



THE

QUAIL-TECH

ALLIANCE



## 2013 A YEAR OF PROMISE

The next twelve months hold a huge place in the history of Bob white quail in the Rolling Plains of Texas. The next twelve months may yield the second year of a rebound and it may yield an increased decline or it may yield a tremendous explosion. The last twelve months, in particular the last six months of 2012, have yielded evidence of a minor rebound across the Rolling Plains although the drought of 2011 continues in many areas. This drought is taking a devastating toll on the quail populations but through it all, programs such as the Quail Tech Alliance have actually increased the population of Bob white quail on some ranches. Many data sets have now been complete with regard to chick survival, overall effects of supplemental feeding and many myths have now been dispelled. In the face of conventional opinions which have been prevalent over the past twenty years, we are in fact ready to shut the door on the fact that there should be no debate concerning the beneficial effects of supplemental feeding.

The two year sustained study on the 6666 Ranch has concluded that there are distinct advantages to a supplemental feed system utilizing the best practices recommended by the Quail Tech Alliance Research Team. Earlier nesting, greater nesting success, limitation of range, re-nesting attempts and overall population improvement all have been shown as an effect of supplemental feeding programs. For many years I listened to the conventional wisdom of quail researchers saying that feeding was neutral at best. We now have seen the effects of supplemental feeding in the improvement of nesting success, year to year carryover, and overall population growth proven on the 8,000 acre study area on the 6666 Ranch.

2012 was the initial year of the parent reared chick experiments at both the new Quail Research Laboratory at the Texas Tech campus and also on our anchor ranches. Many lessons have been learned with regard to the raising, pairing, feeding and release of pure wild strain, parent reared Bob white chicks derived from the original alpha flock created in 2010 at the Texas Tech Research Facility. This season saw the first releases, the successes and the not so successful survival of those chicks on our anchor ranches in the first attempt to re-establish populations of pure wild strain birds.

The next twelve months hold tremendous promise with regard to a highly expanded wild strain chick release program. Anticipated for the coming year are additional feed trials beginning full time at the Tech Research Lab to involve disease resistance, better nutrition, better chick growing capability and overall better health for our pure wild strain release birds. January holds this year's results of the trapping and screening for disease and we hope as in 2011 that the mosquito population was held in check and the overall West Nile virus antibodies were reduced for a second year in a row. Additional screening will also yield the results of investigation for Newcastle's disease and other diseases which could affect our quail population throughout the Rolling Plains.

Will the New Year finally bring a release of the research funds that have been held at Texas Parks and Wildlife and will these funds now be utilized for their intended and promised purpose of quail research distributed among the five research entities across the state? Will additional funding come from outside sources over the next twelve months freeing up even more field personnel and more research efforts to quickly attempt to stem the tide of the quail decline in Texas? All of these questions remain as promise and hope for the coming New Year.

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We need to note the passing of one of the stalwart individuals involved in the Quail Tech Research program. Una, who was featured in previous newsletters, was finally predated after a third year of faithfully carrying the radio collar which she was fitted in 2010. As you might remember, she was also seen frequenting the shelter structure in 2011 that was built at Esperanza to examine the possibilities of movable feed stations, water stations and also nursery positions for growing the sand plum thickets so vital in areas of the Rolling Plains for quail cover. This fateful participant in our research contributed three years in a row and was recaptured again in 2012 still wearing the same radio collar which she had worn so much that the coating was worn off from dragging on the ground. We salute this wonderful Bob white hen and her contributions to our efforts.

The urgency of moving with all haste and efforts cannot be overstated with regard to research to stem the quail decline. Wonderful organizations such as the Hill Country Quail Coalition, the Cross Timbers Quail Coalition, and the Burnett Foundation have all contributed to helping Quail Tech not only further the research and dispel old thinking but to move forward in our program to restore these precious birds to the Rolling Plains of Texas. Individuals recognized in the past twelve months include Dr. Bill Palmer from the Tall Timbers Research station who has been a major collaborator with the Quail Tech Program and also our Quail Patriot of the year for 2012, Ann W. Marion of the historic 6666 Ranch in Guthrie. There are many heroes to our program from our field biologist to certainly Dr. Sosobee and Dr. Dabbert who have given tirelessly of themselves to further the cause of Bob white quail in the Rolling Plains. In the next twelve months, as we expand our overall research efforts, we look for the new quail patriots to step forward and we look for the leadership of Dr. Dabbert and Dr. Sosobee to carry us further through our efforts to restore the quail to Texas. It is vital that these efforts continue. It is necessary for the legacy of quail hunting in Texas to continue and it is necessary if our grandchildren are to enjoy the heritage and the culture of quail hunting throughout this wonderful state. The year 2012 was a great success at Quail Tech, and 2013 is sure to promise exciting advances in our research, expansion of our restoration program, and the beginning of a new era of quail importance at Texas Tech and at the Quail Tech Alliance.

Happy New Year and we will see you in the "Promise Year".

Charles M. Hodges