

Your Side of the Fence

is a FREE publication produced three times a year by the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation. Questions, comments and suggestions about this, or future issues are welcome and should be addressed to the editors.

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Your Side of the Fence
Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation
1801 N. Lincoln
Oklahoma City, OK 73105

Name _____
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New Subscription Discontinue

Outdoor Calendar

May

- Nesting Period Continues for various bird species.
- Deer Fawning Season Continues.
- Bluegill start spawning.
- Largemouth bass continue to spawn.

June

- Deer fawning season continues.
- Hummingbird feeders should be cleaned every three to four days.
- Nesting period continues for ground nesting birds.

July

- Nesting period continues for ground nesting birds.
- Remove cattle from some native pastures to ensure adequate cover for ground-nesting birds next spring.
- Selman bat watches begin this month.

August

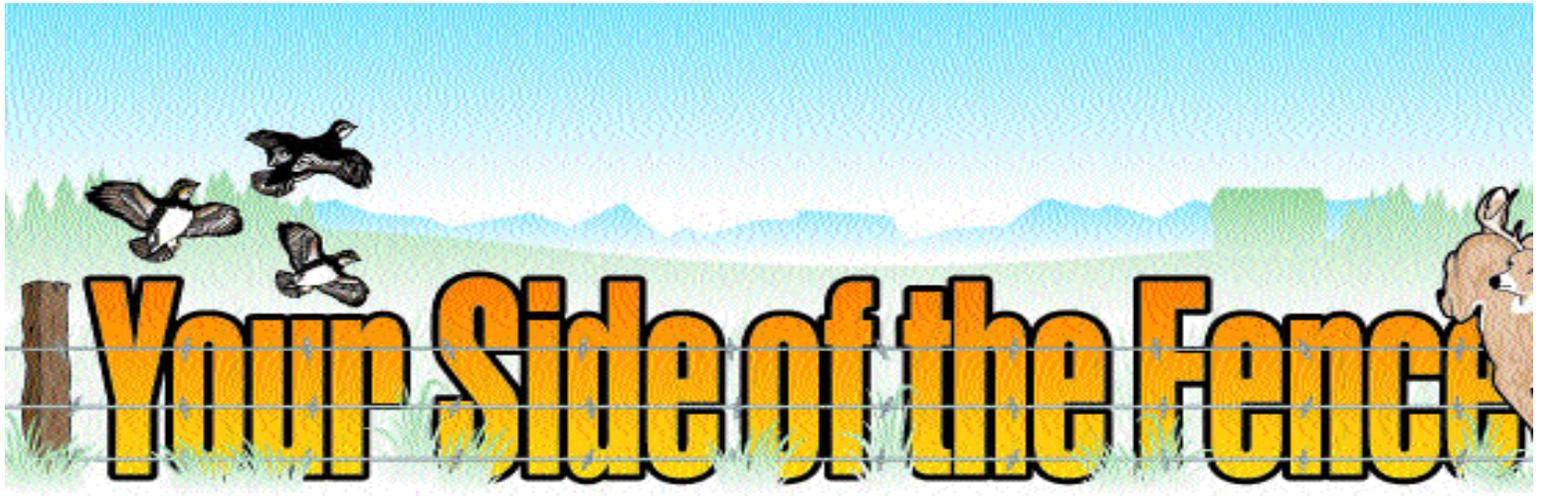
- Clean out purple martin houses and plug entrances after they leave this month.
- Begin deer spotlight count survey as required by the DMAP program.



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Department of Wildlife Conservation





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Turkey Roost Trees

The Key Piece of the Habitat Puzzle

By Rod Smith, southwest regional Wildlife supervisor

What is the single most important habitat component for Rio Grande turkeys in Oklahoma? Without a doubt, the answer is roost trees. No other part of the habitat formula for a turkey is as lacking in the west as those large, mature trees where turkeys prefer to spend their nights.

