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A HUNTING REPORT FROM THE LAST 13 YEARS IN SOUTH TEXAS

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INTRODUCTION

During 2001, the Richard M. Kleberg, Jr. Center for Quail Research developed the South Texas Quail Associates Program (QAP) as a collaborative effort among ranchers, hunters, and biologists concerned about the quail populations in South Texas. We are presenting a report that will include data from the 2013-2014 hunting season, together with long-term data that have helped us understand quail population dynamics in South Texas.

METHODS

Data Collection and Analysis

QAP members that were willing to provide data on their quail populations received a kit that included guidelines for data collection. Specifically we were interested in quail age and sex (by wing and plumage characteristics) and mass (collected with a portable spring scale). We also requested information on coveys encountered and hours hunted to determine coveys/hr.

RESULTS

Northern bobwhite populations in South Texas: what hasn't changed?

From 2001-2014 we collected more than 135,000 hunter-harvested bobwhites. Over that time, average sex ratio (Figure 1) and mass (Figure 2) of northern bobwhites across South Texas has experienced very little change. The average percent of male bobwhites in the 2013-2014 hunting season was 52.4%. Average weights of northern bobwhite across properties during the 2013-2014 hunting season ranged from 150 to 165 grams.

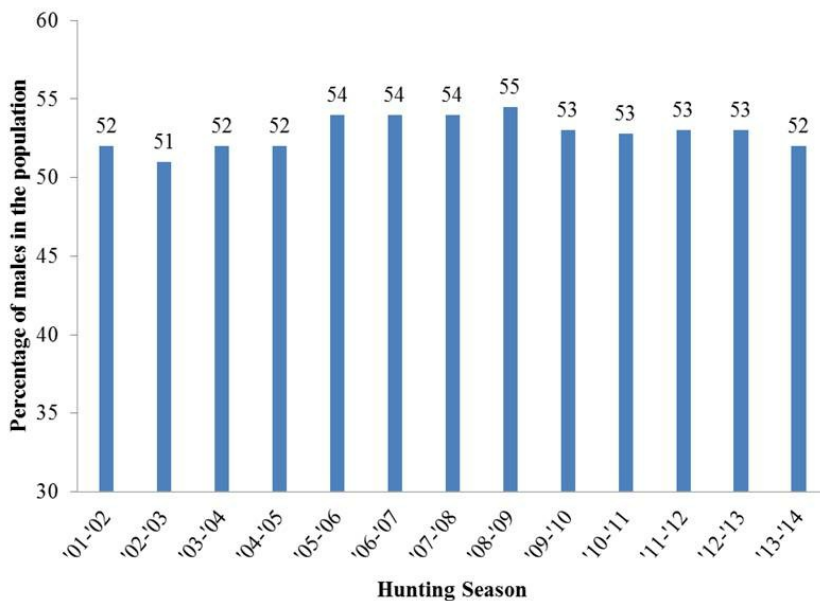


Figure 1 Average sex ratios of hunter-harvested northern bobwhites in southern Texas, 2001-2014.

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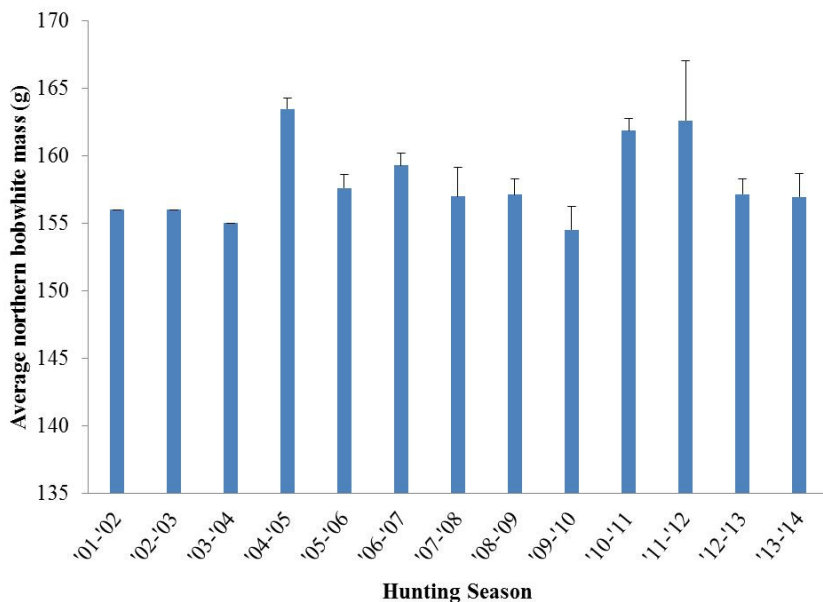


Figure 2 Average mass of hunter-harvested northern bobwhites in southern Texas, 2001-2014.

What has changed?

In contrast to the sex ratio and mass averages over time, mean annual productivity of northern bobwhite populations in South Texas varied dramatically, from a low of 0.94 juvenile: adult ratio in the winter of 2005-2006 to a 8.49 juvenile: adult ratio in the winter of 2007-2008. This winter's mean age ratio was $3.27 \pm 1.97 SD$ (Figure 3).

