

Texas Books on Texas Quails

ARTICLE BY LEONARD A. BRENNAN

Ten books have been published on quails in Texas which is far more than the number of books on quails from any other state. Two books on bobwhites have been published from Florida while a lone book on bobwhites was published in Illinois. Texas is clearly the leading state when it comes to quail publications, which illustrates the important role quail play in Texas wildlife culture and economy.

The purpose of this article is to share a set of thumbnail sketches on the 10 Texas based books, along with context about how each contributes to our ongoing quest for knowledge about these game birds native to the Lone Star State.

1. *Principal Game Birds and Mammals of Texas* (1945). Texas Parks Wildlife and Oyster Commission. Von Boeckmann-Jones. Austin. Out of print. Available from Abebooks.com.

This book is ground zero when it comes to contemporary wildlife science in Texas. Although information on all four species of Texas quails represents a relatively small portion of this book, the accounts contain historical information that is not available anywhere else today. For example, two of the fold-out onion skin paper range maps of scaled quail and Montezuma quail show both the former and current geographic distributions of these quails in Texas. This is essentially the only source for this information in the past 80 years.

2. *Bobwhites in the Rio Grande Plain of Texas*. (1984). Val Lehmann. Texas A&M University Press, College Station. Out of print. Available from Abebooks.com.

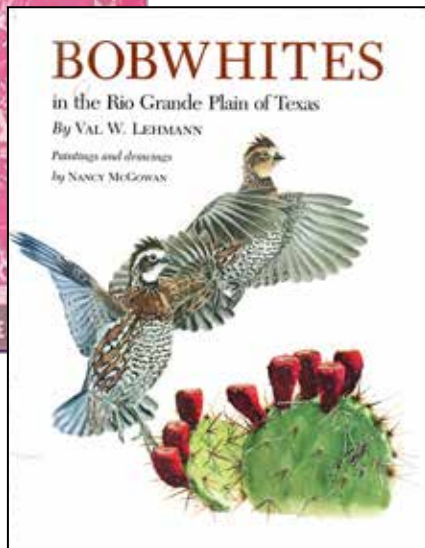
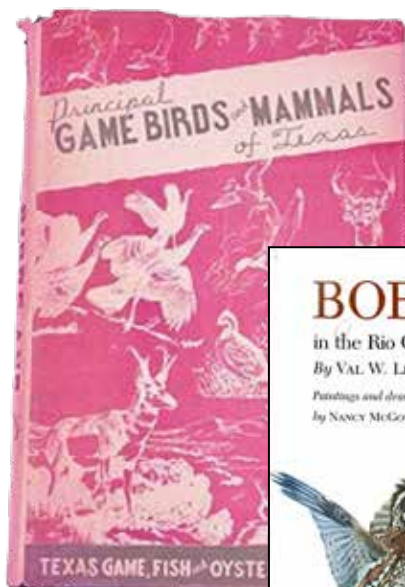
Bobwhites on the Rio Grande Plains of Texas represents nearly four decades of data collection and perspectives from Val Lehmann, the first professional wildlife biologist hired by the King Ranch. It is a sprawling tome that contains 45 chapters, 11 appendices, a substantial literature cited section and a complete index.

The information in this book was collected well before the advent of radiotelemetry, but it remains especially useful. For example, the data on bobwhite movements and changes in covey membership based on classic banding returns have been further supported by numerous telemetry studies. The information on the minimal impact of predator control has been further supported by several contemporary studies.

3. *Beef, Brush and Bobwhites: Quail Management in Cattle Country. I*. (1986). Fred S. Guthery. Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Institute Press. Kingsville. Out of print. Available from Abebooks.com.

Fred Guthery arrived as a professor in South Texas whose charge was to study bobwhites right around the time Lehmann's tome appeared. Dr. Guthery responded to this intimidating situation by writing a brief but complete practical management manual that could easily be instituted by ranchers and bobwhite managers in South Texas. A





6. *Texas Quails: Ecology and Management. I.* (2007). Edited by Leonard A. Brennan. Texas A&M University Press. College Station.

One of the things that fascinated me about the Texas quail world was how biologists, managers and even researchers often talked right past each other even on the same topic. After a couple of years, it dawned on me why this was happening. Texas is a huge state. It has up to 10 different ecological regions ranging from the Piney Woods, to South Texas Brush Country to the Trans-Pecos to the Rolling Plains. Bobwhites and scaled quail can exist and even thrive in many different habitat configurations across these diverse ecological regions.

Thus, I imagined and then proposed a book that was centered around how quails did---or didn't function---in the different ecological regions of Texas. This is the first time such a thing had been attempted, which involved tracking down and cajoling the top quail experts in each ecological region to contribute a chapter to this book. The book finishes with a series of chapters on economics and culture of Texas quails.

