Your Side of the Fence

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Feeding Catfish in Your Farm Pond

By Gordon Schomer, Durant Hatchery Manager

Channel catfish are opportu-nistic feeders and will eat almost anything. With this in mind, you might ask yourself why would you want to purchase fish food to give to channel catfish? The answer is quite simply that you can increase the growth rate of your catfish by ten to 25 percent.

Feeding your channel catfish a good quality floating feed also allows you to visually observe their body condition, size and numbers. Also many people simply enjoy just watching them feed for the pure pleasure of it.

Of course feeding fish requires a good watchful eye to maintain optimum water quality. The key to maintaining optimum water quality in your pond is not to overfeed.

"The key to maintaining optimum water quality in your pond is to not overfeed."

Unused decomposing feed can create low dissolved oxygen in the water. Low oxygen levels in the water will depress fish feeding activity and even kill them if the oxygen level gets too low. The dissolved oxygen level in most ponds is lowest just before sunrise and can remain lower throughout the early morning hours just after the sun rises, so it is best not to feed in early morning for this reason. The best times to feed are between mid-morning and mid-afternoon and on the up wind side of the pond unless a feed ring is used to keep the feed from floating across the pond due to the wind.

Floating food should be used when the water temperature is 65 degrees Fahrenheit or warmer.

How much to feed your catfish depends in part on their size. Prior to purchasing any feed, do some fishing and determine what the average size of channel catfish are in your pond. The size of the catfish will also help guide you in purchasing feed that best fits your catfish. Catfish food should have a minimum protein level of about 28 to 32 percent that can be purchased from most local feed stores.

Another vitally important factor in determining how much to feed is water temperature. The optimum water temperature for catfish growth is 85 degrees Fahrenheit, so as temperatures decreases, food consumption decreases proportionally. Generally catfish don't feed consistently in ponds when the water temperature drops below 60 degrees Fahrenheit, when their

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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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digestion efficiency and metabolism drops markedly. When water temperatures drop below 50 degrees Fahrenheit, channel catfish may still feed some, but at a greatly reduced level and frequency, so it is not recommended to feed them very much or very often throughout the colder winter months.

To determine the actual amount of fish food needed a general rule of thumb is three percent of the total weight of fish in your pond when the water temperature is 70 degrees to 85 degrees Fahrenheit. For example: If you stocked 100 channel catfish in your pond and the one you caught weigh on average one pound you would feed three pounds of food per day {(100 fish x 1 pounds) x .03 = 3 lbs.}. You can adjust your feeding as your fish grow by sampling your fish every two weeks to see how much they average in weight.

When your water temperature is between then 60 degrees and 70 degrees Fahrenheit, you should feed two percent of their body weight; when the water temperature is below 60 degrees Fahrenheit, you should feed one percent. Floating feed is used most efficiently by channel catfish when the water temperature is warmer, such as 65 degrees Fahrenheit and above. Sinking feed should be used when the water temperature is below 60 degrees Fahrenheit. A combination of floating and sinking feed can be mixed and fed when the water temperature is between 60 degrees and 65 degrees Fahrenheit to allow for more efficient use of the feed.

"The end result will be bigger and faster growing fish in a shorter time period."

The end result of a quality feeding program for channel catfish, will likely be bigger fish in a shorter time period than would normally take. Many families enjoy just watching their fish feed especially when the fish begin getting larger and they may see fish weighing eight to ten pounds or more, gracefully skimming the surface of the water while eating. At that point they may almost seem like pets to some folks, but for the real catfish angler, this sight may give you more incentive to want to catch one of those big brutes for supper or maybe just for bragging rights among your family and friends.■

Watching catfish feed is an enjoyed pastime of many families. Seeing the fish grow into catchable sizes is both attracting and rewarding. It can entice you to fish more often.

