



# The Early Bird Gets The Quail

By Allie Biedenharn

I felt like I'd drunk a couple cups of coffee, even though I hadn't. I could feel my heart beating inside my chest. The air felt different—and I was excited! I was just getting out of the car when two girls came up and offered to help me with my suitcase. At that minute I knew I was going to like this place. This place was the Centennial Ranch near Coleman, Texas, and I was there to participate in the 16th Battalion of the Bobwhite Brigade. At the Bobwhite Brigade I would learn everything there is to know about quail, including their habitats and habits. I was excited and could not wait to meet the other participants, or cadets, but I also could not wait to meet all of the state's foremost experts in wildlife preservation.

The week passed quickly and all my expectations were met. The experts, like Dr. Dale Rollins, taught

us all about quail: where they like to live, what they like to eat, how they drink, etc. Did you know that quail do not drink from a body of water? They get all their liquids through dew, plant juice, or from the bugs they eat. Anyway, as the week drew to a close, I knew I wanted to earn a trip to the Early Bird Hunt.

The Early Bird Hunt is the reward for Brigade cadets who submit a record book of programs completed through the year. Programs can be anything from displaying a poster about the Brigades in a local store or business, to putting together a Power-Point presentation for a school group. During the year, I was able to complete many programs. One of my favorite programs was constructing a nest deprecation project for the second graders at my school. This consisted of taking out the second graders to set "dummy" nests around our school campus. The following week we checked the nests to hypothesize what, if anything, broke into the nests. The conclusion was that raccoons, dogs, and pesky third graders were the biggest predators around school.

Another opportunity to share my knowledge came when I was asked to tailor a plant identification project into the botany unit of the fifth graders at school. This was a super fun project because we made it into a contest about which student could identify the most plants. I also got to teach them how important it is to protect animal habitats.

A few months later, I was given the opportunity to participate in a deer tagging project on a South Texas ranch with Texas AgriLife Research through Texas A&M. While not exactly about bobwhite quail, this was an unforgettable

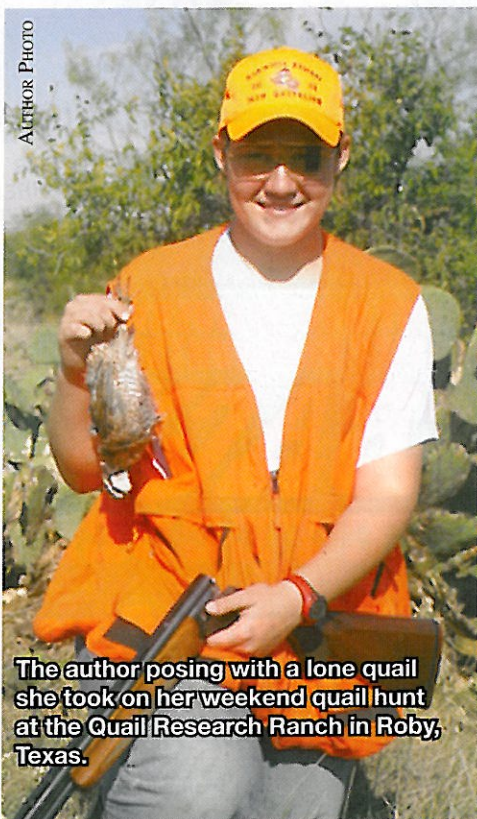
experience watching the wildlife managers use a helicopter to chase the deer out of the brush, capture them with net guns, then tie them up like calf ropers at the rodeo. I got to help record what we trapped and put the tags in their ears. Each deer ended up with colored tags, or earrings, that identified it with the year it was born. The process was very enlightening, and I can only be thankful that *that* was not the way I got my ears pierced.

Through performing the programs to prepare a record book for the Bobwhite Brigade, I learned a tremendous amount about wildlife, quail, and even some about deer. And through putting together the record book I learned a tremendous amount about documentation and recordkeeping. I submitted my album and waited to hear if I had earned enough points for the Early Bird Hunt.

A letter came in the mail a few weeks later saying I had made the cut to attend the Early Bird Hunt. It was going to be held at the Texas A&M Research Ranch in Roby, Texas. I was a little nervous because I would not know anyone at the hunt because they were not in my covey or team at camp. However, I was sure everyone would be cool and friendly; after all, this was the Brigades!

