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Quail disappearing

WHAT HAPPENED TO BOB WHITE? | LAND EVOLVED INTO POORER COVER FOR THE BIRDS

What ever happened to Bob White? That's the way Rick Jerman, a 68-year-old avid quail hunter from Oklahoma City, began his letter to The Oklahoman.

"Bird dogs and quail have been my favorite past-time," Jerman writes. "I have hunted far western Oklahoma from the Texas border to the Kansas border. Years ago this was one of the most productive quail hunting areas in the country."

"The Black Kettle National Grasslands brought in hunters from all over the country to hunt the bobwhite quail. They were plentiful and it was not unusual to have a limit of 10 by lunch time."

"In the last several years the quail population has dwindled to almost nothing. It is sad to watch bird dogs work, looking for that scent that sends them into that frozen state we call 'on point'."

"Recently my son and I purchased some quail and turned them loose in an area that used to be teeming with wild birds. We returned to hunt the area and for the first time this season our dogs were pointing and retrieving quail. Is this what quail hunting has come to in our state?"

Sadly, at least for this season, it has. It has been a pitiful year for Oklahoma quail hunting. You know it's bad when hunters start writing letters to the editor.

Jerman is not the only hunter moaning the plight of quail. I have received several other e-mails from disgruntled quail hunters with the same question.

A common opinion is that the rising population of deer and turkeys and the declining population of quail is no coincidence.

"For the past 50 years from the northwest to the southwest, I have witnessed a tremendous explosion of turkey and deer," another quail hunter's e-mail stated.

"The turkeys are predators of the (quail) eggs and chicks. The deer have a natural curiosity of the nest on the ground in their grazing areas ... just a theory from a guy who has chased that bird dog and that covey for 50 years."

Jerman and his friends



Bobwhite quail have been difficult to find by Oklahoma hunters this season.

PHOTO PROVIDED BY OKLAHOMA WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT

have made the same observation.

Years ago, in the heyday of quail hunting, every once in a while you would come across a turkey," Jerman writes. "That would be the talk of the day while returning from a hunt."

"In those days you could drive the back road section lines and you wouldn't have to go far before a covey of bobs ran across the road. Now that same scenario is true but instead of bobwhites it is turkeys, flocks of turkeys ..."

"I am not a wildlife biologist but I have spent a good deal of time pursuing bobwhites in my state. We have always had

coyotes, bobcats, possums, hawks, and other predators that take their share of quail, but the quail always survived in good numbers.

"Now that we have added the turkey the survival rate of quail has greatly diminished. When flocks of turkeys roam the prairie do they eat quail eggs or even freshly hatched quail? Do they not compete in the same habitat?"

Turkeys have long been rumored to be the culprit for quail's demise.

Wildlife biologists say there is a connection, but it's not because deer and turkey eat quail chicks and eggs. It's because good deer and turkey

habitat is not necessarily good quail habitat.

The trees that turkeys require for roosting spell trouble for quail, which require brush, briars and tangles to protect them.

Turkeys eating quail chicks have been reported, but are extremely rare, according to wildlife biologists.

Turkey populations have risen and quail are disappearing because the land has slowly evolved into poorer cover for quail and better cover for deer and turkeys.

Meanwhile, quail season remains open in Oklahoma through Feb. 15, if anyone cares.

OFFICIALS SAY QUAIL POPULATIONS CAN REBOUND

Quail populations have been on a downward trend for decades. Urban sprawl plus contemporary farming and ranching practices have changed the land. The vast acres of uninterrupted native grasslands where quail thrive are shrinking.

The prairie is being replaced with new grasses for cattle grazing, houses and trees.

"We've got more (habitat) fragmentation," said Doug Schoeling, quail biologist for the Wildlife Department.

"Deer and turkey can adapt to those habitat changes better than quail. They can go out in a Bermuda grass field and run through it where a quail can't."

"We are losing acres all the time to trees. Trees and quail don't get along a whole lot."

Oklahoma, Kansas and Texas are the top three states left for wild quail hunting, but Oklahoma has boon and bust years.

Oklahoma's quail population is still trying to recover from the drought in 2006 and the floods of 2007, Schoeling said. It will rebound if the weather cooperates, he said.

"It just takes a couple of years of the right rainfall at the right time," he said.

HUNTERS SOUND OFF ON OKLAHOMA'S QUAIL SEASON

"Quail hunting in Oklahoma this season has definitely been disappointing. I went out on opening weekend and a couple of other times to Black Kettle and did see several coveys each trip. However, it took an incredible amount of walking and effort to find the birds we did see." — **McIver of Oklahoma City, president of the Central Oklahoma 89ers Quail Forever Chapter**

"So far quail hunting has been at best, dismal. Coveys are few, far apart and most are small, only six to eight birds. This from a season that appeared like it was going to be a good year. Not only are the birds hard to find because of the dry conditions, but even seeing quail tracks and roosts are rare. This may be the end of the good old days of Oklahoma quail hunting." — **Keith Knipp, quail hunter from Norman**

"As far as my season goes, it has been another down year and each covey found is more of a trophy than any 10-point buck these days. Birds can still be found, but it takes much more dedication than it used to." — **James Dietsch of Oklahoma City, founding chairman of the Central Oklahoma 89ers Quail Forever Chapter**

Bird's future concerns OKC leader

Laura McIver worries about the future of bobwhite quail.

