

# A View From Outdoors

The Wildlife Commission receives many requests to stock quail from hunters and landowners. Most people are surprised to find that wildlife biologists generally discourage quail stocking as a wildlife-management practice. Much of this confusion arises as the result of two things. First, the Wildlife Commission has programs to stock deer and wild turkey, so why not quail? Isn't this discrimination against the small-game hunter? The answer is "no," because deer and wild turkey are stocked only in areas where there is suitable habitat and a lack of wild breeding stock — these projects are really attempts to restore populations of these species, and are not stocking programs per se. Biologists have always found that if there is adequate habitat for quail, birds from surrounding areas will quickly fill the void.

A second confusing point is the difference between stocking quail as long-term, wildlife-management, and for short-term, "put-and-take" recreation. Stocking alone has never worked as a long-term means to increase quail populations, and has more often than not even failed to provide efficient put-and-take recreation. The game-farm programs of the past serve as a good example. Many state wildlife agencies, including North Carolina, once operated game farms to raise quail for stocking in the field, ultimately hoping to increase the hunter's bag. Without exception, these stocking attempts were dismal failures.

Here is why. It's not unusual for 60 percent of the pen-raised birds to die within a month after being released into the wild. In fact, one study showed that of 360 quail stocked in the fall, only 28 percent could be located 45 to 60 days later. And by April, the statistics were even grimmer — only six percent remained. Survival from spring stockings was even worse.

There are techniques — such as flight conditioning, call-back pens, and feeding stations — that can reduce

mortality in stocked birds. Under the best of circumstances, however, mortality is still high. With wild birds in good habitat, 70 to 80 percent die and are replaced through natural reproduction every year. If the habitat that you have stocked is so poor that native birds are unable to survive, there is no reason to expect pen-raised birds to do any better.

This put-and-take stocking of quail is not cheap, either. A good price for a flight-conditioned quail is \$2.50. At that rate, it would cost the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission about \$1.5 million to increase the average hunter's bag by one bird. And this is assuming that all of the birds stocked were recovered by hunters, which may be the ultimate in wishful thinking. In reality, studies have shown that very few birds released in statewide stocking programs are recovered by hunters. For example, one state experimentally stocked 13,500 banded birds and offered a \$100 reward for every band returned. Advocates of quail stocking were sure that this would bankrupt the agency, yet only 152 bands were returned. Tennessee concluded that after stocking nearly a half-million quail over a 12-year period, they were spending \$180.71 for each artificially reared quail harvested by a hunter.

In spite of the high costs and

excessive mortality, many people still choose to stock quail on their own lands. Some techniques have been developed in the last few years to improve the short-term survival of pen-raised birds. One technique which is used by many field-trial organizations is to stock a large number of 8 to 10 week-old birds about 4 to 6 weeks before the season opens. These birds are released quietly in groups of 10 to 15 birds, and food is scattered near the release site on a regular basis. This technique seems to reduce post-release mortality, and allows the birds to adapt to their new environment.

What is the alternative to quail stocking? Habitat development is the best answer — it's cheaper, more effective, and lasts longer. Quail require many different things within their home range — good escape cover, nesting and brood-rearing areas, and adequate winter food — and all of these needs may be met through habitat management. If any of these factors are missing, however, quail populations will suffer. Determining which factor is limiting

quail numbers, and how this may be corrected, can be tricky. However, help is at hand. Commission wildlife biologists are stationed throughout the State, and these men are happy to work with landowners to improve the wildlife habitat for quail

and other species on their lands. For the name of the wildlife biologist in your area, contact your local wildlife enforcement officer or call the Wildlife Commission's 24-hour, toll-free, Wildlife Watch Hotline at 1-800-662-7137.

## A Taxing Question

RALEIGH - To pay or not to pay sales tax is the question being asked by consumers and retailers when it comes to fertilizer, lime and some other agriculture products.

"There is no sales tax on fertilizer or lime," said James R. Stevens, fertilizer administrator for the N.C. Department of Agriculture. "Every spring there is confusion about this and we try to clear it up for consumers and retailers."

Stevens said in addition to fertilizer and lime being exempt from sales tax seeds are also non-taxable. This includes certain plants such as flower seeds, sets, tubers, roots, tobacco plants, tomato plants, pepper plants, egg plants, potato plants and others raised in beds or hot houses for transplanting.

Potted plants, trees, shrubs,

cut flowers and other large plants are not tax exempt.

Those with questions about sales tax on fertilizer, lime or plants should contact Stevens in the Plant Industry Division, N.C. Department of Agriculture, Raleigh. Phone: 919-733-3939.

### North Carolina Acid Rain Brochure Available

Acid rain is a subject much in the news these days, and a new brochure entitled *Acid Rain in North Carolina* deals with the effects that this pollution is having on the Tar Heel State. The brochure is a joint effort of the Acid Rain Foundation, N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, Division of Conservation Education, 512 N. Salisbury St., Raleigh, N.C. 27611.

### WEIGHT CONTROL CLASSES

For Information  
Call Daphne Bridges  
704-434-7770  
After 4:30

FOUND: Large Male Cat. green eyes; wearing black collar. Contact Mary at Gray, striped; long-haired. 434-7320.

434-2227  
**LADD W. HAMRICK  
FUEL SERVICE, INC.**

Distributor

HOME HEATING SERVICE  
KEROSENE FUEL OIL

AUTOMATIC CAR WASH  
SELF SERVICE GAS

E. COLLEGE AVE.

BOILING SPRINGS, N. C.

## BOILING SPRINGS FLORIST



Also Available:  
Roses, Corsages, Plants  
And Cemetary Arrangements

LELA BLANTON, Owner  
RENEE WALKER, Manager

Located 2 1/2 Miles From Boiling Springs On Highway 150 South

CALL 434-9662