



Cautiously Optimistic: A Quail Nesting Outlook

By: Eric Grahmann, Fred Bryant, Lenny Brennan, and Fidel Hernandez

At the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute, we pride ourselves in providing information and management recommendations to wildlife enthusiasts based on sound science. This certainly includes information on quail. As scientists, it is our job to produce unbiased research results even when the results are unanticipated or unpalatable. As factual as we try to be, it may come as a surprise that we have become a little superstitious over the past few years; not in a paranormal sense, but rather a little more cautious about all things pertaining to rainfall and quail season predictions. Since 2008 (when conditions really became dry and quail suffered), we find ourselves refusing to look at the radar when storms approach for fear they will dissipate, or even speak of positive quail season predictions without “knocking on wood” shortly afterwards. So, against our better judgement, we would like to provide some good news on the quail nesting season this year from 8 graduate students currently in the field conducting their radio-telemetry studies and from our observations in the field thus far (as of July 1st). Our disclaimer: after writing this article, if anything goes awry between now and quail season, direct

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your frustration to Fred Bryant since he asked us to put this together!

Nesting Outlook

Coastal Texas (From correspondence with ranchers and 1 project, Beeville/Goliad)

Outlook: Fair to Excellent (depending on topography)

Conditions are exceptionally green across the Coastal Prairie. Chicks have been seen as early as June 15th, and broods have been routinely spotted. In some flat and lowland areas, initial nests may have been flooded by heavy rainfall; however this is just speculation given we have not directly observed a flooded nest. Birds thought to have had previous nest failures are currently renesting.

Coastal Sand Sheet (From correspondence with ranchers and 2 projects, Falfurrias and Hebbronville)



Fantastic bobwhite habitat and nesting conditions. Photo of the Coast Sand Sheet taken in July 2015



Student Highlight



John Edwards
Ph.D Candidate

Hometown: Chichaska, Ok

Advisor: Dr. Fidel Hernandez

Project: John is looking at habitat fragmentation, climate, and predators as factors in the Northern bobwhite decline.

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Outlook: Excellent

Conditions are exceptionally green across the sand sheet. We are currently monitoring >40 hens and 85% have attempted to nest. The first nest was found on April 18th. Observed nest success has ranged from 30 to 41% (of 31 and 40 nests on 2 separate projects). Currently, hens that have had unsuccessful nests are renesting. Clutches tend to be larger than average and 2 nests have been found with 26 eggs (this ties the all-time record for South Texas). In one of these nests, 23 of the eggs hatched. Researchers and land managers are routinely flushing large groups of chicks that fly quite well. Many are large and resemble adults in size. Nests are being discovered weekly.

Mid South Texas Plains (From correspondence with ranchers and 1 project, La Salle County)

Outlook: Good to Excellent

Conditions have been green across this area of South Texas. Preliminary nest success for bobwhites has been around 50% from a small sample of nests (monitoring bobwhites around a cultivated field). Clutch size has been above average at 16 eggs/nest, and has ranged to 20. The earliest nest was found on May 9th. On this particular study site, 3-4 week old chicks are being seen. On other ranches in the area, landowners are reporting good numbers of broods.

Northern South Texas Plains (From correspondence with ranchers and 1 project, Live Oak and Karnes Counties)

Outlook: Good to Excellent

Conditions have been green across this area of



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South Texas. Seventy-four percent of 31 hens have attempted to nest. The first nest was found on May 3rd. Nest success is 30% (10 of 30 nests) thus far, and clutch sizes have been above average. Clutches have averaged 15 eggs. A nest was found with 24 eggs. A few nests have been flooded due to a single 5-inch rainfall event in early June. Hens with previously failed nests are on their second clutches. We expect a handful of hens to raise 2 broods and most others to renest this year. Numerous broods have been spotted in the area.

Western South Texas Plains (From correspondence with ranchers and 2 projects in Carrizo Springs and La Pryor)

Outlook: Excellent

Conditions have been exceptionally green across the Western Rio Grande Plains and all indications are that the nesting season should be extended and favorable for bobwhites and blue quail. So far, nest success has averaged 57% for bobwhites and 100% for blues. All bobwhites (42 hens) and 50% of blue quail (20 hens) have attempted to incubate at least 1 clutch. Numerous broods of both species have been seen ranging from 3 to 23 chicks and have averaged around 10 chicks.





Great blue quail habitat and nesting conditions. Photo taken in the Western Rio Grande Plains in July 2015.

Southern Edwards Plateau (Real and Edwards County Projects)

Outlook: Good to Excellent

Conditions are exceptionally green. Montezuma quail and bobwhite chicks have been observed as early as June 2nd.



Great Montezuma and bobwhite quail habitat in the Edwards Plateau. Photo taken during June 2015.

West Texas (From observation and correspondence

with folks from Sul Ross)

Outlook: Good to Excellent

Rangeland conditions range from average to exceptionally green for this time of year. Scaled and Gambel's quail chicks have been seen since the beginning of June. Monitored hens with previously failed nests are currently on their second nesting attempts.

Overall, the nesting season has been favorable for quail across the state. We are hopeful that the upcoming hunting season will reflect this year's positive nesting conditions. Things are looking up (knock on wood)!