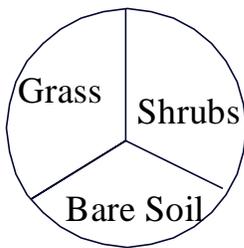




THE COVEY HEADQUARTERS

Volume 16 Issue 3 Fall 2017

This newsletter is aimed at cooperators and sports-people in Missouri to provide information on restoring quail. This is a joint effort of the Missouri Department of Conservation, USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, and University of Missouri Extension. If you would like to be removed from this mailing list or have suggestions for future articles please contact jeff.powelson@mdc.mo.gov or 816-232-6555 x5772 or write to the address shown.



The name of this newsletter is taken from an old concept.....that a quail covey operates from a headquarters (shrubby cover). If the rest of the covey's habitat needs are nearby, a covey should be present. We are encouraging landowners to manage their quail habitat according to this concept. Use **shrubs** as the cornerstone for your quail management efforts. Manage for a **diverse grass, broadleaf weed and legume mixture and provide bare ground** with row crops, food plots or light disking **right next to** the shrubby area.

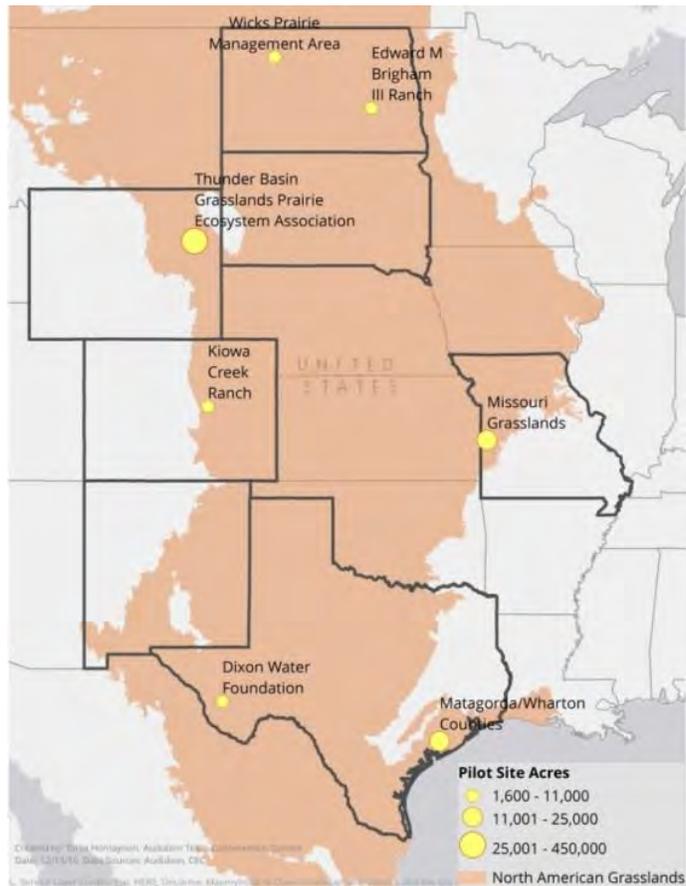
Audubon introducing beef to benefit birds

Chris Wilson, Audubon Conservation Ranching Program Director

Audubon is introducing a certification program to benefit ranchers and grassland birds. The Audubon Conservation Ranching program links consumers to beef produced on farms that provide good grassland bird habitat. When consumers buy beef certified under the Audubon program, they're also boosting habitat for birds. The Missouri portion of a program stretching across the Great Plains began this summer.

The goal is a profitable program for cattle ranchers, but one that also helps reverse steep population declines during the past half century by grassland birds, such as bobwhite quail. Audubon is implementing a partnership between farmers, consumers, and retail outlets, with an assist by conservation expertise in meshing bird-friendly habitat with market-based agriculture. The program gives ranchers a premium price for beef, and it also links them with financial incentives such as cost share programs that defray costs for implementing conservation practices.

"It's designed to build a sustainable, wildlife friendly system that is still profitable for the



Audubon Conservation Ranching Pilot Geographies

farmer,” said Dave Haubein of Dade County, owner of the first Missouri farm to gain Audubon certification through the program. “It dovetails perfectly with the direction I want to take my farm.”