At more than 450 pages with over 1,100 peer-reviewed literature citations, it is no wonder why no one had attempted such a book. It took five years from the original proposal to publish *Texas Quails*.

This first edition of *Texas Quails* received outstanding publication awards from the Texas Chapter of The Wildlife Society, the National Office of The Wildlife Society and the Texas Section of the Society for Range Management.

testament to the practicality of this book is that many copies ended up on the dashboards of ranch trucks and became sun-bleached and dusty from frequent use in the field.

4. *On Bobwhites.* (2001). Fred S. Guthery. Texas A&M University Press. College Station.

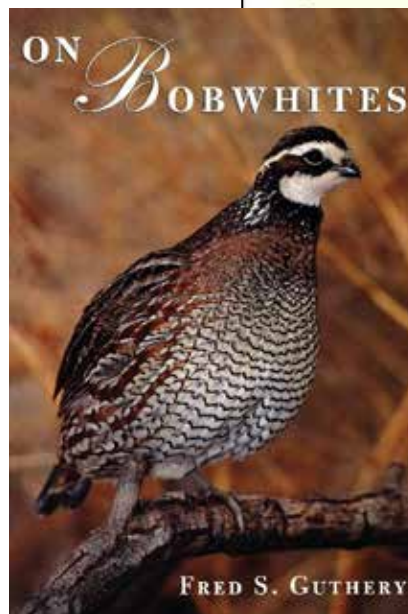
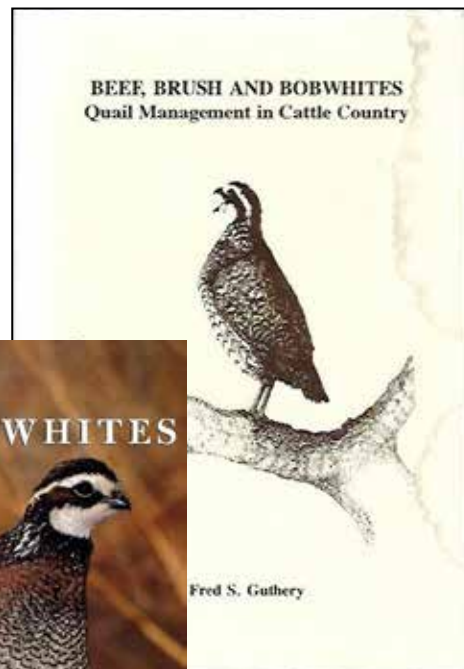
On Bobwhites is an enjoyable armchair read. It explains bobwhite life history and management as a qualitative narrative in a modern natural history context. It is understandable by anyone who passed basic high school biology, which makes such a book accessible to a wide audience.

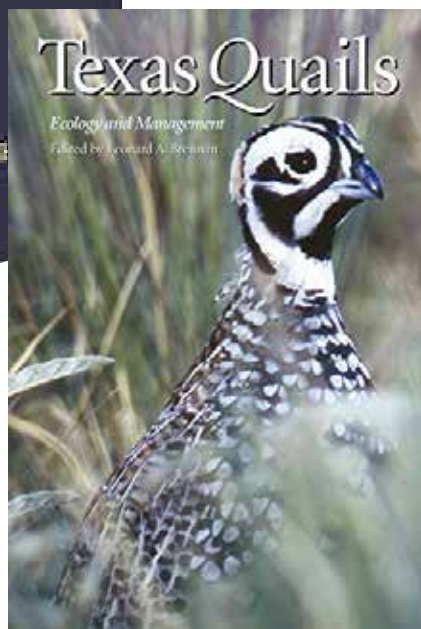
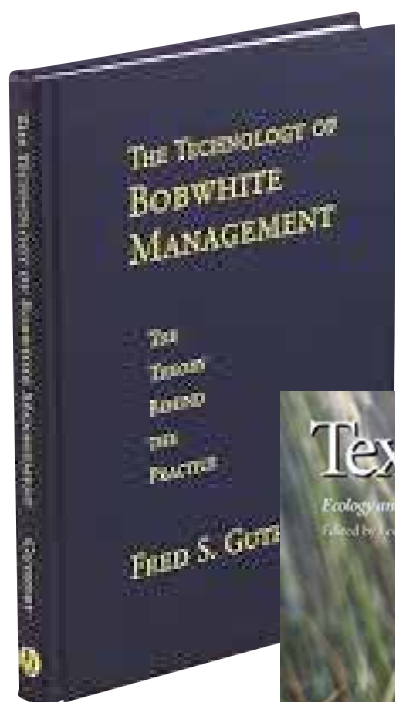
5. *The Technology of Bobwhite Management: The Theory Behind the Practice.* (2002). Fred S. Guthery. Iowa State Press. Ames.