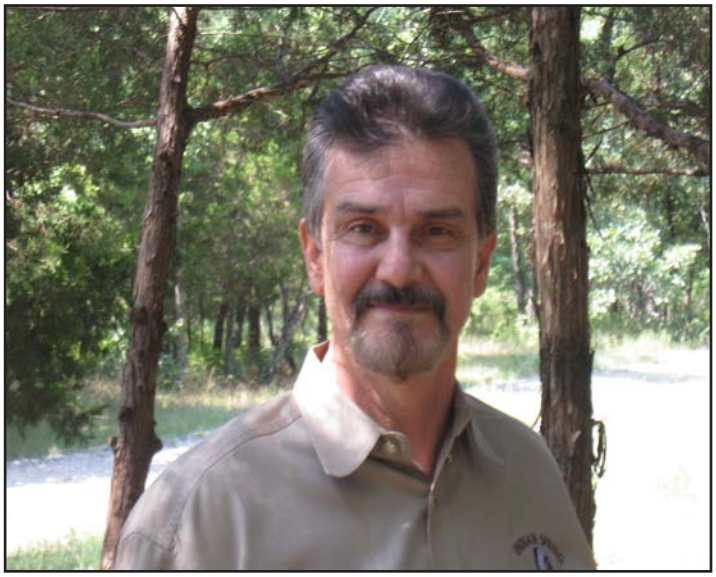
Landowner Spotlight

James Guinn- Returning to His Roots

By Josh Richardson, Wildlife Technician

James Guinn's roots in south-eastern Oklahoma run deep. As a boy he fished in the lakes and streams of northern Coal county and south-western Pittsburg county. Since that time much has changed. Life took him to the Dallas area while time has taken its course on the Oklahoma land. But those good days have not been forgotten. Although various members of the family have always maintained some landholdings in the area, Jim has expanded them and brought back new life and purpose to it.

Back in 2006 Jim heard of a program that was designed to try to re-establish quail populations by restoring good quail habitat. Jim applied for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program Quail Habitat Restoration Initiative (EQIP QHRI) and worked with ODWC and Natural Resource Conservation Service personnel to formulate a plan. Late in 2007, Guinn became an active participant in the program and began work. Within six months he had built many of his firebreaks, accomplished a burn on nearly 150 acres and cleared much of the brush that has invaded the old native prairie.



James Guinn is working to restore a rural icon by participating in the EQIP Quail Habitat Restoration Initiative.

While his quick action and hard work on this project is indeed commendable, it is Jim's obvious desire to take care of the land that is extraordinary. This region of southeastern Oklahoma has seen an explosion of oil and gas exploration and production. Jim has worked hard to protect the health and beauty of the land while maintaining good working relationships with the oil and gas companies. One of the cherished features on Jim's property is an old spring, still active and still clean. Many people now have forgotten it, but for many years it was vitally important to the residents of the nearby community. Several attempts have been made to drill nearby, but Jim has worked with the companies to protect that spring production. In the past Jim has also opened his land to scout troops, comprised mostly of children from the Dallas area, who have never really had the luxury of experiencing nature first-hand. Jim has worked hard to make the land a part of him, and encourages that same sense of stewardship in his children and grandchildren. Maybe he knows the value of getting good roots down when you are young.

Prescribed burns and brush clearing have been James Guinn's top priorities in order to re-establish native prairies.

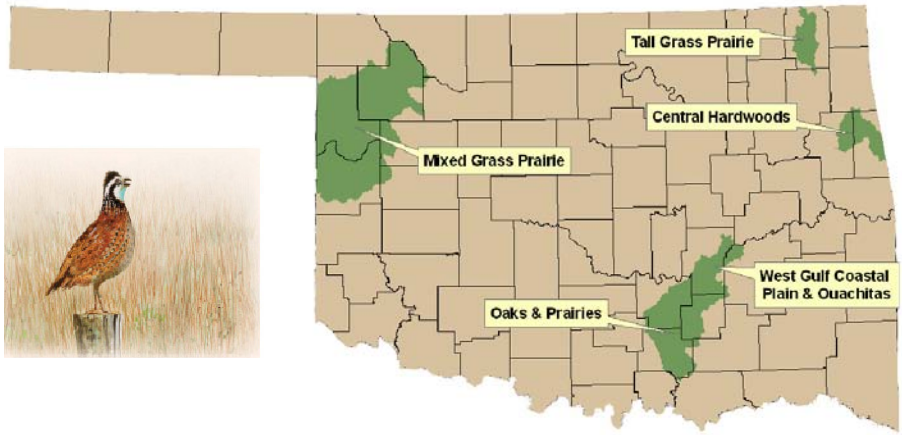
The Quail Habitat Restoration Initiative

By Erik Bartholomew, Quail Habitat Biologist

The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) have teamed up to develop the Quail Habitat Restoration Initiative. The QHRI is offered in certain areas of the state that have a higher likelihood of success based on existing native habitat.

The purpose of the program is to restore native brushy prairie to restore habitat on a landscape level. Research suggests areas close to 5,000 acres (landscape level) of quality habitat are needed to support a healthy population that is not going to crash when the next ice storm or drought hits.

The Quail Habitat Restoration Initiative is offered through the Farm Bill program EQIP- the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. There is financial assistance available through the QHRI for landowners to do specific practices that will benefit quail. In addition to the benefits to quail and other wildlife many of the practices will also benefit livestock operations. Practices such as cedar removal, timber thinning, native grass planting and prescribed fire can be applied to help a landowner reach their habitat management goals. By addressing the needs of quail through habitat restoration landowner assistance in QHRI can be increased over traditional programs.



Areas that can qualify for the Quail Habitat Restoration Initiative are shown in green.

