

1972

The Traditional Southern Bobwhite Quail Plantations

Leon Neel

Tall Timbers Research Station

Follow this and additional works at: <https://trace.tennessee.edu/nqsp>

Recommended Citation

Neel, Leon (1972) "The Traditional Southern Bobwhite Quail Plantations," *National Quail Symposium Proceedings*: Vol. 1 , Article 2.

<https://doi.org/10.7290/nqsp01u5xv>

Available at: <https://trace.tennessee.edu/nqsp/vol1/iss1/2>

This article is brought to you freely and openly by Volunteer, Open-access, Library-hosted Journals (VOL Journals), published in partnership with The University of Tennessee (UT) University Libraries. This article has been accepted for inclusion in National Quail Symposium Proceedings by an authorized editor. For more information, please visit <https://trace.tennessee.edu/nqsp>.

image for the good shooting preserve operator and leaves a trail of disillusioned hunters. Eventually the state game departments will insist on minimum standards; and when they do, they will have the cooperation and backing of the majority of shooting preserve operators.

There's been a lot said about quality hunting on shooting preserves. But quality isn't entirely a matter of management. Frankly, I've reached the conclusion that the quality of hunting also depends on the type of customer. During the years I've been at Nilo Farms we have had both quail and pheasants so difficult to bag that some hunting parties were embarrassed by their poor shooting. Had these hunters been paying for only birds bagged, we would have gone broke. Unfortunately, our supply of supercharged quail disappeared; however, the birds now available allow our guests to come back from the field happy and full of pride in their shooting prowess.

For the last 3 years we have worked with a cross of the usual pen-reared pheasant and the Korean strain--a small, wild and touchy bird. It soon became apparent that these Korean crosses were too wild for some of our guests, and now we have wild pheasants and not-so-wild pheasants to accommodate the good shooters and not-so-good shooters.

What I'm driving at is the fact that the shooting preserve operator has to cater to his customers. Actually, he can provide hunting just about as difficult as anyone wants.

It's also been my observation that most hunters are more interested in action than communing with nature.

It is indeed unfortunate that shooting preserve operators have had to guarantee bags to attract patrons since, in reality, they are in the business of outdoor recreation--selling a sporting chance to harvest a given number of birds, not carcasses. So the next time you feel like criticizing a shooting preserve operator--remember that he is trying to earn a living, and that "the customer is always right." If he doesn't supply an acceptable product at a reasonable price, his competition will.

THE TRADITIONAL SOUTHERN BOBWHITE QUAIL PLANTATIONS

Leon Neel, Tall Timbers Research Station, Thomasville, Ga.

The private shooting plantations of the southeast occupy a most interesting place in the history and development of wildlife management in our country. Dedicated principally to the classic sport of bobwhite quail shooting, these properties stretched from Virginia to Texas and ranged in size from a few hundred to thousands of acres of southern land.

In the Thomasville, Georgia - Tallahassee, Florida area, private ownership of land for recreational purposes, specifically quail shooting, began in the late nineteenth century. Prior to this the sport was exercised in varying degrees by local people as the need for food or

recreation demanded, or by visitors, who with local guides and dogs trooped the surrounding countryside in search of their explosive quarry. The acquisition of land for private quail shooting plantations continued throughout the South for many years as affluent individuals or groups learned that only by actual ownership could their socio-recreational desires be assured. South Carolina became a choice location for ownership because of direct rail connections with New York. Preserves were developed in Tennessee, Mississippi and North Carolina, and they had interesting influences on their parent locations and people. Alabama natives, with a natural affinity to quail hunting, dogs and horses, welcomed the development of the great preserves in their state, and today a large number of the top dog trainers and managers of southern plantations are Alabamans.

Management developed as problems arose. Vegetation manipulation became and is a foremost problem for plantation managers. The old cotton fields and farmsteads, abandoned after the defeat of the South in the war between the states, had gone through the early stages of plant succession and by 1920 offered new challenges to those responsible for the quail crop. This was the beginning of the single most important sequence in the history of bobwhite quail management in the South, and indeed helped to mold concepts in management that have withstood the test of time. This sequence began with a decline in the quail population through the deterioration of habitat caused by excluding fire. The classic study by Herbert L. Stoddard, Sr. (6), in the 1920's was a direct result of the deterioration of the shooting quality on existing plantations and it was financed by unhappy plantation owners. One of the most important underlying principles to emerge from Stoddard's research has to be the concept of an ecological approach to management, including fire as a necessary and useful tool. Stoddard, joined by Edwin V. Komarek in 1934, continued management research on plantations throughout the South (7). Komarek, recognizing the importance of fire as a natural agent (1,2,3,4), has fought long and hard over the years to secure the proper role of fire in our environment. Through such private research, the southern plantations have had considerable impact on wildlife management as a profession, and bobwhite quail management in the South in particular.

