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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 - August/September 2011

Greetings:

Welcome to the August 2011 issue of CKWRI Quail eNews. In this issue, [Dr. Joseph Sands](#) provides commentary on the past 7 years working with bobwhites at CKWRI. This is Joseph's last eBlast. In October, [Katherine Miller](#) will take over CKWRI Quail eNews duties.

From Beaver to Javelina. A South Texas Odyssey

Joseph Sands, Ph.D.

Leaving the Umpqua

One afternoon in March of 2004, I received an email from Dr. Lenny Brennan at Texas A&M University-Kingsville, asking me if I was still interested in doing a Master's project on northern bobwhite. After some consideration and consultation with my wife, Jessica, I responded "yes", but that first I would have to finish up my degree at Oregon State University (home of the Beavers). As some readers may know, I grew up in southwestern Oregon, at the junction of the Coast Range, Cascade foothills, and Siskiyou Mountains. My portion of Southwestern Oregon, the Umpqua Valley, is known more for its abundance of Douglas-fir, huckleberries, and salmon than it's upland game birds. There are however, plenty of ruffed grouse, sooty (blue) grouse, California quail and mountain quail, all of which I pursued relentlessly as a teenager.

Days Creek is a town of five hundred with a store, a high school, and a post office. Like most small western Oregon towns it is a mix of loggers, hippies, farmers, and ranchers. It rains from November to May. A big rattlesnake is 2 feet long. Douglas firs can be more than 5 feet across. The only bobwhites to be found were located in a pen in our backyard. We trained our dogs with them occasionally, but mostly just fed them. I had never seen a wild bobwhite, I had never been to Texas, I had never lived more than 2 ½ hours

*Providing the science
behind quail
conservation and
management.*

August/September 2011

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[Leonard A. Brennan](#)
C.C. "Charlie" Winn Endowed
Chair for Quail Research

away from my hometown of Days Creek, I had never worn a pair of cowboy boots, and I definitely had never seen a javelina. Needless to say, the move to Texas was going to be an adventure.



The southwestern Oregon landscape differs a bit from what I would encounter in South Texas. Photo by Kevin Sands, near Tiller, Oregon.

Miles and Miles of Texas

Day 1 through California was uneventful. Day 2 through Arizona and New Mexico were too. My first night in Texas was spent in Van Horne listening to a thunderstorm, and my first full day in Texas was spent at a truck stop on I-10 outside of Balmorra waiting for a mechanic to drive from Midland to repair the old and long neglected U-Haul I had rented. The second night I spent in Kerrville as a result of the delay in Balmorra, and finally made it to Kingsville by 6 pm after waiting for another repair job in Boerne. A friend and I unloaded the U-Haul in silence, wondering how some place could be so hot and humid. It was an inauspicious start to say the least.

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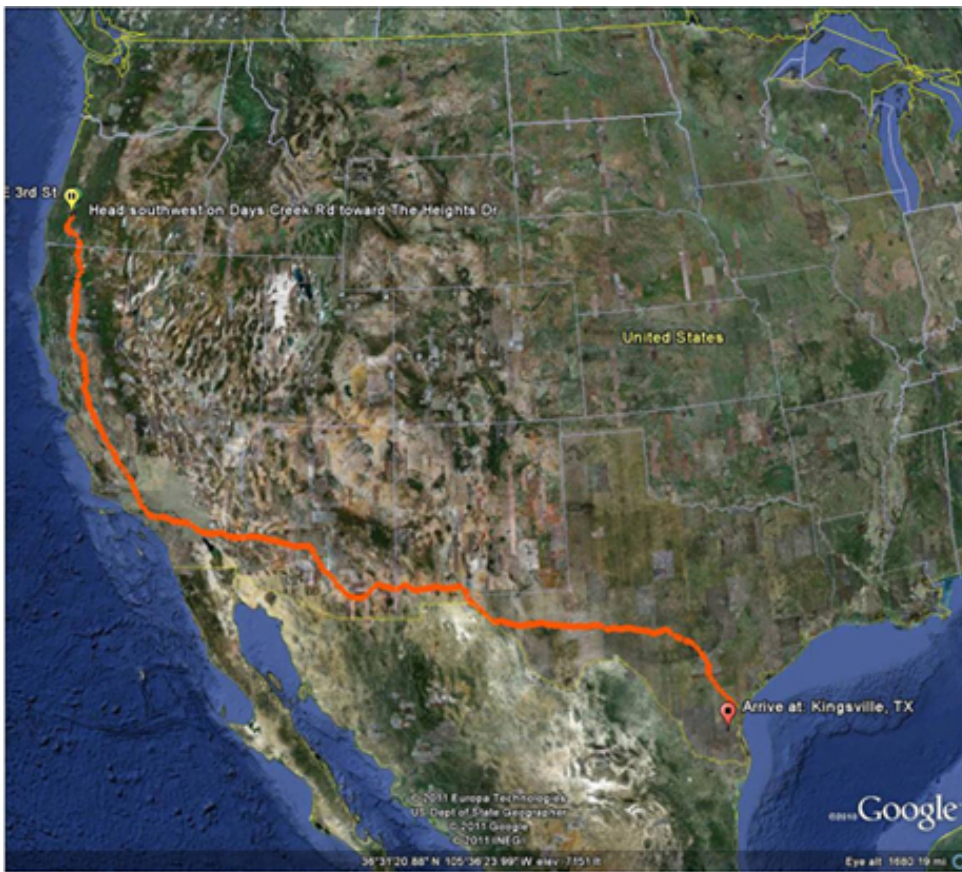
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The route from Days Creek, Oregon to Kingsville, Texas: 2,282 miles.