Beef produced under the program at the Haubein farm in Dade County will be available for purchase this fall at the Root Cellar, a Mid-Missouri food hub focused on bringing sustainable, locally produced food to market. The Root Cellar has shops in Columbia and Jefferson City. The long-range goal is to develop multiple beef producers using the Audubon Conservation Ranching program, with bird friendly beef on sale at numerous retail outlets including in cities such as Kansas City and St. Louis.

“This program invests in ranchers, processors and retailers in your community who care about conservation,” said Jake Davis, Root Cellar owner. “It creates a future where consumers can choose more conservation friendly beef and ranchers have a clear market to sell a better product and get incentives for it.”

The vast majority of grasslands are privately owned and managed for livestock production. So effective conservation requires helping producers manage pastures in ways that build better habitat and make economic sense. Audubon’s Conservation Ranching program will be offered across the Great Plains states. The program is getting a startup in Missouri this summer with plans for expansion as more consumers, producers and retail outlets participate. Audubon also expects beef from certified ranches to hit markets in North Dakota, South Dakota, Texas, Colorado, and New Mexico in the next few months.

Audubon Conservation Ranching provides a path for consumers to participate in bird conservation. Every purchase of beef grazed on Audubon certified land supports producers who are committed to keeping healthy grasslands on the landscape. As Audubon’s certification label increases the demand for sustainably produced beef among conservation conscious consumers, participating ranchers and retailers will reap financial rewards.



Participating ranches adopt Audubon production protocols and implement a Habitat Management Plan that benefits local grassland birds. In Missouri, the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) private land programs will help farmers develop habitat and pasture management plans to benefit bobwhites and other locally important birds such as bobolink, upland sandpiper, Henslow’s sparrow, loggerhead shrike and greater prairie chicken. Typically, these plans outline steps to renovate some fescue pastures, plant native grasses, control invasive plants, and implement a rotational grazing approach that produces patchy, diverse cover across the farm.

“The required habitat management plan provides a roadmap to help participants build the right mix of forages to benefit their cattle while providing essential nesting and brood-rearing cover for birds,” said Max Alleger, MDC grassland coordinator. “Audubon recognizes that improving habitat takes time, so these plans lay out a reasonable timeline, often three years or more, for participants to meet all program standards.”

A real strength is that Audubon’s program allows producers to transition toward providing good habitat in a practical manner, Alleger said. They can sell cattle grown on their pastures while improving their grasslands to meet certification protocols.

“In a very real sense, consumers who purchase this beef are helping pay for habitat improvements,” he said. “Audubon also realizes that implementing habitat and pasture improvements requires financial investment, so the habitat management plans also help link producers to cost-share and incentive programs to help defray these costs.”

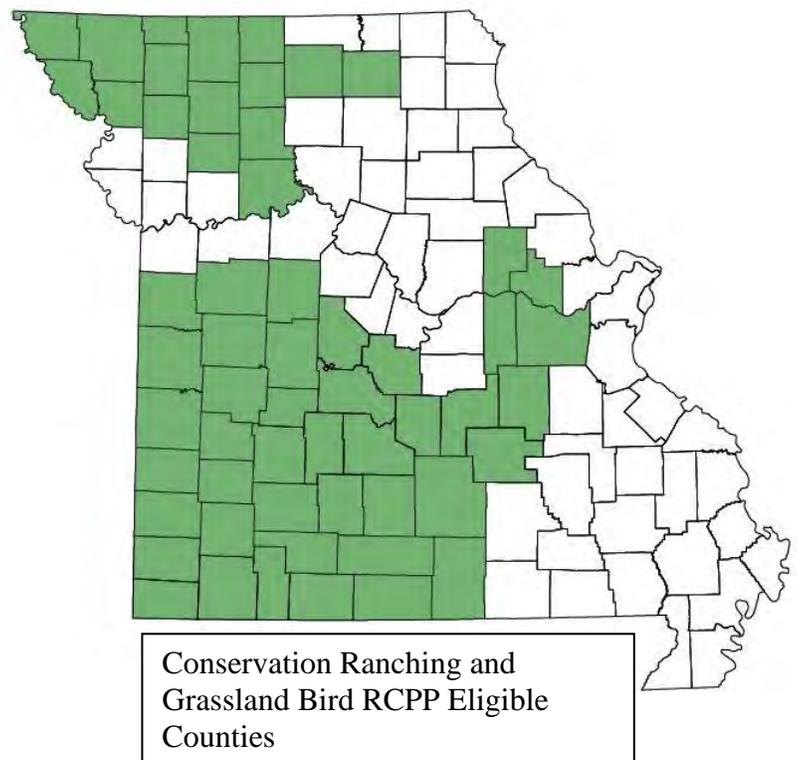
Participating ranches must also meet Audubon standards related to forage and feeding, animal health and welfare, and environmental sustainability. Animals in the program must spend their entire lives on grasslands. Confined feedlots are not allowed. Detailed program protocols may be viewed at <http://Audubon.org/ranching/protocols>.

