

[From Winter 1998-1999]

## **Saving The Quail**

When visiting the Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge during the summer season, you are bound to hear the infamous call of the bobwhite quail. The refuge is unique in that their quail population is growing and doing very well, while the quail population throughout the state is dramatically declining. The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries has started a project which will try to save the quail in Virginia, and the refuge will play an important role.

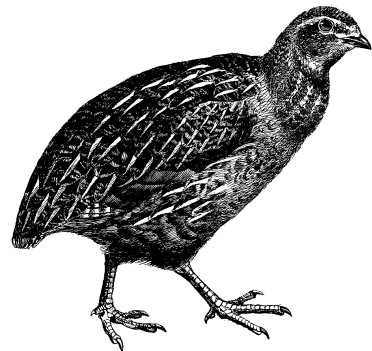
In a recent article written by Marc Puckett, a wildlife biologist for the state, he says the decline of bobwhite quail is most likely due to the disappearance of "early successional" habitat. This type of habitat consists of old fields which are made up of a diversity of low lying plants like broom sedge and blackberry, as well as weedy fence lines and brushy forest edges. Many biologists have managed areas for this type of habitat and now are seeking ways to bring the bobwhite quail back. A recent reintroduction method is the use of an anchor covey release system. This consists of a feeding and housing station used to increase the success of quail covey establishment.

The project being conducted by the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries will test this system using pen raised quail, the F1 generation of wild quail raised in pens, and wild quail. The project will determine if the anchor covey release system works more successfully than just straight release, and which group of quail can be reintroduced most successfully. The refuge will be involved by having 80 of its wild quail relocated. This will not adversely affect the population of quail on the refuge. The reason quail do so well on the refuge is the lack of hunting pressure and intensive woodcock management.

Woodcock habitat parallels very well the bobwhite quail habitat. So the area is perfect for a healthy quail population. To begin trapping the quail you must first find areas in which the coveys are active and are being flushed. You then look for roosting sites, dust baths and feathered quail trails. The most common areas to find these active sites are low field areas made up of diverse cover.

After finding the right location, a quail trap is then set. This is a simple metal cage (2 ft. by 2 ft. 10 inches high) with a funneled entrance to lead the birds into the cage, and a back door which can be opened and closed with a small bungee.

After the traps are set, they are covered and baited with cracked corn. The traps are checked twice a day by Jason Fischer, a wildlife biologist assistant for the state. If quail are trapped, they are banded by Mr. Fischer and held in a pen ready for relocation.



The quail will be relocated to the Amelia Wildlife Management Area in Amelia county, 45 minutes southwest of Richmond. The relocated quail will be used to test the effectiveness of the anchor covey release system. Hopefully, this project will help wildlife biologists determine the most effective methods for quail reintroduction and give other parts of Virginia the opportunity to experience the wonderful activity of bobwhite quail.

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(Thanks to Jason Fischer and Marc Puckett for their input.)