource with equal efficiency."

The registration fee for each workshop is \$20, which includes lunch. To register for a workshop, contact Tracy Cumbie at (580) 224-6292 or register online at www.noble.org/AgEvents.

Increase Fence Visibility for the Lesser Prairie Chicken

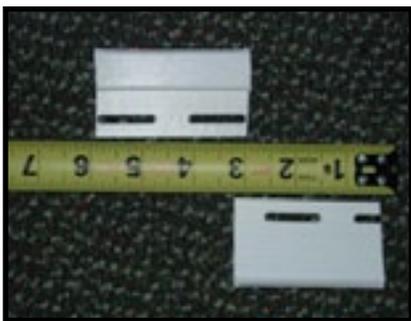
By Matt Fullerton, Lesser Prairie Chicken Initiative Technician



The lesser prairie-chicken (LEPC) is native to the mixed and short-grass prairies of western Oklahoma with scattered shrubs and very few trees. Changes in the historical landscape threaten LEPC populations. This includes woody encroachment, agriculture and development. Research indicates

the LEPC generally avoids anthropogenic (man-made) structures such as buildings, oil and gas equipment, wind turbines and power lines. Create fence markings to increase visibility among the chickens.

During the Oklahoma land rushes of the late 1800's, land parcels were divided into 160-acre plots. Miles of new fencing was constructed throughout the range of the LEPC. When being pursued by a predator, LEPC often fly just a few feet off the ground as a last



Cut markings into 3-inch strips. Photo by Sutton Avian Research Center.

resort. The George Miksch Sutton Avian Research Center in Bartlesville found that greater than 40 percent mortality of female LEPC was due to fence collisions.

Thankfully, Suttan Center researchers also found that adding

visible markers to fence lines decreased LEPC

collisions in Oklahoma. This method has been applied to several fences in LEPC habitat over the past few years. The purpose of fence marking is to increase visibility to flying birds. There are various methods that can be used. The first was employed by the Sutton Center, which utilizes cut pieces of vinyl siding trim strips. These can be purchased at various hardware stores and have a lip that allows them to easily snap onto fence wires. Pieces are usually cut into 3-inch strips using a pair of tin snips or miter saw for mass production. Pieces can be arranged for maximum visibility, as shown in the photos below. Another fence marking method is to employ the use of plastic, oval-shaped markers that hang from a stainless-steel wire.

These are distributed by FENCE-FLAG® and are also useful at increasing fence visibility to LEPC and other wildlife.

Contact me at (580) 571-5820 or mrfulle.odwc@gmail.com for more information about lesser prairie-chickens, the Lesser Prairie Chicken Initiative and marking your fences. Visit widlifedepartment.com for more tips to help wildlife on your property.



Demonstration of fence markings. Photo by Sutton Avian Research Center.

Free Subscription to Your Side of the Fence

Your Side of the Fence is a FREE publication for Oklahoma landowners produced three times a year by the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation. It is our mission to provide practical information for managing wildlife on your property and address issues that affect you, the landowner. What would you like to learn more about? Do you have any questions for any of our ODWC professionals? Please let us know. If you would like, subscribe below and send your comments to the editor.

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What's Inside

Page 1 Gear Up for Quail Season
 Page 3 Ghost Buck Ranch
 Page 4 Grubs be Gone: Controlling para-
 sites in your pond fish
 Page 5 Stay in the Know with Electronic
 News
 Page 6 Annual Field Tour at Pushmataha
 WMA / Sam Noble Foundation
 Workshop
 Page 7 Increase Visibility for the Lesser
 Prairie Chicken

Your Side of the fence