Grassland bird monitoring is required on participating ranches as well. Audubon has worked with the Missouri River Bird Observatory and MDC to develop a monitoring protocol using bird occurrence and territory mapping that provides a Bird-friendliness Score that can be tracked over time as management practices change. A growing database comprised of thousands of individual bird observations will add to our understanding of how bird use changes over time as a result of management improvements.

MDC and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) are key Missouri partners. In addition to providing technical habitat and pasture management assistance, these agencies provide financial resources to help participating producers improve their grasslands.

Two NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) projects provide substantial financial support directly to producers, and an NRCS Conservation Innovation Grant is helping Audubon actively market certified beef products to consumers who care about birds. MDC incentive program funds are focused in Missouri’s Quail Focus Areas and Grassland Conservation Opportunity Areas, but RCPP funds are available county-wide in the eligible program areas as shown in the figure to the right.

Audubon wants to recruit more Missouri producers into the program, and will co-host a series of workshops for interested landowners this winter with the MDC. To learn more about grassland habitat planning or attend a workshop in your area, send an email to max.alleger@mdc.mo.gov.



For more information about Audubon Conservation Ranching, contact Chris Wilson, program director, at cwilson@audubon.org, or visit <http://Audubon.org/ranching>.

Year Two of the Missouri Outdoor Recreational Access Program (MRAP)

In 2015, Missouri was one of 15 states to be awarded federal grant monies from the USDA to help fund recreational access programs. Through the Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentives Program (VPA-HIP), MDC is receiving up to \$1.1 million to help initiate the Missouri Outdoor Recreational Access Program (MRAP). These funds, along with MDC and partner contributions, are being used to enroll at least 10,000 acres of private land for recreational activities such as hunting, fishing, or wildlife viewing.

After 1 full year, 37 properties totaling 8400 acres, were enrolled in MRAP across the state. MDC is focused on enrolling farms and other lands that can provide quality recreational opportunities for the public. One aspect of MRAP that sets it apart from other state walk-in access programs is the requirement for enrolled properties to meet a minimum threshold for wildlife habitat. Currently, about 50% of the enrolled MRAP acres are designated as quality habitat! Over 830 public user survey cards were collected from MRAP properties in 2016 and show positive feedback. Sixty percent of respondents reported a 'Satisfied' experience, 34% 'Neutral', and only 6% reported they were 'Dissatisfied' with their experience.

In FY2018, funding is available to enroll an additional 6,000-7,000 new acres. To be considered, landowners should submit application by November 1, 2017. Eligible land offers are ranked based on factors such as habitat quality, property location, and size. Lands already enhanced for wildlife through other programs such as CRP, EQIP, or WRP (WRE), often make ideal candidates for the program. Landowners determine the type of activities permitted on their land, and payment rates are usually between \$15 and \$25/acre. Agreements for approved applications will go into effect in the spring of 2018.

To learn more, visit the MDC-MRAP webpage at mdc.mo.gov/mrap. There you can find maps of enrolled properties, public access options, rules and procedures, and enrollment information for landowners.

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Buy native trees and shrubs from MDC State Forest Nursery

Native trees and shrubs can help improve wildlife habitat and soil and water conservation while also improving the appearance and value of private property. The Missouri Department of Conservation's (MDC) George O. White State Forest Nursery offers a variety of low-cost native tree and shrub seedlings for reforestation, windbreaks, erosion control, wildlife food and cover, and other purposes.

This year, the State Forest Nursery is taking orders starting a couple months early, beginning on Sept. 1 instead of in November. Orders are being accepted through April 15, 2018. Supplies are limited so order early. Orders will be shipped or can be picked up at the nursery near Licking from February through May.