As with all programs there are some requirements that have to be met in order to qualify: the property must lie within or touch the boundary of the highlighted areas on the map and the land must be in some kind of agriculture-related production (cattle, hay production, goats, etc.).

By using a targeted approach, rather than shotgunning our efforts statewide, we can concentrate on restoring habitat on a landscape level. If enough landowners and their neighbors sign on and make the necessary habitat changes or hope is that the next person I meet will say "I haven't seen this many quail since I was a kid!"■

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THE QUAIL HABITAT RESTORATION INITIATIVE, CONTACT ERIK BARTHOLOMEW BY CALLING (405) 684-1929 OR BY EMAIL AT EMBARTHOLOMEW@HOTMAIL.COM.

USDA NRCS

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Game Cameras- More Than Just a Picture

By Jerry Shaw, Big Game Biologist

Any outdoor catalog is likely to have at least a page or two devoted to "trail cameras." These days, many hunters are more likely to have a trail camera picture of a big buck in their wallet than they are a photo of their wife. Other than satisfying a hunter's curiosity about "what's on my place," there are benefits that can be gained by these cameras.

One of the biggest benefits of having a game camera in place is what I call the "hold out factor." In my mind, all deer hunters are trophy hunters when we leave the truck. While we might start out with trophy deer in mind, many of us are quick to settle on something short of that trophy buck goal. Game camera photos can provide a hunter the opportunity to see what type of animals might be available on the property, even if they are not normally seen. If the game camera photos show a mature deer, hunters are more willing to hold out. Just knowing that there is a good buck sharing the woods with you adds greatly to your ability to patiently let younger bucks pass by.

A second, more in-depth use of the game camera data is to use the images to help establish population parameters. For years the standard method of determining population estimates has been the standardized spotlight count. Increasingly, wildlife managers are looking to supplement or even replace this data with information collected at game camera equipped bait stations.

Placement of trail cameras is a key factor for determining a good representation of the deer population on your property.

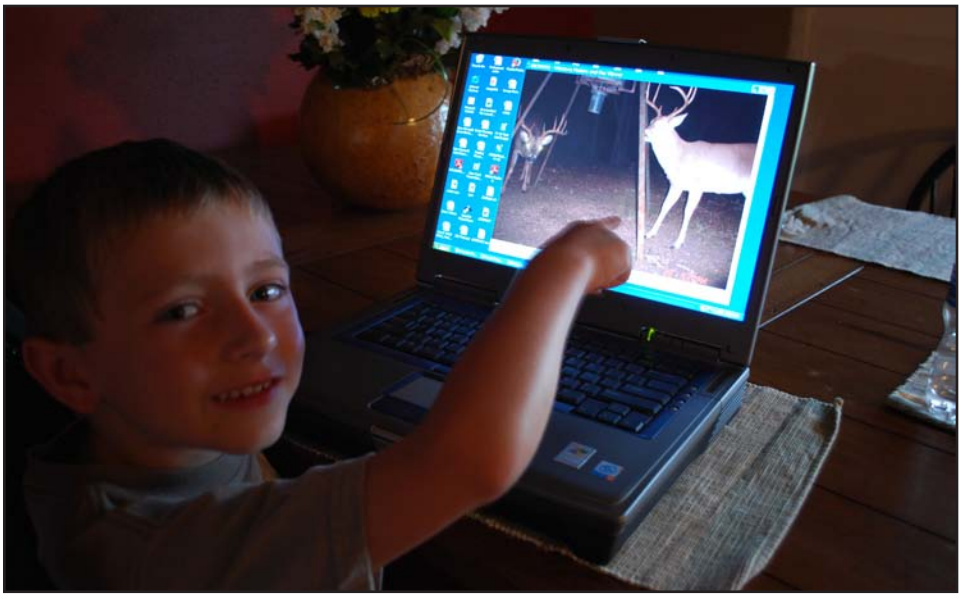
Being able to obtain important calculations from game camera data is dependant on having a large enough group of photos to study and enough camera stations to ensure a good representation of the entire property. Research done at the Samuel Roberts Noble Foundation in Ardmore in coordination with Mississippi State University recommends a placement of one camera for every 100 acres. Data also indicated that the camera should remain in place for no fewer than five consecutive days, with longer being better.

"If the game camera photos show a mature deer, hunters are more willing to hold out."

To illustrate how a game camera survey might be conducted, let's imagine we have a landowner who has 500 acres of land. To survey this amount of property, five camera sites are established. These sites are evenly spaced on the property and baited with an attractant (corn is most often used). After deer begin to frequent the bait site, the camera is turned on and begins recording. For two weeks this landowner refreshes the bait and collects the images from the camera.

At the end of the two weeks each photo is examined and each deer is tallied as a buck, doe, or fawn. Any deer not identifiable is left out of the tally. Furthermore, all buck photos are scrutinized to identify the number of unique individuals using body condition and antler characteristics. Not all bucks will be distinguishable from other bucks.