The president of Central Oklahoma 89ers Quail Forever Chapter fears quail may become like the Lesser Prairie Chicken, a bird that is close to going on the Endangered Species list.

"The situation is more critical than people realize," McIver said.

This year's quail hunting season in western Oklahoma has been extremely poor for most hunters.

Similar hunting reports have come from the Texas Panhandle, south Texas and the eastern half of Kansas.

McIver said the only good news has been from western Kansas, where the quail population is up both from last year and from long-term downward trends.

"This is quite possibly due to the tremendous efforts that have been put into the CRP (Conservation Resource Program) in western Kansas," she said.

What's happened to the birds? McIver said it's quite simply the loss of quail habitat and severe fragmentation of what good habitat there is for quail. Contributing factors are the rapid proliferation of red cedar infestation, climate changes, and poor land and livestock management practices, she said.

"Ninety-five percent of Oklahoma is privately owned and without intensive landowner involvement, education and proactive leaders, this situation will not change," McIver said.

"ODWC (Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation) is working hard to revitalize and improve public lands that are currently poor quail habitat and work the land to change it over for better nesting, feeding and ground cover for quail."

"But until the majority of landowners are on board with the same goals, unfortunately I think, quail

populations will continue to decline."

McIver noted that in the Dust Bowl days of the 1930s in Kansas and Oklahoma, there was no quail habitat and no quail. But

conservation efforts

changed that. "So all is not lost, but action is required in order for us to make a difference in the future of bobwhite quail."

OUTDOORS NOTEBOOK

Winter boat show opens Thursday

The 56th annual Oklahoma City Winter Boat Show opens Thursday at State Fair Park. The show, which runs daily through Sunday, will be held in the Cox Pavilion and the Travel and Transportation Building.

Sponsored by the Oklahoma City Boat Dealers Association, the show will feature boats, personal watercraft, ski equipment, four-wheelers, fishing tackle and boating accessories.

Professional bass anglers **Mark Menendez, Kenyon Hill, Brad Hallman and Terry Butcher** will be appearing.

Show hours are 4 p.m. to 9 p.m. on Thursday; noon to 9 p.m. on Friday; 10 a.m. until 9 p.m. on Saturday and 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Sunday.

Tickets are \$7 for adults. Ages 11 and younger receive free admission. On Thursday and Friday only, couples receive \$10 admission.

Discount tickets are available at 7-Eleven stores. For more information, visit www.okboats.com.

TACKLE SHOW AT COX CONVENTION CENTER

After a two-year absence, Oklahoma City is getting a winter tackle show but with a new promoter and at a new location.

The Oklahoma Tackle and Hunting Show will be Friday through Sunday at the Cox Convention Center in downtown Oklahoma City.

The show will include tackle, fishing and hunting guides, gun and knife dealers, a dog show, fishing seminars, a kids' fishing pond, kids' archery shooting, bluegrass music, a wild turkey calling contest, a rattlesnake show and more.

Montgomery Productions of Adair, which has put on tackle shows in the Tulsa area for several years, has organized the Oklahoma City show.

Trophy bass guide **Chuck Justice**, Lake Eufaula crappie guide **Todd Huckabee**, pro bass angler **Mike Delvisco** and catfish angler **Danny King** will be conducting fishing seminars.

Former Tampa Bay pitcher **Jim Morris**, whose story was featured in the Disney movie "The Rookie" will be signing autographs Saturday.

Show hours are Friday from noon until 9 p.m.; Saturday from 10 a.m. until 9 p.m.; and Sunday from 10 a.m. until 6 p.m.

Admission is \$10 for adults, \$3 for ages 6 through 12 and free admission for ages 5 and younger.

For more information, visit www.oktackleand-huntingshow.com.

DUCKS UNLIMITED BANQUET IN EDMOND

Edmond Ducks Unlimited is having its annual fundraising banquet Feb. 5 at the Oak Tree Country Club.

Doors open at 6 p.m. with dinner being served at 6:30 p.m.

Tickets are \$60 for singles, \$75 for couples and \$15 for greenwings. A corporate table is \$550 and a sponsor couple costs \$300.

To reserve tickets, call (405) 282-8313. Register by Friday for a chance to win a prize.

WOW CHAPTER ORGANIZING

An Oklahoma chapter of DIVA ... WOW (Women Outdoors Worldwide) is forming.

An organizational meeting for the chapter is scheduled Saturday at H&H Gun Range in Oklahoma City from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m.

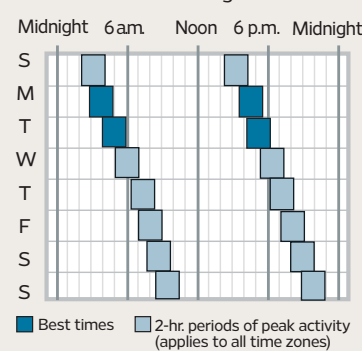
DIVA membership is open to women of any age who are interested in discovering their outdoor passion.

SHE Outdoor Apparel and Rawhide, an Oklahoma City western store, will be displaying products.

For information on the organization, visit divawow.org.

Solar-lunar table

Some people think fishing and hunting are better at these times because of the activity patterns of fish and game animals:



Source: U.S. Naval Observatory

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