

Fresh from the Farm
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DNR Does a Good Job with their Quail Habitat Management Seminars

I recently attended the 17th Annual Quail Management Seminar in Hampton County. I have advertised this event the last several years but have not been able to attend for various reasons until last week's addition was held. I have actually hunted at the place in years past but never attended this event for landowners and others who have an interest in promoting quail habitat.

In my opinion this seminar couldn't have been improved on unless they would have let us go hunting. Folks with the Department of Natural Resources are to be commended for the location in which the subject matters are presented. I am one who does lots of squirming after an hour or so in a classroom - not so at this event. The setting was the Webb Wildlife Center, the former Belmont Plantation surrounded by 5600 acres of well kept woodlands, fields and food plots for deer, turkey and quail. Our leaders offered us a mix of sit down classroom and outdoor field trips to demonstrate what they were preaching in class at this day and a half schooling.

I happen to take a liking to anything about quail, from hunting scarce coveys in scarce woodlands locally to eating them with good southern prepared grits and gravy(which my mother and wife have a good knack for doing). There is no prettier music than that of a bobwhite in spring and summer months on hedgerows in the area. Come hunting season, Mother Nature knows how to make them disappear locally. The population of quail in our state and the whole Southeast has been in a nose dive since the 1960's, but information presented to us goes back beyond that.

Herbert Stoddard, author of “The Bobwhite Quail-Its Habits, Preservation, and Increase,” wrote this book in 1931 and included the following remarks: “The bobwhite quail occurs over a vast area of Eastern, Mid-Western, and Southern United States and southward through Central America. During the pioneer period of our country, the species increased greatly and extended its range, for the crude agriculture then in vogue created conditions that were ideal for its multiplication. With the increase of the human population, however, and with improvements in farming methods and farming machinery and the expansion of the livestock industry, came conditions less favorable for the species. As a result, difficulty is now being experienced in maintaining these birds in numbers in many parts of their range.”

For hunters who may read this article, some interesting numbers were shared by one of our speakers. Two hunters in Rock Hill, SC in 1888 recorded the following numbers of birds taken on a three-day hunt-83, 79 and 97 on the respective days. Obviously, in our current day and time these numbers would be the main reason we do not have abundant wild quail. Even the maximum limits of 10, 12 or 15 (depending on county) our state allows today are seldom ever reached by the average quail hunter due to low numbers of coveys.

What is the number one reason we have this decline in quail population? Hunters will be quick to say predators such as hawks, foxes, house cats, coyotes, or fire ants. Interestingly enough, all of these contribute, even hunters to some degree to quail decline; however, the number one problem is lack of suitable habitat. According to our presentations at the Webb Center and based on the statement by Stoddard, modern times apparently is the problem- more schools, new residential areas, industry, larger farming

operations and more of each on the way. It is no wonder why our government is pushing so many conservation programs for farmers(who by the way are still getting fewer in number and bigger in acreage). Even the large plantations that manage for wildlife are having problems with the quail decline. There are numerous large, ongoing quail decline studies being conducted in several southeastern states at present, and two of these (Georgia and N.C. State) have support from plantations in S.C. Even though it is obvious in two of the studies that predators are taking many quail chicks, loss of good habitat is still the main problem. There are things local landowners can do and things our farmers can do, but quail need open areas in addition to thickets for cover. They always need to be close to cover wherever they feed. DNR folks would be glad to participate in local meetings and offer visits to farms and woodlands to offer help in restoring quail habitat. Contact us at Clemson Extension or your DNR folks if you are interested.

Local Cattle Producer and Central Cattlemen's Association Meeting Set

Jimmy Bradham, local cattleman and farmer, is hosting the upcoming cattle producer and Central Cattlemen's Association Meeting this Tuesday, March 16th at 6:30 PM. The location is 1371 Rembert Church Road between U.S. Hwy. 15 and Woodrow. The Rembert Church Road is at the Sumter/Lee County line. Heading west on Rembert Church Road from Hwy. 15, look for the pretty white Rembert Church on the left. Jimmy's farm site is just beyond the church on the left. From Hwy. 441 in Woodrow, turn east on Rembert Church Rd. and the site is approximately a mile on the right. The meeting is being sponsored by Garst Seed Company and Royster Clark in Bishopville. Contact Clemson Extension in Sumter by Monday at 773-5561 to reserve your meal. BSE situation and animal identification will be discussed with other topics.