Where turkey roosts currently exist, they should be protected at all costs. Where they don't occur, planting the right species of tree in the right place should produce roosting trees in the future. There are thousands of acres of land in Oklahoma that are almost ideal turkey habitat except they don't have the necessary stands of large trees for turkey roosting. Tree plantings today may transform your property from a turkey desert into a turkey oasis. All it takes is a little work and time.

The notion of once a turkey roost, always a turkey roost, is not true. Things change. The most common turkey roosting sites in the west are large stands of mature cottonwoods. These are typically along rivers and other drainages. Even excellent stands of cottonwoods can get degraded.

One common problem is the invasion of eastern red cedar. Turkeys like the area around their roost site to be fairly open. If left unchecked, cedars can become tall and dense and ruin the attractiveness of a roost site to turkeys. Cedars may also out compete other trees for water, nutrients and sunlight. Once cedars invade a stand of timber, there may be little regeneration of the type of tree species that are most beneficial for roost sites.

Cattle grazing can also limit the growth of young trees. We often see a mature stand of cottonwoods where the older trees have started dying. Without new trees to take their place, these sites may be gone in a few years. A few strands of barbed wire to limit grazing around young trees can go a long way toward maintaining these roost sites for future generations of turkeys and turkey hunters.

Planting trees for future roost sites is not for the impatient, but can be very satisfying for those that really want to make a difference. Even though these plantings will take several years to

become big enough for a turkey roost, a lot of other wildlife will benefit in the interim. Tree plantings near a creek or other drainage will probably have the most potential for turkey use, especially if there are turkeys moving along these areas on neighboring properties.

Linear plantings will be used by turkeys, but it would be best to make some block plantings also. Which trees to plant and the best locations to plant them may differ from one property to the next. We suggest you contact a forester with the Division of Forestry to help plan your tree plantings.

Rome wasn't built in a day and neither is good turkey habitat. If you already have turkey roost trees, do everything you can to keep them in good condition. It's a lot easier to maintain these areas than to start from scratch. If you want to improve what you have, or you want to develop new roosting areas, there may be help out there for you.

There is a new program on the horizon called the Riparian Habitat Initiative. The objective of this program is to help fund habitat improvements along the streams and rivers of western states including Oklahoma. Stay tuned with this newsletter to learn more about this program and how to get involved.



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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.

ODWC Landowner Assistance Programs:

Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program(WHIP); Technical Assistance Program

Russ Horton: 405/202-5901
John Hendrix: 405/742-1278
Mike Sams: 405/590-2584
Dick Hoar: 918/744-1039

Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP)

Wildlife Division: 405/521-2739

Oklahoma Wildscapes Certification Program

Melynda Hickman: 405/522-3087

Farm Pond Technical Assistance; Farm Pond Fish Stocking Program

NW Region-John Stahl: 580/474-2668
SW Region-Larry Cofer: 580/529-2795
NE Region-Jim Burroughs: 918/683-1031
SE Region-Paul Balkenbush: 580/924-4087
Central: 405/379-5408
Southcentral-Paul Mauck: 580/924-4087

ODWC Contacts

Wildlife Division: 405/521-2739
Natural Resources: 405/521-4616
Fisheries Division: 405/521-3721
Law Enforcement: 405/521-3719
Operation Game Thief: 1-800-522-8039
Information & Education: 405/521-3855
License Section: 405/521-3852
Instant Licenses: 1-800-223-3333
Web site: www.wildlifedepartment.com

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Brian Barger
1801 N. Lincoln
Oklahoma City, OK
bbarger@odwc.state.ok.us
405/522-4872

or

John Hendrix
100 USDA, Suite 203
Stillwater, OK 74074
jhendrix@onenet.net
405/742-1278.

Back to the Basics Pond Management Simplicity

By John Stahl, northwest regional Fisheries supervisor

Summer is here and everyone has the urge to go fishing. Many will head down to the pond on the back 40. But, they may get tired of just catching the normal farm pond fish species. So why not add a little excitement to the mix. Here are just a few of the questions the Department commonly receives about farm ponds.

Will rainbow trout live year round in my pond?

