

Wildlife Issues

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Joe Mac Hudspeth, Jr.

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MDWFP Initiates Public Dove Hunting Program



MORE MISSISSIPPIANS TAKE TO THE fields each fall to hunt mourning doves than any other game bird species. While dove hunting has long been very popular in the Magnolia State, finding a place to pursue this game bird seems to get harder every year. In response to public requests, the MDWFP has looked for ways to increase public hunting opportunity in our state. In addition to offering dove hunts on several WMAs across the state, the MDWFP has initiated an exciting new program aimed at providing public dove hunting on private lands.

Under this program, the MDWFP will lease private fields where landowners have prepared and managed a standing crop, such as sunflowers or browntop millet. The MDWFP will then sell a pre-determined number of permits to the general public on a first come, first serve basis to recoup the cost of the lease. The MDWFP will be responsible for managing these public hunts and all fields will be subject to patrol by agency law enforcement officers.

During the 2004 seasons, the MDWFP leased the initial field in this program to serve as a pilot hunt. The field was located near Lackey, Mississippi, in Monroe County. A total of 80 permits were sold at a cost of \$50 each. A permit allowed a hunter to hunt Monday,

Wednesday, and Saturday afternoons during each of the first two dove seasons. A permitted hunter also was allowed to bring up to two youth hunters, provided that not more than one adult and no more than two guns total could hunt on one permit. Initial response from permitted hunters has been favorable, and the MDWFP will continue to monitor and evaluate this pilot hunt.

The MDWFP hopes to expand this opportunity to each region of the state, using lessons learned from this hunt to improve the program for next year. Hopefully, over the next three or four years, the agency will be able to offer several public hunts in each region of the state. If you are a private landowner and think you might be interested in working with the MDWFP on this program, contact Migratory Bird Program Leader Scott Baker at 601-540-5783 for more information.

Dove hunting offers an excellent opportunity to introduce youth to hunting and to the outdoors. It is also a good way for those who might have gotten out of hunting to get back involved. Relative to other types of hunting, an individual needs very little in the way of specialty equipment to enjoy dove hunting. We hope that this program will help make dove hunting more available to many Mississippians in the coming years. **WI**



Tell Us!

1-866-TELCHEK
to report harvested
deer and turkeys

Update and Results of the **Fifteen-Inch Rule** *on Delta Wildlife Management Areas.*

THE DELTA INITIATIVE, COMMONLY known as the 15-inch rule, was implemented on wildlife management areas (WMAs) throughout the Delta last year. These areas include Lake George, Leroy Percy, Mahannah, Shipland, Stoneville, Sunflower, and Twin Oaks in District Three and Malmaison and O'Keefe in District Two. The purpose of this strategy is to protect bucks in younger age classes, which in turn will allow recruitment of more older age class bucks into the population. This article describes the results from the first year of data collection under this rule.

Contrary to popular belief, the 15-inch rule was not implemented to grow 150-inch Boone & Crockett bucks. The goal is simply to give more bucks the chance to breed prior to harvest. Bucks in the Delta can reach harvestable size using some antler restrictions, such as the 4-point rule, in their first year. Protecting these young bucks from harvest will improve the buck:doe ratio. According to historic data from the Delta soil region, a 15-inch spread rule will protect all 1.5 year olds, 80% of the 2.5 year olds, 50% of the 3.5 year olds, and 30% of the 4.5 year olds. This will result in a more balanced sex ratio and, in turn, lead to an earlier rut which will put fawns on the ground earlier.

This concept has been well received by the public. However, there have been a few concerns expressed, such as possible high grading and having antler width essentially narrowed to the point of having a management area full of 14-inch deer. These lower quality deer may have more time to breed than their wide-racked counterparts, but a genetic contribution to the population is made by most bucks for two breeding seasons before they reach 15 inches and are eligible for harvest. Randy DeYoung's

research (2004) from Mississippi State University indicated that one individual buck has minimal breeding impact within the population as a whole. Even if these lower quality deer breed slightly more, it would not nullify the contribution from the higher or intermediate quality deer. It seems safe to speculate that if a higher quality deer's contribution is small his first year, it is far better to let him breed than to allow him to be harvested as a 1.5 year old before any opportunity to breed. Antler restrictions are a tough proposition at best. There will always be some outstanding young bucks harvested at 2.5 years old, which are mistaken for 3.5 year olds, but a vast majority of the 2.5-year-old bucks will have ample opportunity to breed.