With a number of individual bucks identified, and the tally from all the photos, let's look at what this hypothetical camera survey shows.



Being able to see what is visiting your feeders is a great technology that anyone can utilize.

Total number of bucks photographed = 35
Total number of does photographed = 50
Total number of fawns photographed = 40
Total number of deer photographed = 125

The landowner was able to positively identify 10 individual bucks.

By dividing the number of individual, unique bucks by the total number of bucks photographed.

10 / 35 = 0.286

This number is called the "population factor" and it is used to calculate the number of unique does and fawns captured in the photos.

To arrive at the estimated number of unique does and fawns, simply multiply the number tallied by the newly calculated "population factor" to obtain population totals. In our example the calculations would be:

Total number of unique does (50 x 0.286) = 14.3

Total number of unique fawns (40 x 0.286) = 11.44

Since we cannot have a fraction of a deer, we round up to 15 does and 12 fawns.

Combining all the calculations we have an estimated population of 10 adult bucks, 15 does, and 12 fawns for a total of 37 deer. Our buck to doe ratio is 1:1.5 and our fawn to doe ratio is 0.8:1. Dividing the 500 acres surveyed by the total estimated number of deer results in an estimated density of one deer for each 13.5 acres.

As with any wildlife survey, certain assumptions are made. This survey technique assumes that all bucks are equally likely to be photographed and that does and fawns will be photographed at the same rate as bucks. The validity of these assumptions can be easily questioned, but the longer the survey is conducted and the more photographs are analyzed, the closer these assumptions come to being true.

Local habitat usage can also impart bias as deer use bait less frequently when there are abundant native forages available. Disturbance from baiting and checking the cameras can also move deer out of the area.

Timing of the survey is also important as bucks must have antlers to be identified as individuals and fawns must be old enough to be out foraging with their mothers. For these reasons mid-August through September is the most appropriate time to conduct camera surveys.

While game camera surveys are likely not going to replace the spotlight count they can be used to get a better understanding of the deer on an area. Besides…who is not curious to know what is going on in the woods when you are not there!■

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Your Side of the Fence is a FREE publication produced three times a year by the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation for Oklahoma landowners. It is our mission to provide practical information for managing wildlife on your property and address issues that affect you, the landowner. Nowhere else can you receive helpful, in-depth information from experienced biologists and law enforcement officers who work in all corners of the state. With so much knowledge and insight at our disposal, we strive to provide you with information we think you may need. But, sometimes we do not address the management issues you want to know more about. So this is your opportunity to tell us what you think. What would you like to learn more about? Do you have any questions for any of our ODWC professionals? Are we doing a good job of providing useful, practical information? Please let us know. If you would like, provide any comments below and send in your advice to the editor.

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Tech Notes

Temporary Fire Guards- Using Leaf Blowers

By Mike Sams, Private Lands Biologist

Without a doubt installing and maintaining fireguards can be the most expensive part of conducting prescribed burns. This is especially true in timbered areas where clearing fireguards involves pushing trees. The Natural Resources Conservation Service estimate the cost for clearing fireguards in timber was $531/acre during 2007. With increases in fuel cost and demands for dozers for energy exploration, cost for installing fireguards this fall will most certainly be expensive.

In addition to the cost associated with creating dozed fireguards through timber, they also require extra attention during burning, as brush piles are created adjacent to the fireguard.

"A standard rule-of-thumb is that the fireguard width should be eight times as wide as the height of the fuel."

For these reasons one might want to explore the option of using leaf blowers to create temporary fireguards in closed canopy forests. A standard rule-of-thumb is that the fireguard width should be eight times as wide as the height of the fuel. In closed canopy forests where leaf litter is the fuel, fireguard widths can be as little as three feet wide.

While not as easy as cleaning off your front yard, blowing fireguards in forested areas is not difficult. The occasional poison ivy or green briar that wont give up a leaf or two can be annoying, but larger thickets are easy to avoid by simply going around them.

Gas powered leaf blowers range in price from $60 to $300. While the less expensive models work fine, the backpack style as well as more expensive models with higher wind speeds can save time and effort.

Fireguards created with leaf blowers are temporary and may only last a week or two. If these fireguards start to accumulate leaves prior to burning it is a relatively quick process to clear them off with a second pass.

It is important to note that fireguards, especially leaf blown, are designed to create a safe point from which to start your prescribed burn from and not simply to contain a fire. One should also take inventory of any dead trees (snags) in proximity to the fireguard and remove them or use ignition sources around them to prevent a potential source of sparks.

Although temporary, using leaf blowers for establishing fireguards can be an economically feasible way to conduct your prescribed burn this fall.

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What's Inside

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