

Your Side



of the fence

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Farm Pond Fish Harvest

By John Stahl, Northwest Region Fisheries Supervisor



We are often asked, “How do I properly harvest fish from my pond? What is the appropriate ratio of bass to bluegill? What size of bass should I be removing?” The answer to these and

other harvest questions are as variable as the number of farm ponds in Oklahoma (200,000). In this article, we will look at several different farm pond situations and discuss harvest.

The easiest farm pond to manage is a channel catfish pond on an artificial feeding program. After the initial stocking and the feeding to harvestable size has occurred, you just keep good pond records.



If 75 channels were harvested for the table, restock with 100 eight-inch channels to replace those harvested. What about the 25 extras? Those fish are needed for natural

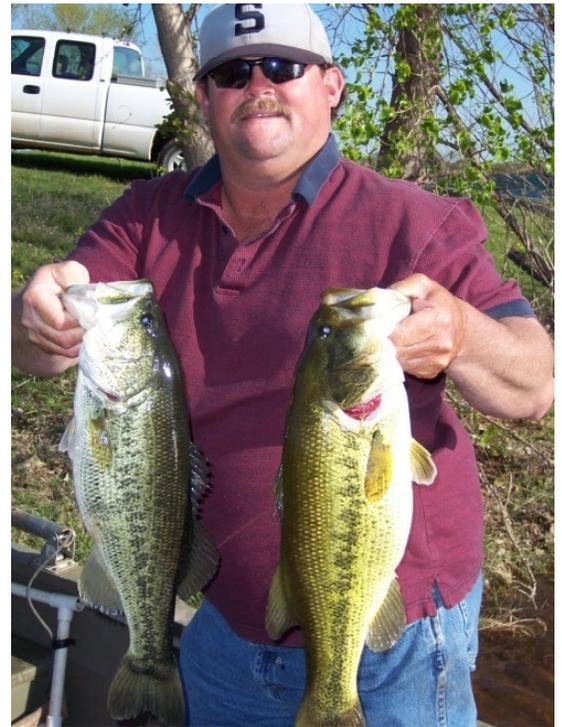
mortality, not angler mortality. In other words, these fish make up for the ones the varmints will get. By following this simple harvest plan, the assembly line of channel catfish fingerlings to the table will continue and there will be some real line busters that don't get caught. Largemouth bass-bluegill balance is a much more difficult goal to obtain. The more species in the mix, the harder it is to manage.

Years ago, we suggested removing ten pounds of bluegill for every pound of bass harvested. This system seldom works. The angler may harvest six 2-pound bass, but he will not return to the pond and harvest 120 pounds of bluegill.

Back in the 1970's, farm pond surveys would occasionally come across a stunted bluegill pond with few or no bass present. Then, largemouth bass became king. To kill a bass was almost against some folk's religion. This situation was similar to doe harvest ideas years ago.

Now, pond surveys most often find crowded, stunted bass and few or no bluegill. A balance must be reached. The average Oklahoma farm pond has 50 pounds of bass per acre. Seldom is this population composed of five 10-pounders or even twenty five 2-pounders. I have seen several ponds with 200

quarter pound bass per acre. Most healthy bass populations are made up of fingerlings weighing less than an ounce to trophies. The best rule of thumb is to harvest the



By harvesting the most common size of bass that you are catching, a person can produce larger, trophy-sized fish.

size bass that you normally catch. If you are catching 1 ½ - 2 pound bass regularly, harvest some of them. Harvesting this size bass will allow smaller bass to grow and provide some protection for larger brooder bass which will keep firing fingerlings into the system. Keep removing the most com-

“The best rule-of-thumb is to harvest the size bass that you normally catch.”

mon size bass until you see a change in your catch. Although we have concentrated on bass harvest, it is just as important to man-

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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“Farm ponds are great sources of entertainment and table fare. If you are not happy with what you are catching, tinker with the fish dynamics until you are. You can see a difference in your fish populations by changing the harvest in just a few years.”



age your forage fish (bluegill).

