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CKWRI Quail eNews

News from the Richard M. Kleberg, Jr. Center for Quail Research at the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute

Richard M. Kleberg, Jr. Center for Quail Research
Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute
CKWRI Quail eNews - July/August 2012

Special Announcement:

The South Texas Chapter of the Quail Coalition
cordially invites you to the
3rd Annual
Banquet Dinner and Fundraising Auctions

August 25th, 2012
J. K. Northway Coliseum
Kingsville, Tx

Doors open at 5:30 PM
Dinner served at 7:00 PM

Contact Bill Rauch (361) 527-2168,
Ronnie Howard (361) 568-3636, or
Beth Howard (979) 204-3329
for more information.



Providing the science
behind quail
conservation and
management.

July/August 2012

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CAUTIOUSLY OPTIMISTIC, OPTIMISTICALLY CAUTIOUS

Dr. Leonard A. Brennan

C.C. Charlie Winn Endowed Chair

Richard M. Kleberg, Jr. Center for Quail Research
Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute
Texas A&M University - Kingsville

The 2012 quail nesting season in South Texas got off to a great start because of some late winter and early spring rains. The month of June was extremely hot and dry. Those tough conditions probably curtailed a good bit of nesting activity. As I type this—in mid-July—we have had two weeks of unsettled weather with frequent but widely scattered storm cells throughout South Texas. Technically, we are still enduring drought conditions. Biologically, however, we received enough rain to get the quail production engine started, and keep it running, in at least some places. Thus, we have a basis for some cautious optimism this coming hunting season.

The widespread and scattered patterns of rainfall this summer, and extremely low quail numbers due to virtually no production on most ranches in 2011, means that fall and winter coveys will also be widely scattered during the upcoming hunting season. This is because we need to have at least two consecutive years of average to above-average rainfall for the birds to make a full recovery. Simply put, it is biologically impossible for quail numbers to swing from extremely low to very high levels with only one summer of production.

Based on these circumstances, South Texas quail hunters can expect to have hunts this winter that run hot and cold. By hot and cold, I don't mean warm days and then cool ones. What I mean is that hunters can probably expect to find three or four coveys during an hour of hunting and then find few or no birds during the next hour to hour and a half of hunting, even within the same pasture and in excellent habitat. We saw this kind of situation during the 2010-2011 hunting season. Ecologically, what it means is that the quail have simply been unable to colonize all of the usable habitat space after just one year of recovery.

We are fortunate the La Niña conditions that brought us the deadly heat and drought of 2011 have returned to a "neutral" phase in the Southern Oscillation of the Pacific Ocean. It is hard to imagine that the dynamics of ocean currents thousands of miles to the west can

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CKWRI Quail eNews:

**Winner of the Outstanding
Electronic Media
Publication Award from the
Texas Chapter of The
Wildlife Society, February
2011.**



have such an effect on quail production in South Texas, but they do. The cumulative amount of precipitation from April to August that falls on a landscape of high-quality habitat explains more than 90% of the annual variation in South Texas bobwhite production. This gives a whole new perspective to the phrase “just add water”!

[The National Climate Prediction Center](#) states that *[current El Niño Southern Oscillation or ENSO] “...observations are consistent with ENSO-neutral, but reflect a likely progression towards El Niño.”* The prediction is that we may enter an El Niño phase of ENSO, perhaps by this September or even sooner. If this happens, it means that we have a great chance of getting above-average winter and spring rainfall in 2013. If so, then we will have the conditions we that we desperately need for a full quail population recovery in South Texas.

THE AUSTIN QUAIL SUMMIT

On 5 June 2012, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department hosted a joint, all-day meeting of the Resident Upland Game Bird Advisory Committee and the members of the Texas Quail Roundtable. The meeting was chaired by Mr. Carter Smith, Executive Director of TPWD, and attended by several Commissioners. This is the first time such a meeting has been held in the state. Private landowners, members of the Quail Coalition, researchers from academia, and many other stakeholders were in attendance, along with a cadre of TPWD biologists and administrators. One of the primary foci of the meeting was to address the implementation of “quail focal areas” in Texas that are being organized in conjunction with the [National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative](#). With the past kerfuffle about shortening the quail hunting season or reducing the quail bag limit now out of the way, TPWD has made the implementation of focal areas for quail habitat management a top priority. And rightfully so. For a complete set of minutes from this meeting please click [here](#).

The Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute at Texas A&M University – Kingsville is the leading wildlife research organization in Texas and one of the finest in the nation. Its mission is to provide science-based information for enhancing the conservation and management of wildlife in South Texas and related environments.

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The mission of the Richard M. Kleberg, Jr. Center for Quail Research is to develop a scientific basis for the sustainable management and harvest of wild quail populations throughout South Texas and elsewhere.



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