The nursery provides mainly one-year-old bare-root seedlings with sizes varying by species. Seedlings varieties include: pine, bald cypress, cottonwood, black walnut, hickory, oak, persimmon, birch, maple, willow, sycamore, blackberry, buttonbush, holly, dogwood, hazelnut, redbud, spicebush, sumac, wild plum, and others.

Seedlings are available in bundles of 10 or increments of 25 per species. Prices range from 16 – 80 cents per seedling. Sales tax of 6.1 percent will be added to orders unless tax exempt. There is an \$8 handling charge for each order. Receive a 15-percent discount up to \$20 off seedling orders with a Heritage Card, Permit Card, or Conservation ID Number.

Find images and information on available items, along with ordering information, in MDC's 2017-2018 Seedling Order Form. It is available in the September issue of the *Missouri Conservationist*, at MDC regional offices and nature centers, online at mdc.mo.gov/seedlings, or by contacting the State Forest Nursery at 573-674-3229 or StateForestNursery@mdc.mo.gov.

Plants You Should Know – Common Milkweed *Asclepias syriaca*

Common milkweed is a sturdy, upright plant with broadleaves, milky sap, and clusters of flowers. Blooms May through August. Flowers are pink to lilac, vary fragrant, borne in clusters terminally and along the stems, arising from leaf axils. Leaves are broadly elliptical, rounded at the base, to 6 inches long, with fine hairs underneath on distinct leaf stalks.

Fruit are large seedpods, elongated and covered with slender warty projections. When dry, these split to release hundreds of seeds, each attached to a "parachute" of white, silky, flossy hairs that can carry them on the wind. Common milkweed typically grows to about 3-4 feet in height, but can get up to 6 feet tall.

Common milkweed grows on upland fields, prairies, pastures, glades, roadsides, wasteland, edges of woods, and open, disturbed places. This is the most commonly seen milkweed, especially in abandoned fields and waste places, where it is an early colonizer of disturbed soil.



This and other native milkweeds are extremely important in conservation of the monarch butterfly, whose numbers are plummeting. Monarchs require milkweeds as larval host plants: Adult monarchs lay eggs on

milkweeds, and their caterpillars eat the foliage. Herbicides, mowing, fencerow and woody draw removal, and removal of other weedy places, has vastly reduced the number of milkweeds available for monarchs. You can help increase monarch numbers by growing this and other milkweeds. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program has a Monarch Initiative that assists landowners with planting wildflower mixtures containing milkweed that will benefit the butterflies and numerous other species.

Fall Covey Headquarter Calendar

September

Contact NRCS or MDC for burn plan assistance this month
Prepare firebreaks for fall and winter burns
Burn native warm-season grasses this month to increase plant diversity
Broadcast alfalfa and wheat into tilled firebreaks

October

Youth pheasant/quail season 28th and 29th
Conduct fall covey whistling count surveys 20-30 minutes before sunrise
Prepare for edge feathering and downed tree structures by spraying fescue and brome in those areas
Spray fescue and brome in fencelines, woody draws, and under shrubs after a killing frost

November

Basal spray undesirable trees according to herbicide label now through March
Dormant seed pollinator and monarch forb mixes after mid-November

Did You Know???

MDC Private Land Conservationists Brad Pobst and Tim Kavan were recipients of the prestigious National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative's Firebird Award. This award was presented for their efforts in helping landowners successfully restore bobwhite quail to several focus areas in Southeast Missouri on more than 70,000 acres. MDC Private Lands Division Chief Bill White received the National Bobwhite Technical Committee (NBTC) Leadership Award. Bill received this award for being an active member of the NBTC since 2004, serving in numerous capacities, as well as bringing \$100 million in additional USDA Farm Bill program payments to Missouri, leading national level committees and working groups in development of the 2008 Farm Bill, as well as writing numerous articles and publications all promoting conservation and quail habitat restoration. Bill has also led the Missouri Monarch Collaborative calling for 20,000 acres per year of new habitat in Missouri which will directly correlate to needed quail habitat as well.

EQIP Ranking Period Ends November 17

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) announced November 17 as the cut-off date to apply for fiscal year 2018 funds through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

EQIP allows farmers, ranchers, forestland managers and landowners to conserve natural resources by making available financial assistance to improve soil, water, air, plants, animals and related resources.

"EQIP provides opportunities for financial assistance statewide to applicants who have natural resource problems on their land, including concerns associated with crops, livestock, forest and wildlife," State Conservationist J.R. Flores said.