Bluegill respond well to artificial feed which promotes bluegill growth and for-

age production for the bass. A healthy forage fish population will yield a healthy bass population. Bluegill can take more

angling pressure than bass, but bluegill can also be over-harvested. Farm ponds are great sources of entertainment and table fare. If you are not happy with what you are catching, tinker with the fish dynamics until you are. You can see a difference in your fish populations by changing the harvest in just a few years. For more information on methods of farm pond management, please contact the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation's Farm Pond Technical Assistance office in your area (see sidebar).■

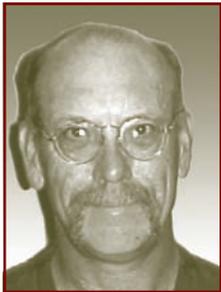


With proper management, a farm pond can produce outstanding results and happy faces like the one above.

Landowner Spotlight

Buddy Spradlin Fulfills a Dream

By Ian Campbell, Wildlife Technician



Howard (Buddy) Spradlin has owned his 300-acre ranch in Sequoyah County for some 35 years. During most of this time his management goals revolved around

livestock production, specifically cattle. However, in 2004, Buddy decided to manage the property more in line with the fish and wildlife resource concerns.

Buddy sought out advice and technical assistance from the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation and the Natural Resources Conservation Service for making wildlife friendly improvements to his property. Receiving assistance through the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program Buddy restored woody cover by planting over 2,000

trees and shrubs. Specifically, plantings were done to provide thickets for protection within fields and corridors to provide cover and food between existing habitats.

Recently Buddy has started improving wildlife foraging opportunities by converting Bermuda grass to food plots and early successional habitat. Through a combination of chemical applications, mechanical soil disturbance and plantings, food



Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program participant Buddy Spradlin.

production for wildlife has been greatly improved on the ranch.

In 2006 Buddy expanded his ranch to include a neighboring 40-acre tract. Not just any tract of land this one was one that his son had admired. Being an avid sportsman John Paul, Buddy's 18 year-old son, appreciated the 7-acre pond and the abundant timber and often mentioned a desire to buy the land if it ever came up for sale.

Unfortunately, John Paul was unable to be a part of the purchase as he lost his life in a four-wheeler accident in 2000.

Today Buddy sees managing habitat for wildlife as a labor of love -- one that he does in memory of his son. Whether constructing walking trails or a fishing dock for family enjoyment Buddy knows John Paul would have approved. It is for the vision of John Paul and the dedication of his father Buddy to enhancing the local wildlife population that we've selected them as this issue's outstanding landowners. ■



Oklahoma Wildscapes, Landscaping for Wildlife

By Melynda Hickman, Wildlife Biologist



Oklahoma Wildscapes is habitat conservation close to home. Wildscaping is landscaping with the needs of wildlife in mind. Not only will Wildscaping bring flashes of vibrant color and exuberant bird song into your yard but it provides habitat improvements that will benefit your wildlife neighbors.

To help Oklahomans establish and maintain habitat for wildlife, the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation has produced the book, *Landscaping for Wildlife: A Guide to the Southern Great Plains*. Beginners and experts alike will benefit from the detailed, easy-to-follow guidelines for attracting wildlife. This 224-page full-color book is the first of its kind to cover landscaping for wildlife with an Oklahoma emphasis. The book includes descriptions of Oklahoma's natural

communities, the most complete up-to-date listing of wildlife-friendly plants and their wildlife values, a step-by-step guide to Wildscape design, and helpful advice on feeding preferences, water needs and living requirements for a host of wildlife species. Illustrated guides to building simple patio ponds and more complex ponds are provided, as well as directions for building a recirculating stream. A woodworking section provides species-specific nesting and feeding station patterns. Color photographs complement the text relating to landscaping features, structures and techniques.

After you create your habitat, celebrate your efforts by certifying it as an official Oklahoma Wildscapes. You can join over 500 Wildscape certified property landowners, currently representing 59 counties, who are committed to creating and maintaining habitat for Oklahoma's wildlife resources.