Fred Guthery once told me that this book was a companion volume to *On Bobwhites*. At first, I was skeptical of this claim. These two books could not be more different, at least at first glance. *The Technology of Bobwhite Management* is filled with mathematical equations that describe virtually all aspects of bobwhite population dynamics, habitat, and harvest management. If you have math anxiety, this is probably not a book for you.

However, if *On Bobwhites* is the equivalent of acoustic guitar music, then *The Technology of Bobwhite Management* is an electric guitar with the amplifier turned up to 11 (apologies to Spinal Tap).

After reading both books, I realized that Dr. Guthery was correct. Each tells the same bobwhite story, but in very different ways. The fact that the same person wrote both books and published them from major academic presses is nothing short of remarkable.





7. *Texas Bobwhites: A Guide to Their Foods and Habitat Management*. (2010). Jon A. Larson, et al. University of Texas Press. Austin.

Ellen Randall, who is now on the Advisory Committee for the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Institute, thought that the *Texas Quails* book was fine, but that the black and white photos fell short. She put us in touch with the editors at U.T. Press with the idea of doing a quail book with all color photos, the first of its kind. We brainstormed as a co-author committee and came up with the idea of doing a book with color photos of the major seed foods eaten by bobwhites in Texas. Two of the coauthors--Jon Larson and Tim Fulbright--were excited about taking high resolution color photos of nearly 100 different tiny seeds eaten by bobwhites in Texas.

Chapters on foods and nutrition, habitat management and restoration, exotic grasses and two appendixes are also part of this book.

8. *Beef, Brush, and Bobwhites: Quail Management in Cattle Country. II* (2012). Fidel Hernandez and Fred S. Guthery. Texas A&M University Press. College Station.

Beef, Brush, and Bobwhites is the first Texas quail book to see a second edition. It appeared 26 years after the first edition was published. This edition of *Beef, Brush, and Bobwhites* is a tour de force with respect to quail management in cattle country.

The book contains all color photos of habitat, landscapes and management actions. Most importantly, this second edi-

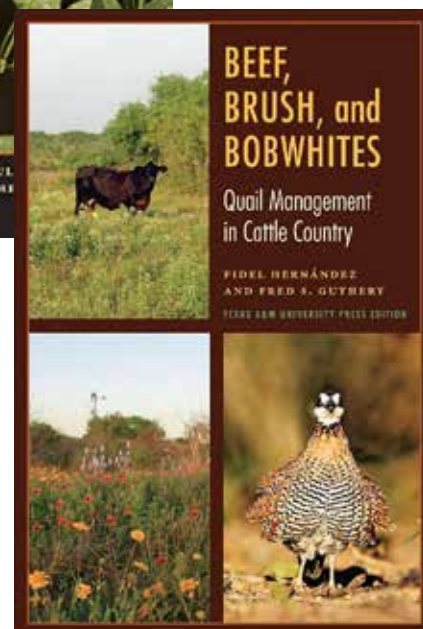
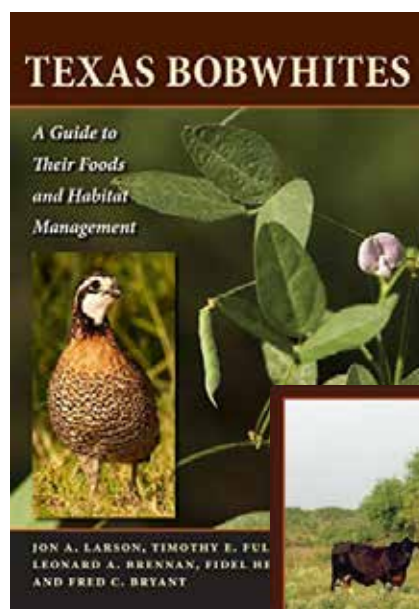
tion corrects and updates the first edition with new information gained over the 26 years that elapsed between the two.

9. *The Upland and Webless Migratory Game Birds of Texas*. (2017). Leonard A. Brennan, et al. Texas A&M University Press.

Most bird hunters do not realize there are 22 species of upland and webless migratory game birds in Texas. Quails, doves, turkeys and prairie grouse attract most of the research and management attention while other species such as rails, gallinules, and chachalacas persist in relative obscurity.

The Upland and Webless Migratory Game Birds of Texas was designed and published to correct this oversight. Even though there are only four chapters on the species of quails found in Texas, this book--much like the *Principal Game Birds and Mammals of Texas* book that appeared 72 years earlier--puts quails in the context of what we know about their ecology and management.