When the pond was constructed we uncovered six strong springs and when we go swimming, the depths are real cold.

Answer:

The presence of springs and cold ground water does not mean that trout will survive. One key consideration besides cold temperatures is the amount of oxygen in the water. Trout need oxygen levels of 6-7 parts per million to be healthy. Most warm water fish like largemouth bass need around 3-5 parts per million.

There are three factors limiting the amount of oxygen in pond water. First ground water has little or no oxygen as it surfaces. If your spring enters below the ponds surface it may be very cold, but very oxygen poor. Farm ponds may also be rich in organic matter such as dead leaves, cattails or cowpies. Bacteria are also present and will break this organic matter down consuming up to 99 percent of the pond's oxygen in the process. This leaves little oxygen for trout. Just like many of the Department's winter time trout fisheries; you can stock rainbows in late October and have good trout fishing in your pond through March or April. Remember to stock at least 8.5 inch trout or larger to avoid largemouth predation.

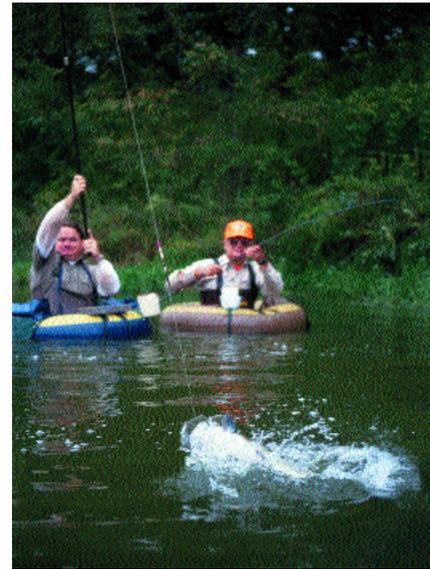
What about stocking hybrid stripers, walleye, saugeye or flathead catfish in my pond?

Answer:

Folks, it's hard to beat a pond with largemouth bass, bluegill and channel catfish. The easiest farm pond to manage (keep in balance and producing) is one containing a single species, like a fed channel catfish pond. You will have more problems with every species you add.

These large exotic predators don't work well because of food economics. An old largemouth bass has an established territory and ambushes it's prey like a big cat. It uses very little energy to obtain fuel. Because the bass is efficient, it only needs around six pounds of bluegill to produce one pound of bass. Stripers, hybrid stripers, walleye and saugeye are roving wolf packs, which are always on the move. Because of their hunting strategy, they burn energy. Therefore it would take over ten pounds of groceries to produce one pound of predator.

As you can see, a good population of these predators would quickly eat all the forage in the pond causing the largemouth bass population to be in poor shape. Flathead catfish are huge predators that can reach up to one hundred pounds. A big engine needs a lot of fuel. Stock one to two 10 to 20 pound flathead catfish in your pond and in a few years, all you will have are two 30 to 50 pound flatheads. They are underwater vacuums that will clean out a pond.



It's hard to beat pond channel catfishing action.

Managing Deer On Oklahoma's Private Lands

By Mike Shaw, Wildlife Division research supervisor

Over the past twenty-five years, Oklahoma deer hunters have witnessed what was once thought to be virtually impossible in the Sooner State.

In 1975, the statewide deer harvest was 9,677 deer, and one of the goals of the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation's fledgling deer management program was to manage the herd for a sustained harvest of 20,000 deer. It took 13 years to reach that goal and Oklahoma hunters have set record harvest for 14 of the last 17 years. Although final harvest figures for the 2000 seasons aren't available yet, it's clear that the total harvest will top 100,000 deer.

No doubt, these are great times for Oklahoma deer hunters, but recent successes have also brought some mighty big challenges. One of the reasons for the explosive population increase was an under-harvest of does. An adequate doe harvest is essential to curb herd growth, and their under-harvest over the years created herds with sometimes greatly skewed sex ratios.

Although deer herds can be managed on a harvest unit level, there are often pockets of habitat which would benefit from more intensive management. In 1991, the Department conceived a program that would assist private landowners who wanted to manage the deer herd on their property with specific goals in mind.