In 2003-04 hunter participation throughout the Delta WMAs was down in general. This was expected, since the

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number of harvestable bucks was lower throughout the included areas. Also as expected, buck harvest as a whole decreased throughout all management areas involved, but the harvest was highly variable. Sunflower WMA had a somewhat extreme change in harvest from the previous season. In 2002-03, there were 221 bucks harvested, but this year only 55 bucks were taken. Shipland WMA also had a substantial decrease in the buck harvest. During the 2002-03 season, 29 bucks were harvested on Shipland, but last season only 5 were taken. These two WMAs had the most significant decreases throughout the program.

Doe harvest was not a real focus of the Delta initiative, but it was also extremely variable. Leroy Percy, Mahannah, and O'Keefe had slightly higher doe harvests, whereas Lake George, Malmaison, Shipland, Stoneville, and Sunflower had fewer does taken. Twin Oaks' doe harvest was equal to that of last year. As expected, these figures were highly variable among management areas.

Based on the decrease in buck harvest throughout the Delta region last season, we expect an above average harvest of mature bucks this year. There should be more 3.5 and 4.5-year-old bucks available to hunters on the Delta WMAs this fall compared to the past. As a result of this new surge of mature deer, an insurgence of hunters with high hopes is expected on these WMAs during the 2004-05 hunting season. This year should be the big jump year, where everyone's eyes get big with the excitement of seeing more big deer. However, a plateau in the number of mature bucks in the population should be expected in the next year or two. Good luck and good hunting. **WI**



2004-05 Season Should be a Big Success

THE TIME IS HERE TO ENJOY THE fruits of our management efforts. Deer season has arrived! By all observations, if the weather cooperates, I expect the 2004-05 season to be a success. Environmental conditions are set for deer to be in the best condition in several years. Abundant spring and summer rainfall for the past three years has produced above average fawn crops and should result in many 3.5 and 4.5 year old bucks reaching their full potential. Because these bucks have not seen significant environmental stress in their lifetimes, they will be better able to express their genetic potential.

Bowhunters Report Deer Observations: As wildlife biologists, we are continuously trying to find more effective and cost efficient ways to collect data on wildlife


The Rub
William McKinley
*White-tailed Deer
Program Leader*

species in Mississippi. By asking the sportsmen of Mississippi for help, we can reduce cost and manpower to gain the data we need. In return, we can help answer many of the sportsmen's management questions. During the 2004-05 season, the MDWFP will attempt to gain statewide buck:doe and fawn:doe ratios. To collect the data needed to calculate these ratios, we need the assistance of hunters from every county in Mississippi. We have requested and received the assistance of the

Mississippi Bowhunters Association (MBA) to collect this data. Each of the 1100+ members of the MBA was mailed a pocket-sized deer observation book to record their deer sightings during the 2004-05 season. The participants will record the date, time spent hunting, how many bucks, does, and fawns observed, and the county where they were hunting. The participants will collect data from October 1 to December 1, and then mail the booklets back to the MDWFP. This should provide data from all 82 counties in Mississippi. We will analyze the data to generate county and statewide buck:doe and fawn:doe ratios. These ratios will help the MDWFP provide better recommendations for deer management in Mississippi. Thanks to the MBA for collecting these data. **WI**

Balancing Biology and Public Opinion

HAVE YOU EVER WATCHED A REALLY good juggler? Most of them started with three balls, until they learned to keep them in the air. Then they worked up to four, five, maybe even six, or more. My perspective of wildlife administration is that it has some similarities to juggling. The juggler who loses concentration on any one of the balls that he is trying to keep in the air is going to drop it. If he loses concentration on the whole process and becomes distracted, then every ball is going to hit the ground. At this point the juggler will have failed.