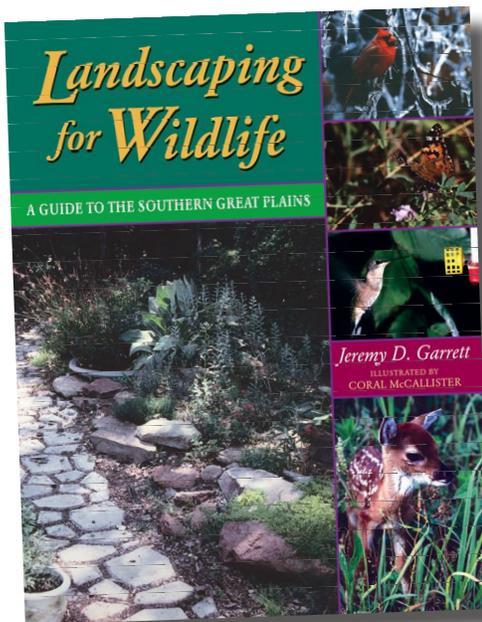
The first step toward certification is to purchase *Landscaping for Wildlife*. Use the book to plan your wildscape or to enhance your existing landscape. When you are ready to seek certification, send in the voucher at the back of the book to receive an application. You do not have to achieve a mature habitat before seeking certification. Your application is reviewed by a wildlife biologist to determine if your habitat plan meets the needs of the wildlife you wish to attract. Following the



One example of a Certified Oklahoma Wildscape sign.

certification guidelines will ensure a positive evaluation, upon which you will receive a numbered certificate and an outdoor sign. Placing the sign in your wildscape shows that your property is part of a statewide network of Wildscapes indicating that landowners, no matter the size of their land, can practice good habitat conservation.

More information about the Wildscapes Certification Program can be viewed on the ODWC website, wildlifedepartment.com, or by calling (405) 424-0099. *Landscaping For Wildlife: A Guide to the Southern Great Plains* can be ordered through the Outdoor Store on the same website or at ODWC headquarters in Oklahoma City. ■



Habitat Matters

Dove Field Management

By Mike O'Melia, Migratory Game Bird Biologist



September 1st for many Oklahoma hunters heralds the much-anticipated beginning of the annual cycle of hunting seasons. Generations of Oklahoma

fathers and mothers have introduced their children to hunting for the first time by going afield in pursuit of the most sought after game bird on the continent, the mourning dove.

Although September 1st is the traditional dove season opening date, for many avid dove hunters, the anticipation and planning for the opening day begins much earlier. For landowners, land lessees and dove hunters willing to work with landowners, producing quality dove shooting opportunities is simply a matter of producing and/or manipulating small grain crops or native, seed producing plants attractive to doves.

Crops such as winter wheat, milo, corn, proso and browntop millet, black-oil sunflowers, canola and sesame are all very attractive to mourning doves. Selection of the right crop for planting will depend on specific planting site characteristics including average rainfall and soil type. Extension service specialists and seed dealers can provide reliable suggestions on suitable crop types and planting schedules. Typically for most of Oklahoma, winter wheat is a good choice because it is easy to plant, including top sowing, has a high germination rate, is drought resistant and has good seed production. The usual



Images like the one above bring back memories for many Oklahomans. You can re-visit these days by managing your property for dove.

considerations for planting a crop should be followed as much as possible including site preparation, proper seeding rate and fertilization.

There are several key considerations for manipulating and managing a dove

“There are several key considerations for manipulating and managing a dove shooting field.”

shooting field. The timing of harvest or manipulation of the crop field (mowing or light discing) is very important and should be conducted at least one or two weeks

prior to dove season. This allows sufficient time for doves to locate and begin using the field. In order to prolong the availability of seeds and sustain dove use of a field, strips or patches of the crop should be mowed or lightly disced periodically to scatter seed and maintain a supply of seed on the ground that will be available to doves.

Winter wheat and other small grains like proso millet are especially prone to germination during wet September weather and will become unattractive to doves soon after germination. Use of controlled burning is a good technique to inhibit seed germination and make the seed more available to doves by reducing plant litter and increasing bare ground. Typically, mowing the wheat before burning will

help prevent excessive loss of seed from the fire. However, too hot of a burn can still reduce seed availability by burning up the entire seed.

One of the most important considerations for managing any field for dove use is ensuring a certain percentage of the field is open or bare ground. Doves prefer a relatively high percentage of open ground in order to move around and find seeds. Doves do not have strong legs designed for walking and scratching through plant litter like quail. As such, the more seed is available on open ground, the more attractive it will be to doves. The same activities that scatter seed to the ground can be used to create more open ground within a field. Burning of crop residue can be especially effective in providing the bare ground component important in attracting doves if done properly.