The six-hour-long car trip became a minor inconvenience. The instant I pulled up to the Quail Research Ranch, Dr. Rollins came out to greet me and lay out the details of the weekend. I had made it to the hunt! I was ready for a fun weekend of hunting. To get us warmed up for the hunt, practice with clay targets was first on the agenda. We all tried our hand (perhaps better said hand/eye coordination) at breaking the clay birds while Dr. Rollins expertly tried to bamboozle us by throwing the birds at unexpected angles.

After that humbling experience, the



AUTHOR PHOTO

**The author posing with a lone quail she took on her weekend quail hunt at the Quail Research Ranch in Roby, Texas.**

four other early bird hunter/cadets and I booted up and accessorized with tons of hunter orange. We were ready to go hunting. I got the opportunity to hunt with Dr. Rollins that afternoon. Watching his dogs Annie, Deuce, Ellie, and Babe run was amazing. I wish I could smell that well! I didn't shoot any birds that afternoon, but talking and driving around the ranch watching my *compadres* bring down a bird or two made an indelible memory.

That night Rocky Vinson prepared a scrumptious dinner. After dinner we played many games such as the broom kick, the broom dance, and even took an I.Q. test. Most of the games were schemes to identify the "less than sophisticated" ones of the group, but let's just say I learned many useful tricks that night and will be sure to use them on my friends and family at home. After a full day, I was ready to get to sleep in preparation for another big day.

Bright and early everyone was up eating breakfast eager to go hunting again. That morning I got to hunt with Mackie Morgan and his fascinating dogs. He even brought along his cute puppy. About half way through the morning a covey was flushed and I shot my only quail for the weekend. However, this quail was rare. It carried a radio collar on his neck and an I.D. band in his leg. He was part of the research that was being done at the ranch. Oops! Dr. Rollins told me that they had been trapping and collaring birds at the ranch for many years and that was the first radio-collared bird anyone had ever shot. He reassured me that it was all right, but I hope it doesn't mess up their studies!

We were all tired but happy when we left that afternoon. The hunt had been everything I'd hoped for. Through the Brigades I have received the chance to meet wonderful people and learn a considerable amount about the outdoors. Not only do the Brigades teach, but also give opportunities to earn college scholarships and prizes. In fact, I won a \$300 gift certificate to Academy Sports and Outdoors for having a very complete record book. Now that was a bonus that I didn't expect! My life has greatly benefited as a result of my involvement in the Brigades and I would encourage anyone who likes the outdoors to get involved.

## Porter's Exotics Circle Ranch

- Guided Hunts
- Trophy Whitetail Deer, Elk, Axis, Fallow, Trophy Rams, Blackbuck & other Exotics
- Rifle, Bow, Blackpowder Seasons
- 4 Ranches to hunt - Over 1000 acres
- 130 miles North of Houston
- 130 miles South of Dallas
- Lodging and Meals Available

For Bookings and Price List, Contact:  
Carroll R. Porter

936-396-6969 Day or Evenings  
P.O. Box 173 • Flynn, TX 77855



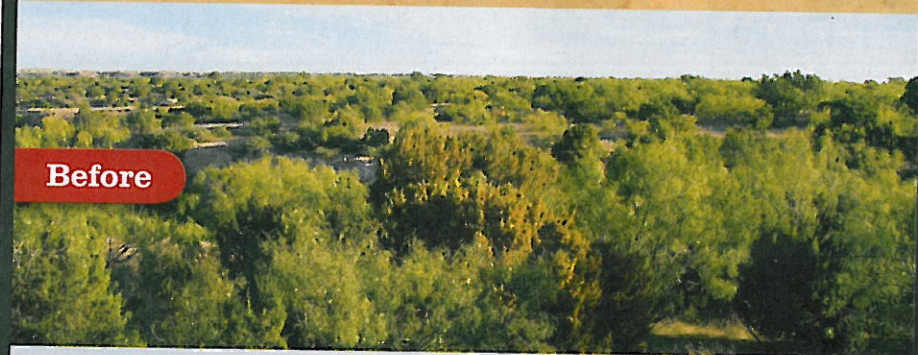
## BRUSH EATERS

► BY THE ◀

# ACRE

### A LAND RECLAMATION SERVICE

**Before**



**After**



**Restore your ranchland, improve your view, and increase the value of your property as we turn your cedars and brush into beneficial mulch.**

- > Cedar Eradication
- > Ranchland Management
- > No Stumps
- > Land Restoration
- > Right-of-way Clearing
- > No Hauling
- > No Soil Disturbance
- > No Burning or Stacking

**Call us today for a free estimate. 806.420.9885 or 806.681.8733**  
[www.brusheaterbytheacre.com](http://www.brusheaterbytheacre.com)