Bobwhites by Land and Air

I spent the first 3 summers of my time in Texas tracking bobwhites on the Chaparral Wildlife Management Area. The objective of the project was to investigate the impacts of exotic grasses on bobwhite habitat use during the breeding season. At the end of the study the results seem to be relatively straightforward: bobwhite hens were more than happy to nest in buffelgrass, but adult birds and birds with broods tended to avoid buffelgrass patches for foraging purposes. As buffelgrass becomes more abundant on an area, its presence is often associated with decreased biodiversity (e.g., fewer forbs and arthropods for quail), and as the results of another CKWRI researcher Aron Flanders illustrated, a decreased abundance (-50%) of quail. I think that the exotic grass problem represents one of the most significant challenges that bobwhite managers in South Texas will face in the coming years, especially if droughty weather patterns remain, as exotic grasses tend to be more drought tolerant than many of the native grasses.

After finishing the exotic grass project I shifted gears to a topic that lay very close to my heart: the impacts of harvest on bobwhite population dynamics. From 2006-2009 I spent the vast majority of my time working with two other students (Matthew Schnupp and Trent Teinert) surveying bobwhite population densities, collecting harvest data, and building a model to evaluate the long-term impacts of harvest on bobwhite populations in South Texas. We surveyed bobwhites from a helicopter counting coveys as they flushed. The modeling process was a little less invigorating though no less challenging, but eventually we built a model that simulated a hunted bobwhite population on a piece of property in South Texas. The modeling results suggested that less can be more. Over a 100 year simulated timeframe, an annual harvest of 20% tended to minimize the probability of population extinction and also optimized yield of bobwhites. This was because at the 20% rate, simulated harvest drew bobwhites from a much larger pool of birds than was available at higher harvest rates such as a 30% rate.

The point here of bringing these topics up isn't to highlight the work that I've done personally but to make the point that both of these topics (habitat and harvest) have broad implications for bobwhite management. Until proven otherwise, habitat, or lack thereof remains the major factor in promoting bobwhite population viability. There does not appear to be any viable way to circumvent this basic necessity. That said, harvest management is also important especially when considering a fragmented habitat matrix where bobwhite populations are isolated from each other. Integrating these two components into the bobwhite management has potential to maximize the efficiency of rangewide bobwhite conservation efforts or optimize yields on individual properties.

In all I spent 7+ years in Kingsville and had the opportunity to work a lot of great people and make a lot of great friends. I own a pair of cowboy boots now, and have seen countless javelinas. I don't get too excited over a 4 foot rattler anymore either; and it isn't hot out until the temp hits 100. I have my own bird dog now and will never forget the time and place where I killed my first bobwhite, and when my dog had his first point. There is nowhere else I'd rather be than walking through good quail country, legs tired and mouth dry, but hoping for a point, and waiting for a flush. There is no substitute for good bird dogs or the landscapes that keep quail populations viable. Good quail country is unbeatable, and the moments this country provides rest timeless in memory. Quail have given me a lot both professionally and personally, I hope that I can give something back.

Do You Know the Way to Santa Fe?

I suppose one of the few things I am certain of besides the necessity of habitat for quail is that life takes you around a lot of different bends. I never thought I would have the opportunity to live in Texas, and I didn't anticipate moving away this soon. The time has come however. We are leaving Texas and heading west again, to New Mexico. A new adventure beckons. I accepted a position as the Game Bird Programs Manager with New Mexico Department of Game and Fish in July and began work there on September 6. I have really enjoyed my time at CKWRI, even the trials and tribulations that come with the territory of being a graduate student. This opportunity has been one of the greatest of my life and I am lucky to have been a part of the CKWRI family.

Before I conclude I must mention a few of the top notch professionals and friends of quail that I've met over the years here who have given me a great deal of knowledge, made my life easier and just been a heck of a lot of fun to get to know and work with. Thanks to: Leonard Brennan, Fidel Hernández, Stephen DeMaso, Fred Bryant, Matthew Schnupp, Trent Teinert, Randy DeYoung, David Hewitt, Bart Ballard, Tim Fulbright, Bill Kuvlesky, Erin Wehland, Andrew Tri, Michael C. Buelow, Don Kahl Jr., Samantha Wisniewski, Casey Phillips, Damon Williford, Mike Rader, Aaron Tjelmeland, Chris Reopelle, Yolanda Ballard, Rebecca Trant and the entire CKWRI support staff, Robert Perez, Jim Gallagher, Chip Ruthven, Dale Rollins, Ronnie Howard, Bill Rauch, and Danny Pierce. Thank you all very much for your guidance, friendship, and support. See you soon.

*So get to the closet, darlin'
Where all your coats are hung
We're gonna go get a little
Mountain air in our lungs*

*We can make the border
Before the break of day
Do you know the way to Santa Fe?*

-Phil Pritchett

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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.