Wildlife biologists who designed the program agreed that landowners who met the criteria and were willing to work closely with the Department should be given the tools to accomplish their deer management objectives. The following year, the Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP) was implemented.

Managing deer is not a difficult task if the right information is available. The goal of the landowner/cooperator may be to maximize harvest potential on a particular piece of property or it may be to manage for quality or trophy bucks. In either case, if the right components are present, biologists can tailor a program to meet the cooperator's objectives. The key to success is forging a cooperative relationship between the biologist and the landowner, understanding the cooperator's goals and evaluating the habitat component.

Secondarily, biologists will explain the data collection process designed to assess the population components present. Data collection begins in late summer

The success of DMAP since its debut has been remarkable. The 1992 season began with 11 cooperators and 99,540 acres enrolled in the program. The initial season produced 431 deer of which 58 percent were does. The program has continued to grow each year, and during the 1999 season, 135 cooperators enrolled 659,148 acres and harvested 2,721 deer. During the past eight years of the program, the percentage of does harvested on DMAP properties has averaged nearly 60 percent compared to the statewide average of 33 percent. Many cooperators and hunters are now beginning to reap the rewards from their hard work.

The program continues to be popular with hunters and landowners alike. This season's growth resulted in 154 cooperators enrolling 710,412 acres. The number of deer harvested on DMAP properties during the 2000 season will approach 3,500 deer. While this number may not seem impressive at first glance, consider that DMAP deer account for 3.5 percent of the total deer harvest on 1 percent of Oklahoma's land base.

with spotlight counts to determine a few basic herd parameters. Buck/doe and fawn/doe ratios can be very helpful in evaluating current population status.

Once the season is underway, the Department furnishes all the tools necessary to collect a variety of biological information from deer harvested on the property. The information is summarized and furnished to the cooperator at the end of the season. Over several years, these data will enable the biologist to formulate and refine a harvest strategy that will eventually produce the desired results.

Deer management goals may vary considerably, and despite the best intentions, achieving the final goal, is often dependent on the size of the property enrolled. Good deer hunting can occur on parcels of land as small as 40-60 acres.

However, implementing a management strategy that is capable of having an impact on a deer herd requires control over a much larger property. Even the 1,000-acre minimum is inadequate if the objective is to produce trophy bucks. Production of trophy bucks requires complete protection of immature bucks, allowing them to reach 4 1/2 to 8 1/2 years of age before they are harvested. Landowners with the minimum of 1,000 acres simply do not have enough control over the deer on their property. Hunters may exercise strict restraint in harvesting young bucks on the enrolled property only to have those bucks harvested on adjacent lands. For DMAP to be most effective, the size of the property should be as large as possible. Several adjoining landowners may get together to meet the minimum acreage required, and as long as all of the landowners have a common

goal, the program can be effective.

The Department spent considerable time this past year evaluating the deer management program. Part of that process involved examining DMAP for possible improvements. What's in store for DMAP in 2001? Since the basic concepts of DMAP have been so successful, the only change deemed necessary at this time will be the enrollment and permitting process. During their regular monthly meeting in February, the Commission voted to adopt a recommendation to eliminate the \$7.00 antlerless DMAP permit fee and modify the enrollment fee.

Beginning with the 2001 season, DMAP enrollment fees will be based on the size of the property. If you are enrolling 1,000 – 4,999-acres, the annual enrollment fee will be \$200.00. The enrollment fee for properties of 5000 acres or more will be \$400.00. In the long run this change should be very beneficial. It will encourage better use of the free permits, reduce administrative paperwork, simplify permit allocation, and reduce the chance of permits being lost in the mail and not reaching the cooperator when they are needed.

If you think you might be interested in DMAP, you can contact the Wildlife Division at 405/521-2739 and ask for a pamphlet explaining the program in more detail.