Perhaps the optimum period in the life of southern quail plantations as an entity began to decline after World War II. Changing social and economic conditions made it difficult to put together new plantations in more desirable locations. The old, established properties have begun to disappear as shooting preserves as death or inflated land values and ever-increasing taxation whittle away at them.

An interesting management phenomenon has occurred over the years that in part has led to the loss of certain properties as shooting plantations. The pioneer owner generally had a well-developed esthetic sense. As timber stumpage prices were very low until World War II, most owners preferred to retain and encourage all timber. The timber volumes increased until these properties became woodland plantations, some with very high timber values (5). Consequently many fine plantations have passed into the hands of commercial timber-utilization companies and are thus lost from the ranks of private shooting lands.

While there is usually an attempt by the timber concerns to maintain quail shooting, at least in part, it is never very satisfactory in the traditional sense as quail management values become secondary to commercial timber values. Some of the finest southern plantations are now nothing more than land owned by commercial timber companies, with the once magnificent stands of old-growth timber gone, generally along with the quail.

Population increases and growth and development have taken their toll also. Florida has lost several fine properties to "progress," and some of the remaining Tallahassee plantations are even now experiencing the threat of absorption by the pressures of a frenzied development boom. Other properties in the South are becoming smaller by division, as heirs seek to each retain part of the old life. Oftentimes the owners of these smaller acreages have less personal wealth and less interest in management for quail, thus concepts of a continuation diminish.

Several attempts have been made to perpetuate certain individual properties by donating them to educational institutions for the purpose of conducting research in a directly related field for the public good. The Ames Plantation in Tennessee and Tall Timbers Plantation near Tallahassee, Florida are examples of once great private shooting preserves that are now serving the public through research on many subjects related to the bobwhite quail and its management. Of course their function as traditional quail plantations has ceased, but hopefully these properties will continue to be managed as an ecosystem that will include a bountiful population of bobwhite quail.

Other excellent plantations, such as Nilo Plantation at Albany, Georgia have, through the generous efforts of their owners, become laboratories for certain research projects conducted by competent biologists on various aspects of bobwhite quail ecology and management.

In summary, the traditional southern bobwhite quail plantations had their beginning as an entity some 100 years ago. Bobwhite quail management largely developed on these properties, scattered throughout the South, and this in turn contributed much to the development of wildlife management as a science in the United States. The success of this management effort can be attributed primarily to the fact that these properties have been privately owned, and their management is free from the pressures of bureaucratic or public control. Increased taxation and the "progress" of growth and development are the major threats to the continuation of these great private shooting preserves, and even today many have passed into history. Regardless of their place in the future, the southern bobwhite quail plantations have made their contribution to all who share the many pleasures derived from the bobwhite quail.

Literature Cited

1. Komarek, E. V., Sr., 1965. Fire Ecology - grasslands and man. Proc. Tall Timbers Fire Ecol. Conf. 4: 169-220.

2. ----- 1967a. Fire - and the ecology of man. Proc. Tall Timbers Fire Ecol. Conf. 6: 143-170.
3. ----- 1967b. The nature of lightning fires. Proc. Calif. Tall Timbers Fire Ecol. Conf., Hobergs, Calif. 5-42.
4. ----- 1971. Effects of Fire on wildlife and range habitats. Proc. Prescribed Burning Symp., USDA Forest Service, Asheville, N. C. 46-52.
5. Prunty, Merle, Jr. 1963. The woodland plantation as a contemporary occupance type in the south. Geogr. Rev. 53(1):1-21.
6. Stoddard, H. L. 1931. The bobwhite quail, its habits, preservation, and increase. Chas. Scribner's Sons, New York. 559
7. Stoddard, H. L., Beadel, H. L., and Komarek, E. V. 1961. The cooperative quail study association. Tall Timbers Research Stat. Tallahassee, Fla.

BOBWHITE QUAIL MANAGEMENT ON STATE CONTROLLED WILDLIFE AREAS

Ralph J. Ellis, Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, Oklahoma City

Introduction

The public's use of bobwhite quail depends upon the presence of the birds and upon access to lands where they are found. Access to state fish and game lands is rarely a problem. However, providing desired quail populations is usually a challenge. The purpose of this report is to discuss what the state fish and game agencies are doing to produce bobwhites on lands they manage.

Techniques

All states known to have bobwhite populations were queried concerning: (1) numbers of acres under their control, (2) numbers of acres under their control inhabited by bobwhite quail, (3) percent of managed land receiving treatment beneficial to bobwhites, (4) kinds of quail management practices in use, (5) numbers of acres in each practice, (6) estimated effect on quail populations of each practice, and (7) plans for future quail management.

Findings and Conclusions

Twenty-five states answered the inquiry (Fig. 1). This included 9 states having so few bobwhite quail that management for this species did not exist or was of a token nature.

The responding states indicated that they controlled 16.9 million total acres of state fish and game lands (Fig. 2). One-third (5.6