The same techniques discussed previously regarding manipulation of crop fields can be applied to manipulation of fields of native plants. Most naturally occurring seed producing plants attractive to doves can be managed and encouraged through some type of soil disturbance using discing, or burning in the early spring (February-April). The keys again are, scattering seeds to the ground by light discing or mowing periodically to maintain a supply of seeds over time and light discing or burning to ensure bare ground. Some of the very best potential dove feeding fields

are first year fallow fields that have a thick overstory of native sunflower that tends to shade out plant growth at the ground that can be mowed when the sunflowers begin to mature. Sunflower fields such as these produce tremendous quantities of seed important not only to doves but a range of other seed-eating wildlife and are not prone to germination during wet weather like some agricultural crops and therefore supply a food source over a longer period of time. If managed properly by using regular soil disturbance, high quality native sunflower fields can be maintained year after year. The key is disturbing the soil sufficiently at the correct time to initiate germination of the preferred species.

Another important consideration in proper dove field management involves the management of hunting pressure. By regulating hunting pressure, managers of dove fields can often extend quality dove hunting on an area well into the season. The desired effect of these efforts is to maintain dove concentrations in an area by allowing doves undisturbed use of managed fields during at least a portion of the day. Even though doves tend to be early migrants and local populations may move out of the area relatively soon after the season opens, migrant doves will find and use properly managed dove fields and can provide some exceptional late September and October hunting opportunity.■



The mourning dove is a migratory game bird and both Federal and State laws govern hunting. The Code of Federal Regulations allows for the manipulation of agricultural crops, other feed, and natural vegetation to improve dove hunting. Manipulation means activities such as mowing, shredding, discing, rolling, chopping, trampling, flattening or burning treatments that are considered normal agricultural practices for dove hunting. Manipulation does not include the distributing or scattering of seeds or grains. Hunters should be aware that although you can hunt doves over manipulated agricultural crops, the same is not true for duck hunting. The crop manipulations discussed above are considered baiting with regards to waterfowl because they are beyond what is deemed normal harvest and removal of grain. You can also find information on baiting and dove hunting at <http://www.fws.gov/le/HuntFish/WhatisLegal.htm>.

Free Subscription to Your Side of the Fence

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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New Subscription

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Documenting Change

By Mike Sams, Private Lands Biologist



Recently I attempted to describe the progress of habitat improvement that had taken place on a property in Lincoln County. I could tell that my verbal description was just not painting an accurate

enough picture and my arm gestures were maybe a bit frightening. Then in frustration I surrendered with, "I wish I had a picture!"

It has been said that a picture is worth a thousand words, but for this Okie it very well may be a million. I'm sure that we've all reflected on a time when we wish we had taken more pictures. To me this not only applies to my family, but also to the improvements I've made to my property.

Beginning this year, I'm going to start documenting my sweat equity by using the technique of photo point monitoring. Photo point monitoring documents changes over time using photography. By taking pictures of the same location over time the changes to your property will be recorded.

To monitor habitat changes with pho-

"It has been said that a picture is worth a thousand words, but for this Okie, it very well may be a million."

tographs one needs to simply establish some permanent photo points. Photo points are easily marked with t-post or other means of permanent recognition. As you locate and mark your photo point it is a good idea to make notes as to the point location. Direction is also a factor

to consider when using photo point monitoring. Making sure to look the same direction every time an image is shot will help record change as well.

When it comes to taking photos the only hard-and-fast rule is that your comparison photos need to be taken during the same time of year. If you take photos the first week of April remember each successive year to take comparison photos the first week of April. Whether you choose to take one photo a year or one every season, be sure to mark it on your calendar for future reference.

For those of you interested in an easy way of recording your habitat achievements, I'd recommend photo point monitoring. Your result will pay off in the end. ■



April 26, 2006



March 24, 2008



While taking photos during different months can mask changes, the changes to a property from having received one burn (top image) versus two (bottom image) is apparent.

Do you have any before and after photos of your property? If you would like to share your story, please submit images to mgsams@brightok.net.



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