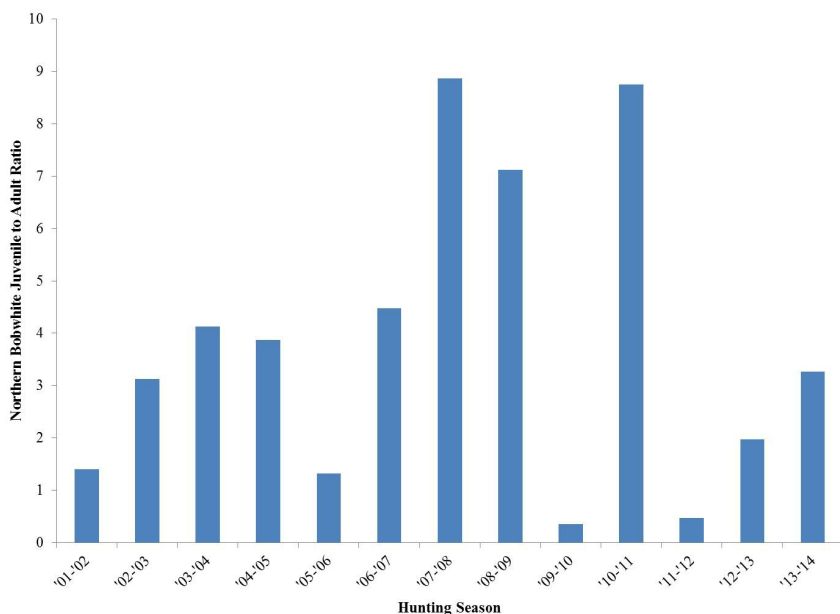


Figure 3 Average annual productivity (based on juvenile-adult age ratios) of bobwhite populations in southern Texas, 2001-2013.

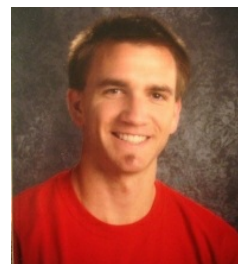
Rainfall in South Texas varies from wet years to drought years. Texas experienced a drought in 2001, followed by exceptionally wet years (2002-2005). 2005 was another dry year. Occasionally southern Texas experiences years where moderate rainfall occurs in certain areas but is sparse in others, such as the case in 2006. Southern Texas experienced another wet year in 2007, and while the winter was dry, Hurricane Dolly brought more rainfall to the region in July of 2008. Beginning in October of 2008, a severe drought hit Texas and lasted into 2010. Rainfall in 2010 may partly explain the increase in productivity in 2010, and the resulting high juvenile: adult ratio in the winter of 2010-2011. Unfortunately, rain was severely limited in the summer of 2011, which may in part explain the decrease in productivity in the winter of 2011-2012. Rainfall in late spring and early summer of 2012 was a boon for the quail habitat across southern Texas, and ranches resumed their hunting, although some hunted at reduced levels. The additional rains of 2013 boosted the quail population more, and productivity improved. This also allowed ranches to hunt at higher levels than the last 2 years.

Spring and summer rainfall is critical for northern bobwhites, as it stimulates plant growth for nesting cover and food, thus rainfall responsible for variation in northern bobwhite productivity.

Results by Ranch

Biologists, landowners, and hunters watched the northern bobwhite population through the summer and fall of 2013. Most ranches reported finding more coveys in 2013, compared to 2011

Student Highlight



Casey Cain

Hometown: Lincoln, NE

Advisor: Dr. Leonard Brennan

Project: Casey will be radio-tracking northern bobwhite quail to gauge their response to brush management in two plots: one historically managed for quail and one being transitioned to it.

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and 2012, and hunting improved. The data represents 8 ranches that provided us with wing data for the winter of 2013-2014.

Ranch	Age Ratio (J/A)	Sex Ratio (M/F)	Mass	Sample Size
A	3.70	0.97	150.30	75
B	3.24	1.40	154.64	157
C	7.09	1.04	159.47	186
D	1.60	2.00	160.90	39
E	4.90	1.03	153.55	1100
F	1.70	1.20	165.21	186
G	1.20	2.70	158.50	11
H	4.40	1.24	150.20	97
Average	3.48	1.45	156.60	

What does this mean for the upcoming quail season?

Our cumulative summer (April-August) rainfall was 23.90 cm. Certainly some ranches had more rain, some had less, but regression allows us to predict the productivity from the rainfall. This means you can expect J:A ratios in the range of 4:1 to 6:1, and an excellent hunting season. Quail are a boom and bust species, and in periods of drought we will see numbers drop again, but right now, productivity is on the upswing!

Continuing Research

Quail will be collected again during the 2014-2015 hunting season. If you wish to learn more about the Quail Associates Program at Caesar Kleberg, please contact Katherine Miller (katherine.miller@students.tamuk.edu) or Casey Cain (casey.cain@students.tamuk.edu). Thank you for your support!

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