OKLAHOMA WETLAND PROGRAMS

By Alan Stacey, Wetlands Program Coordinator

After church service a few Sunday's ago, I greeted a visitor who told me he farmed for a living out in the northwest part of the state. Being very polite and friendly, he then proceeded to ask me what I did for a living.

When stating to him that I worked for the Wildlife Department, his face lit up asking "Are you a game warden?" "No, I work with the wetland programs," I replied.

Immediately his facial expression soured, and in a somewhat disappointed voice stated "You know, I like wildlife but I'm not very high on wetlands."

I can't blame him, but always one to enjoy a challenge and seeing a potential convert, I jumped in head first. Throughout the course of the next five or six minutes, both of us exchanged various views concerning wetland issues before parting ways on friendly terms. Whether I succeeded in slightly changing his attitude regarding the benefits and values of wetlands during this brief encounter remains to be seen.

Over the past several years, a lot of confusion and negative feelings have occurred because of legislation and regulatory laws that provided needed protection for wetlands but offered little or no economic incentives to the landowner. Fortunately, programs offering financial incentives and/or cost share assistance combined with a greater awareness of wetland values, have helped to change attitudes and boost the conservation of our state's wetland resources.

More and more, Oklahoma landowners are becoming increasingly aware of those program opportunities that provide a number of options to restore wetland resources on their property. Without a doubt, one of the most popular programs with landowners has been the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP).

Administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service, this farm bill program was first offered in the state five years ago. It has rapidly grown in popularity with nearly 40,000 acres of wetlands either currently enrolled or restored during this relatively short time period. Two of the three options available to the landowner are a perpetual easement or a 30-year



Landowners may receive technical assistance for wetland restoration projects, including water control structures for wetland management such as the one seen above. These projects will attract a variety of wildlife for a landowners enjoyment.

easement. Adjacent buffer areas deemed necessary to protect the restored wetland are also included in the total acreage enrolled within the program.

The landowner retains ownership of the land but voluntarily agrees to preserve wildlife values as well as other wetland functions. In return, the landowner receives a payment usually based upon the appraised ag value of the land for perpetual easements and 75 percent of what would be paid for perpetual easements for a 30-year easement. With the perpetual easement option, the program pays 100 percent of the restoration work and 75 percent with the 30-year easement.

A third option includes matching cost share assistance to restore wetlands, but without an easement restriction and easement payment from the government. The cost share match for assisting the landowner with restoration work on this option is 75 percent, based upon average cost rates with the landowner responsible

for the remaining 25 percent.

State wetland areas which have been used extensively for crop or forage production have previously qualified for restoration under WRP. Eligible lands are often existing or previously cropped wetlands, where hydrology has been altered through draining, diverting, filling or other alterations. Consideration in some instances is also given to areas where original vegetation such as bottomland hardwood timber has been altered or destroyed.

In addition to WRP, other popular wetland assistance options are available to the landowner including the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program funded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the State Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program (WHIP), administered by the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation. Both of these programs also offer cost share assistance for restoration or habitat improvement of

other habitat types as well.

The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program can offer up to 100 percent cost share assistance for approved wetland restoration projects up to a maximum funding level of \$10,000 per project. Dependent upon available funding, financial assistance is based upon a specified dollar amount per surface acre restored plus a lesser rate for an approved number of adjacent buffer acres. Requirements for developing these areas include the restoration or creation of a shallow water zone and a provision for draw-down capability through the installation of a water control structure. The program also emphasizes restoration of riparian corridors and adjacent wetlands.

The State WHIP Program provides a matching cost-share assistance rate of up to 50 percent, either to restore, enhance or even create wetlands provided projects qualify and funding is available. Restrictions include a maximum state match of \$2,500 per landowner per project per year. As a rule of thumb, projects

which will provide an average water depth of 18" or less over 75 percent or greater of the total water area created are eligible. Other eligible practices include cost share for development of permanent structures used to enhance existing wetland resources such as the construction of an upstream reservoir for reliable wetland flooding downstream, installation of water control structures, or perimeter fencing of existing wetlands.

