Texas Quails: Ecology and Management

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Texas Quails: Ecology and Management.—Leonard A. Brennan, Ed. 2007. Texas A & M University Press, College Station, Texas. 512 pp., 132 black-and-white photographs, 18 maps, 5 line drawings, 26 tables, 41 graphs. ISBN-13: 978-1-58544-503-5. Cloth, $40.00.—From the opening quotation in the preface to the final chapter, it is evident that "quails are [indeed] at the very heart of Texas ornithology." This book provides current and relevant information about all four quail species and associated habitats found in Texas: Gambel's Quail (*Callipepla gambelii*), Montezuma Quail (*Cyrtonyx montezumae*), Northern Bobwhite (*Colinus virginianus*), and Scaled Quail (*Callipepla squamata*). The target audience runs the gamut from lay persons to scientists, including landowners, hunters, managers, amateur naturalists, biologists, and researchers. The purpose of the book is to provide a compendium of the state of knowledge about these species and to critically explore challenges and opportunities for management and research, and prospects for the future. The inclusion of all the species of quails found in Texas, rather than just focusing on the Northern Bobwhite, is a strong plus for this book. Another strong plus is the land-stewardship theme, though readers unfamiliar with the tremendous brush-encroachment problems in Texas may not think so.

The book is divided into three sections, with a total of 25 chapters. The first section deals with the ecology and life history of the species. The second section provides an ecoregion approach to frame discussion of population status within the geographic boundaries of a particular ecoregion. The final section takes a look at the culture, heritage, and future of Texas quails.

The introductory chapter in Section I sets a broad context to establish the organizational flow of the rest of the book. Surprisingly, no overview of the taxonomy and relationships of the species of quails in Texas is given. This introduction is followed by chapters on the ecology and life history of each species. Readers with interest in a particular species (or ecoregion) can shop through the table of contents and easily find their area of interest. The chapters on each species provide concise and readable summaries of Texas-based research information about some species, yet they appropriately draw from the literature from adjacent or nearby states when it provides additional insight or where a

research gap exists. One of the values of this volume is that it illuminates knowledge gaps and points the way to areas that deserve research focus. The species chapters follow similar but not identical organizational structure. As with most multi-author books, the writing style differs considerably among the chapters, but this is not a major detraction, given that most readers will likely pick and choose sections of particular interest rather than read the book straight through. Although I used to live in Texas, I found myself wanting a county map and a statewide ecoregion map that I could easily consult for specific locations or consideration of range overlaps among species within ecoregions. Information in the Northern Bobwhite account was decidedly slanted toward grassland- and shrubland-based research. There were also some inconsistencies throughout the book in how distributions on range maps (and ecoregions) were shaded and depicted. Although tables were consistent in format, figures with graphs were not. The final chapter in Section I gives a thorough overview of the diseases and parasites of the various quails, drawing from the literature of other regions as well as from extensive research conducted in Texas and providing useful insights for those who may wonder why these things matter.

Section II is organized by ecoregions and discusses the quail species found therein. The brief overview and description of plant communities within the region is especially useful to those who may be managing the land. Details about land-use history in many of the chapters in this section are interesting but often sad, and they will be useful to land managers trying to restore ecosystems and increase the numbers of quail. By necessity, there is a fair amount of repetition among some of the chapters in the first section (dealing with species) and the second (summarizing information about specific ecoregions). This will be useful for readers looking for information about quail within an ecoregion. The ecoregion approach also illuminates some subtle differences in the ecology of quail across regions through discussion in Section III about plant succession and vegetation structure. Discussion and examples are weighted more to the Northern Bobwhite than to other species throughout this section. I found some inconsistencies in terminology about grazing in the chapters in this section. "Overgrazing" and "overutilization" are not the same thing. A recurring theme is evident after reading several chapters in this section: grazing management, disking, prescribed burning, mowing, and brush management (or planting woody vegetation in some cases). Yet, as is pointed out on page 288, "Empirical data demonstrating the impacts of disking on usable space or bobwhite density do not exist."

At first inspection, Section III seemed to be a collection of odds and ends, but after jumping in, I found it was full of useful information and included some novel (outside of Texas, that is) approaches for quail management. The section covers regulatory—and, hence, political—aspects of management, the economics of quail hunting as a recreational enterprise, the nuts and bolts of running a hunting camp, and even the practical aspects of forming an association or cooperative. The chapter on sources of information and technical assistance is all-encompassing and will point readers in the right direction for information and assistance. The chapter on effects of quail management on other wildlife opens the door to a more holistic approach to land management, shifting away from a single-species approach (for each individual quail species) to recognition of the complex and dynamic nature of plant communities interacting with climate and edaphic differences and how animal communities are associated with the varying vegetation structure. This system-level recognition of discrete vegetation chronosequences is explored in combination with a host of land-management practices. The final chapter offers substantive suggestions for what can be done to reverse the declining trend of these species and associated wildlife species.

Texas Quails: Ecology and Management is a fine, comprehensive effort and will be an essential reference in years to come for those interested in the species and those managing land in Texas and neighboring regions in the south-central United States. This book achieves its purpose, and it will meet the needs and interests of its broad target audience.—Ronald E. Masters, *Tall Timbers Research Station & Land Conservancy, 13093 Henry Beadel Drive, Tallahassee, Florida 32312, USA. E-mail: rmasters@ttrs.org.*