**QUAIL: Bobwhites survive by hiding from predators**

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She might lay three or four clutches during a breeding season, which lasts from spring until September or October.

Bobs require grassy fields, brushy rangeland and longleaf pine savannas with thick understory that provides cover and food. The small birds need bare dirt at ground level so they can easily move around and pick up seeds. Quail also need thick overhead canopies to hide from avian predators.

“Quail habitat is all about cover,” Mitchell detailed. “If the birds can hide from predators, some quail will survive to breed. Brood habitat is usually the limiting factor for wild quail management. Quail can nest almost anywhere, but brood habitat needs to protect them overhead and be open at ground level. A newly hatched quail chick is not much bigger than a bumble bee. When young birds hatch, the parents take them to a place with early successional growth like a fallow field."

In the past few years, Alabama put more emphasis on bringing back wild quail by preserving and enhancing bobwhite habitat on certain public lands. In cooperation with the U.S. Forest Service, the state opened Boggy Hollow Wildlife Management Area in 2017 specifically for quail. About two hours east of Mobile, the property includes 7,000 acres in the 84,000-acre Conecuh National Forest in Covington County on the Florida line south of Andalusia.

“Boggy Hollow WMA was created as a small game hunting area with the focus on bobwhite quail,” Mitchell advised. “Since its creation, we have been working with federal officials to improve the habitat for wild quail through prescribed burning and field management.”

Like most of the surrounding national forest, Boggy Hollow WMA consists primarily of flat longleaf pine savannas with some slightly rolling hills. Two creeks and several finger drains coming off them run through the tract. The understory consists predominantly of grasses, gallberry and yaupon.

Some resident wild quail already inhabited the property when the state opened it to hunting during the 2017-18 season. Unfortunately, the quail population remains very low.

“We haven’t seen a large population response yet, but there’s a good population of quail there,” Mitchell remarked.

The Alabama quail season runs through Feb. 29, 2024, with a daily limit of eight per person. For more information on seasons, regulations, public hunting areas and other information, see www.outdooralabama.com/hunting.

A bobwhite quail in the hand means a successful day afield.

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