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D. Clay Sisson  
*Albany Area Quail Management Project*

H. Lee Stribling  
*Auburn University*

Dan W. Speake  
*Auburn University*

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EFFICIENCY OF POINTING DOGS IN LOCATING NORTHERN BOBWHITE COVEYS

D. Clay Sisson
Albany Area Quail Management Project, c/o Pineland Plantation, Route 1, Box 115, Newton, GA 31770

H. Lee Stribling
Albany Area Quail Management Project, Department of Forestry and Wildlife Science, Auburn University, Auburn, AL 36849

Dan W. Speake
Albany Area Quail Management Project, Department of Forestry and Wildlife Science, Auburn University, Auburn, AL 36849

ABSTRACT

We studied the efficiency of pointing dogs in locating coveys of northern bobwhites (Colinus virginianus) using radiotelemetry from 1992–1997 on 2 private hunting plantations in southwest Georgia. During these 5 hunting seasons, 169 hunts generated data on 838 “encounters” with 254 separate radio-marked coveys. Pointing dogs located 53% of the available coveys, 25% of which were never seen by the hunters due to evasive behavior by the birds. An additional 12% of encountered coveys were seen by the hunters even though they were never located by the dogs. This resulted in the hunters seeing a total of just over half (53%) and shooting into approximately one-third (32%) of the total radio-marked coveys they encountered.

An evaluation of “false pointing” was conducted by examining cases when dogs pointed radio-marked coveys that were never seen by the hunters. Most (58%) of these unproductive points were caused by coveys running away from pointing dogs, but were also attributed to wild flushes (28%) and pointed coveys that held tight and refused to flush (14%).

The percentage of radio-marked coveys seen by hunters was highly variable from day-to-day ($\bar{x} = 53\%$, range $= 0–100\%$), but fairly consistent between years ($\bar{x} = 53\%$, range $= 40–63\%$). Information obtained using pointing dogs appears to be more practical for measuring population trends than it is as a census technique.