Other farm bill programs that offer options to protect or restore wetlands include the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP), and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Although primary emphasis of these programs focuses on other environmental measures and conservation practices, wetland resource options exist, pending program approval and funding availability.

At times, landowners may have a primary need for wetland technical assistance without cost share assistance.

Many of these needs include questions concerning wetland management issues such as moist soil management, control of undesirable vegetation, or water level manipulations. Other common questions focus on wetland enhancement practices, wetland delineation, and regulatory policies.

Currently these programs are available for landowners. However, budgets may or may not allow agencies to conduct a sign-up period for specific programs. Landowners who are interested in these programs should contact the proper agency for program sign-up dates and funding opportunities. The following agencies/organizations are available to provide technical assistance in dealing with these and other questions regarding wetlands:



Wetland Program Contacts

Agency

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Issue(s)

Wetland restoration
Wetland management
Wetland delineation

Contact

Local Field Offices

U.S. Army Corp of Engineers

Wetland delineation
Regulatory Policies

Tulsa District Office
(918/669-7400)

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Wetland restoration

Tulsa Ecological Services
Wetland management Office
(918/581-7458)

OK Dept. of Wildlife Conservation

Wetland restoration
Wetland management
Wetland enhancement

OKC Central Office
(405/521-2739)

Ducks Unlimited

Wetland restoration
Wetland management
Wetland enhancement

Shawnee Office
(405/275-9152)

MANAGEMENT MEASURES

May

Wildlife Habitat

- Monitor/Fluctuate water levels in wetland areas.
- Monitor tree and shrub plantings.

Ponds

- Install catfish spawning containers (1-2/acre).
- Stock new ponds with fingerling largemouth bass (100/acre). Only stock bass after stocking bluegill.

June

Wildlife Habitat

- Monitor/Fluctuate water levels in wetland areas.
- Monitor grazing program to provide nesting cover.
- Leave some unharvested winter crops next to field edges.
- Before mowing, walk out hay meadows to reduce wildlife mortality, and consider leaving unmowed strips.

Ponds

- Spray willows and other woody vegetation.
- Pull catfish spawning containers.

July

Wildlife Habitat

- Monitor/Fluctuate water levels in wetland areas.
- Monitor grazing program to provide nesting cover.
- Complete wetland dike repairs as needed.
- Before mowing, walk out hay meadows to reduce wildlife mortality, and consider leaving unmowed strips.
- Monitor tree and shrub plantings.

Ponds

- Seed exposed shoreline to Japanese millet.

August

Wildlife Habitat

- Monitor grazing program to provide nesting cover.
- Spotlight count survey should be completed as required for the DMAP program.
- Prepare ground for winter food plots.
- Complete wetland dike repair.
- Before mowing, walk out hay meadows to reduce wildlife mortality, and consider leaving unmowed strips.

GREEN VARMINTS

By Dr. Fred Guthery, Bollenbach Chair, Oklahoma State University

As we rue the decline of bobwhites in some parts of America, and cast aspersions on predators, big agriculture and sundry other scoundrels, green varmints are quietly and relentlessly gobbling up space that could otherwise house coveys.

Eastern redcedar is a green varmint of some moment in central Oklahoma.

"Examples of wildlife that decline commensurate with increased invasion of junipers, such as eastern redcedar, include Rio Grand turkey, mourning dove, bobwhite quail, greater and lesser prairie chicken and white-tailed deer," report Terry Bidwell and associates, Oklahoma State University. "In the case of wild turkey, juniper encroachment in riparian areas that were turkey roosts has been implicated in the abandonment of historical roost sites."

Bidwell and associates estimate that from 1985 to 1994, eastern redcedar and Ashe juniper claimed 284,000 acres of Oklahoma each year. Under strong assumptions, this could represent the loss of up to 5,680 coveys per year.

"The invasion of juniper into native plant communities shades out forage plants for wildlife and livestock and reduces stocking rate and carrying capacity. Forage pro-

cedar trees increase in canopy cover and density..."