Applicants can sign-up for traditional soil and water conservation practices as well as newer practices aimed at increasing habitat for Monarch butterflies and those focusing on utilizing adaptable cropping systems that increase resiliency.

Listed below are just a few of the EQIP initiatives/fund pools available this year:

- **Monarch Butterfly Habitat Development Project** – provides financial assistance to help landowners establish milkweed and other plants critical to the iconic monarch butterfly.
- **Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative** – provides financial assistance focusing on limiting nutrient and sediment movement occurring on land in the priority watershed areas. The seven Missouri MRBI watersheds are: James Bayou – St. John's Diversion Ditch and Mud Ditch (Mississippi and New Madrid Counties); Upper Buffalo Creek Ditch (Dunklin County); Bear Creek – West Yellow Creek (Linn County); Peno Creek and Spencer Creek (Ralls and Pike counties); Sugar Creek and Mission Creek – Missouri River (Buchanan and Platte counties); North River – (Marion, Ralls, Monroe and Shelby counties); Profits Creek – (Osage, Cole, Maries and Miller counties).
- **Cover Crops for Soil Health and Water Quality** – establish cover crops to improve the production capacity and organic matter of highly erodible soils.
- **Regional Grassland Bird and Grazing Land Enhancement Initiative** – assists with improving grazing operations by incorporating cover crops and native warm season grasses, removing invasive species, and adding water and fencing while creating habitat for prairie chickens, quail and many other grassland bird species.
- **Restoring Glade and Woodland Communities for Threatened Species in the Ozarks of Southeast Missouri** – restore glades and woodlands and treat cropland with conservation practices that benefit threatened and declining wildlife species.
- **Improving Working Lands for Monarch Butterflies** – helps agriculture producers provide food and habitat for monarch butterflies.
- **Conservation Ranching Program** – assists livestock producers with holistic management practices that support grassland bird-friendly beef production to align with the Audubon Conservation Ranching Program habitat standards.
- **Wildlife, Forestry, Grassland, Cropland, Soil Health, and Agroforestry fund pools** – provides cost-share for practices that improve grassland, cropland, and forestland production as well as providing habitat for many wildlife species.

NRCS accepts applications for all of its programs on a continuous basis, but applications must be filed for these programs by November 17 to be eligible for the next round of funding. Farmers can submit applications at local NRCS offices.

NRCS also offers free technical assistance to all Missouri residents. For more information about [NRCS programs](#) contact the [NRCS office serving your county](#). NRCS employees in county offices can provide more information about how to apply for benefits offered by NRCS.

Youth-Only Quail and Pheasant Season

To provide more opportunities for hunters ages 6 through 15, the Conservation Commission has established youth-only quail and pheasant seasons. Both seasons take place October 28-29, 2017. Youth who are not hunter-education certified must hunt in the immediate presence of an properly licensed mentor; however, the mentor may not hunt.

2017-18 FEATURED HUNTING SPOTS

Bobwhites can be found on many conservation areas across the state. While many of these areas provide quail hunting opportunities, several are designated as Quail Emphasis Areas (QEAs) and are managed with quail as a main focus. Below are some suggested quail hunting opportunities. For more detailed information about an area, visit the Department's Places to Go webpage at short.mdc.mo.gov/Z4V

Bunch Hollow CA (Carroll Co.)

Robert E. Talbot CA (Lawrence Co.)

Bushwacker Lake CA (Barton, Vernon Cos.)

Sand Prairie CA (Scott Co.)

Happy Holler Lake CA (Andrew Co.)

Schell-Osage CA (Vernon, St. Clair Cos.)

Henry Sever Lake CA (Knox Co.)

William G. and Erma Parke White (LincolnCo.)

J.N. Turkey Kearn Memorial CA (Johnson, Pettis Cos.) **Whetstone Creek CA** (Calloway Co.)

Providence Prairie CA (Lawrence Co.)

White River Trace CA (Dent Co.)

Equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from programs of the Missouri Department of Conservation is available to all individuals without regard to their race, color, religion, national origin, sex, ancestry, age, sexual orientation, veteran status, or disability. Questions should be directed to the Department of Conservation, PO Box 180, Jefferson City, MO 65102, 573-751-4115 (voice) or 800-735-2966 (TTY), or to Chief, Public Civil Rights, Office of Civil Rights, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1849 C Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20240.

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