One of the things that many bird hunters seem to forget is that the resident game birds in Texas are regulated by a state wildlife agency and the webless migratory game birds are regulated by a federal agency. Additionally, the definition of a game bird has changed tremendously over the past century. Back in the day, shorebirds, sandpipers, curlews and the like were considered game birds and regularly bagged by hunters, something that would be an anathema today.



10. *Texas Quails: Ecology and Management II*. (2025). Edited by Leonard A. Brennan and Fidel Hernandez. Texas A&M University Press.

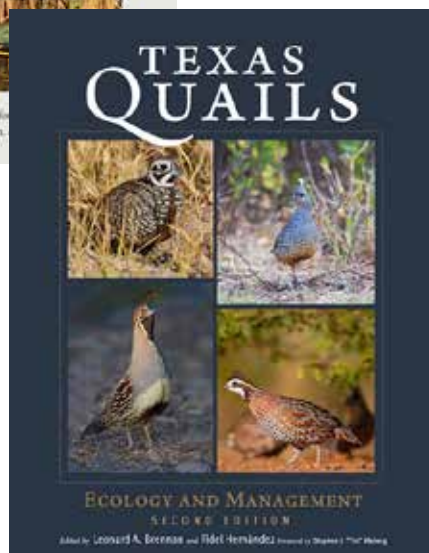
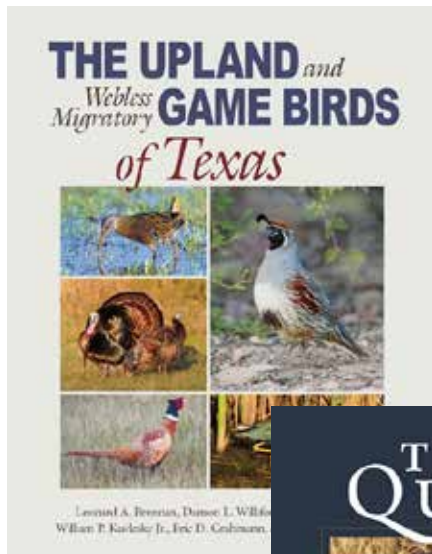
While the first edition of *Texas Quails: Ecology and Management* was well-received, some reviews made noteworthy criticisms and rightly so. For example, readers were not happy that there was no chapter on quail genetics and taxonomy. Readers commented on the poor quality of maps and the confusing and inconsistent appearance of population trend graphs. The lack of color photos was also a contention. Fidel and I set out to correct these shortcomings in the second edition of this book.

Along with the new chapter on genetics and taxonomy, we added a completely new section on emerging technologies for quail management that includes chapters on state-of-the-art population assessment, managing harvest, plus landscape and geospatial tools.

The second edition of *Texas Quails* contains 30 chapters written by 50 co-authors. It was seven years in the making and contains an enormous amount of information on the four species of quails in Texas that was not available when the first edition appeared 18 years earlier.

LESSON LEARNED ABOUT TEXAS BOOKS AND TEXAS QUAILS

Publishing books on Texas quails has shown us a tremendous amount of scientific progress---and also frustration---about what we have learned from thousands



The frustration stems from how we as scientists, managers and administrators are stymied by the predominant land uses of our contemporary society that thwart quail conservation on seemingly every level... What we can do about it remains to be seen.

of studies because the inferences from these studies are summarized in one place in most of these books.

This progress stems from knowledge about what we must do to stabilize and elevate quail populations. We know that it works. Especially when land uses are favorable to quails and other grassland birds.

The frustration stems from how we as scientists, managers and administrators are stymied by the predominant land uses of our contemporary society that thwart quail conservation on seemingly every level. Our Texas books on Texas quails show that this has been happening for well over a century. What we can do about it remains to be seen.

BOOKS AND SCIENCE

Peer-reviewed articles in scientific literature are the backbone of science. Peer-review and science journals represent the first line of quality control over what information makes it into print and what information does not.

On the other hand, books published by major academic presses--which are also peer-reviewed--represent a much more accessible pathway to judge the progress of science in a particular field.

The 10 books on Texas quails that have been published over the past 80 years are a testament to how we have obtained progress in wildlife science.

Finally, another testament to why books from academic presses are important is that they are often written with language and graphics that are much more accessible and understandable to the public. This is especially the case with it comes to peer-reviewed scientific articles that often contain obscure analyses, bizarre graphs and way too much jargon.

This is a common theme across the 10 books described in this article. The common themes of quail ecology management are presented in these books in a way that is accessible to virtually any adult with an interest in these fascinating game birds. ✨