



# The Elusive "Blob"

By Kelsey Davis

"Bob-white! Bob-white!" I heard the familiar sound of a northern bobwhite (*Colinus virginianus*) as I was driving along my trap route in early April, but it was louder than usual. So I decided to put the truck in reverse and look for the bird to see if I could get a good picture of him calling.



I am currently a graduate student conducting a Master's project on northern

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bobwhites and scaled (or blue) quail in South Texas. I am studying the impacts of the Eagle Ford Shale exploration on these species. At the time, I was busy trapping and attaching radio-collars to quail so I could obtain their locations via radio-telemetry throughout the summer. I will use these data to assess space use, survival, nest success, and abundance of quail in relation to intense oil-and-gas activity. This spring was my first working with these species, so I was eager to get some photos to use for my future scientific posters, papers, presentations, etc.

Immediately after pulling over, I spotted the suspected bobwhite perched on the branch of a tall mesquite about 25 yards from the road. After focusing my camera on him, I realized there was something different about him. He had a long crest, an off-white mask, and a scaled pattern on his chest. I started snapping as many photos as I could, thinking I was photographing a different species or something really weird. After he hopped from his perch, I remembered an excerpt I had read about bobwhite/blue quail hybrids or “blobs”. This is what I had been photographing! He had some attributes of a bobwhite (left below) and some of a blue quail (right below); I didn’t actually know what they looked like until then.



A poster for the South Texas Quail Coalition event. At the top is the logo for the South Texas Quail Coalition, featuring a quail and the text "South Texas Chapter of Quail Coalition" and "QUAIL COALITION SOUTH TEXAS". Below the logo is the text "SAVE THE DATE" followed by "SATURDAY AUGUST 29, 2015" and "KINGSVILLE, TX". The poster lists activities: "THE DRILL: CLASSIC COCKTAILS, REGIONAL CUISINE, LIVE &amp; SILENT AUCTION, RAFFLE TICKETS" and "THE DETAILS: J.K. NORTHWAY COLISEUM, SOUTH 6TH STREET, DOORS OPEN @ 5:30 PM, DINNER @ 7:00 PM". At the bottom, there is a "Purchase Tickets" button and the website "www.southtexasquailcoalition.org".

### Student Highlight



### Andrea Bruno Master's Candidate

*Hometown:* Winthrop, Massachusetts

*Advisor:* Dr. Leonard Brennan

*Project:* Andrea is monitoring northern bobwhite density and vegetation response to experimental grazing regimes on the East Foundation in South Texas.

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After confirming with the biologist of the ranch I was working on that the quail was indeed a blob, I did a little research. Rollins stated that blobs are infertile and can either be a cross between a bobwhite cock and a blue hen, or a blue cock and a bobwhite hen. According to Rollins, blobs occur where both species' ranges overlap—generally between the Pecos River and U.S. Highway 83 in Texas. Rollins also reported that blobs are rare; on a ranch in Zapata County, about 1 in 1000 quail harvested by hunters was a blob. After trapping and banding was conducted on the ranch, blobs were estimated to occur at ratios of about 70 in 1000 quail.

Return trips to the tall mesquite this year to trap or observe the blob have been to no avail. He remains the only one of his kind I have seen in the area so far. Perhaps “blob” isn't the best nickname to describe such a rare and mysterious creature. How about blue-white? Bob-blue? Any other suggestions?

To my knowledge, no one has ever observed or recorded a blob's vocalizations. I may have already ruined the surprise, but a male blob's reproduction call is the same as a bobwhite's (“bob-white”). I heard the blob make this call 5 or 6 times at noon from his perch before he became wary of my camera lens. I didn't know much about blobs at the time or I would've taken a video!



Further reading:



<http://www.ckwri.tamuk.edu/research-programs/richard-m-kleberg-ir-center-for-quail-research>

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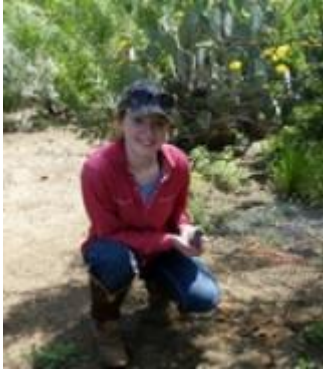
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[Rollins, D. 2001. Wildlife by design. Livestock Weekly. 22 February 2001.](#)



**About the Author:** Kelsey Davis is from Taylor, TX. Her interest in the outdoors began when she was a kid exploring the Ozark Mountains of Arkansas with her brothers. She is currently a Master's student at Texas A&M-Kingsville studying the impacts of the Eagle Ford Shale exploration on bobwhite and scaled quail under Dr. Eric Grahmann and Dr. Fidel Hernández. Kelsey plans to become a wildlife biologist and own a little piece of land one day.