Another green varmint that is depredating the countryside is sericea lespedeza. This plant is a quail problem in portions of central and eastern Oklahoma.

Introduced from Japan for conservation purposes, sericea is adapted to a variety of soils. The plant has high levels of tannin, rendering it largely unpalatable to livestock. Hence, grazing may foster sericea by placing palatable forages under a competitive handicap.

Sericea can turn pastures into dense monocultures that provide cover but no other habitat needs of bobwhite.

Although eastern redcedar and Ashe juniper are native to America, green varmints tend to be introduced plants. Sericea, Johnsongrass, Old World bluestems, bermuda grass and buffel grass are examples.

"We are facing a dilemma with predictable consequences," reports Bidwell on the juniper invasion. "Are we going to be good stewards of the land and maintain native plant communities or not...? One option, doing nothing, has major negative environmental consequences.

"Our best option is to use a combination

and other human designed (mechanical) management practices to restore prairie, shrubland, and forest ecosystems." Bidwell points out that when juniper communities cross a threshold of size and density, they become extremely difficult to manage.

For further information, obtain a copy of *Invasion of Oklahoma Rangelands and Forests by Eastern Redcedar and Ashe Juniper* by Terry Bidwell, David M. Engle, Mark E. Mosely and Ronald E. Masters. Bidwell's mailing address is Department of Plant and Soil Sciences, Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK 74078.

Ecology and Management of Sericea Lespedeza by Lance T. Vermeire, Terry Bidwell and Jim Stritzke is available at the same address.

Green Varmints previously appeared in Quail News and was written by Dr. Fred Guthery, Bollenbach Chair in Wildlife Ecology, Oklahoma Agriculture Experiment Station.

Getting to Know Your Farm Pond

By Brent Gordon, Fisheries biologist

There are some 250,000 farm ponds in Oklahoma totaling more than 500,000 surface acres. Although farm ponds are an important resource for anglers, it just isn't feasible for the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation to sample private ponds. However, the following information should help you develop your own management plan.

There are two secrets to managing your pond. The first requires your getting to know the fish population in your pond. Second, involves managing people. Since you own the pond, you should be the authority on how the pond is managed.

Gathering information about your fish population doesn't require expensive sampling equipment. You can get all the information you need using a rod and reel. Keeping a daily journal of your angling success is a good starting point. The journal should include species caught, size, abundance and the condition.

Anglers should fish regularly during the year and they should use a variety of artificial lures and live baits. Be sure to keep track of the hours spent on each outing. This will help determine your hourly catch rate.

When measuring a fish, measure it with its mouth closed and

tail lobes pressed together. The weight should be recorded in pounds and ounces. If you are unable to weigh the fish, be sure to use the following ranking in condition: poor - skinny; good - normal; and excellent - fat. Use a paperhole punch to punch a hole in the tail of fish caught and released. Mark the log if you recapture a hole punched fish.

Once you have compiled this data over an entire fishing season, you will want to consult a Wildlife Department fisheries professional. Armed with the information you have collected, a fisheries professional can give you specific suggestions on how best to manage your pond.

NOTE: The Department has a publication entitled *Managing Pond Fisheries in Oklahoma* which can be purchased from any Department installation. This handy booklet may also be purchased by mailing a \$3 check to: Oklahoma Department of Wildlife, C/O License Section, 1801 N. Lincoln, OKC, OK 73105.

Daily Fishing Log

Month _____	Day _____	Hours Fished _____	_____	Year _____	_____
	Species	Length	Weight	Kept(K) Released(R)	Recapture
Fish 1	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Fish 2	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Fish 3	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Fish 4	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Fish 5	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Fish 6	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Fish 7	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Fish 8	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Fish 9	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Fish 10	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Total	LMB _____	BG _____	CC _____	O _____	
Average Length	LMB _____	BG _____	CC _____	O _____	
Average Weight	LMB _____	BG _____	CC _____	O _____	

Species Code: LMB=Largemouth; BG=Bluegill; CC=Channel Catfish; O=Other

Field Notes: _____