There is a whole basketful of balls in the wildlife world. A complete list would only bore you and waste ink but, as an example, give thought to all the different ways deer hunters prefer to pursue deer. Start with archery, and then consider compounds, recurves, long bows, and even crossbows. If you move next to primitive weapons, then you have to consider the in-lines, flintlocks, percussion caps, and even magnified optics. We have still hunters, dog hunters, buck


Smoke Signals
Larry Castle
Chief of Wildlife

hunters, quality buck hunters, trophy buck hunters, and brown deer hunters. Add to these methods the time within the season that each group wants to hunt. Then throw in hunters pursuing other species, too, with each group wanting its fair "slice of the pie."

Wildlife agency effectiveness ultimately depends on the ability of the agency to balance biology and public opinion while effectively enforcing game laws designed to provide all hunters with a level playing field. Our challenge today is to find the best way(s) to receive public opinion, apply the biology, and then make recommendations that will provide maximum hunter opportunity without negatively impacting the wildlife resource. Our dilemma is that we cannot make everyone happy. Most sportsmen

understand this. They realize that limits and restrictions must exist. They only desire to be heard and not to be dominated by an overwhelming majority or a vocal minority.

My opinion is that we do a good job with the biology. This is not an arrogant statement implying that we know everything. Biologically, our knowledge is continually increasing, requiring us to humbly admit that what we thought we knew earlier may not be entirely correct in every situation.

If the opinion of sportsmen about the effectiveness of the MDWFP remains positive, or improves, it will only be because we hear your opinions. Some of you will receive mail surveys, asking your opinion on a multitude of topics. Others will find us asking for your opinions on our web site. We will continue to have public hearings, designed specifically to give you an opportunity to be heard. No one method will reach everyone, so write us or e-mail us and provide us with the information we need to allow us to balance biology and public opinion. We cannot keep all the balls in the air unless we hear from you. **WI**

Species Profile: Pileated Woodpecker

THE PILEATED WOODPECKER, *Dryocopus pileatus*, gets its name from its head. Pileatus, meaning “capped,” refers to the red crest on the woodpecker’s head. Here in the South, common names for this bird include “Indian Hen” and either “Great God” or “Good Gosh” (as in “Good Gosh what a woodpecker!”) The pileated woodpecker is probably most widely recognized as the model for the cartoon character Woody Woodpecker. With the apparent extinction of the ivory-billed woodpecker, the pileated is now the largest woodpecker in North America.



This distinctive crow-sized woodpecker can be found throughout the eastern half of North America, through most of the southern part of Canada, and into Washington, Oregon, and northern California. Pileated woodpeckers are mostly found in mature forests with a closed canopy and an abundance of snags for feeding and nesting. Streamside forests are preferred because the humid environment promotes decay in the trees, which in turn promotes the increased presence of insects. Around the turn of the century, due to the loss of forested habitat, numbers declined to the point where the survival of this species was in question. But, either through the adaptation of the bird to second growth

Non-Game Issues

Kathy Shelton

Wildlife Biologist

forests or the conversion of farmland back to forests, or both, the pileated woodpecker has made a comeback.

Despite its large size, the pileated woodpecker can be hard to find. Most often, its presence is noted by the large, rectangular or oval shaped holes found in snags in the forest. These holes are mostly made in the winter. They may be up to a foot long and several inches wide. They reach into the heart of the tree, where dormant ants often overwinter. Once it reaches the ant colony, the woodpecker licks up the ants with its long, brushy tongue. Pileated woodpeckers also spend time feeding on the forest floor, tearing apart rotten logs to find ants and beetle larva in the dead wood. While they are primarily insectivorous, these woodpeckers will also eat acorns, beechnuts, grapes, and berries from plants such as holly, poison ivy, sumac, gum, and hackberry.

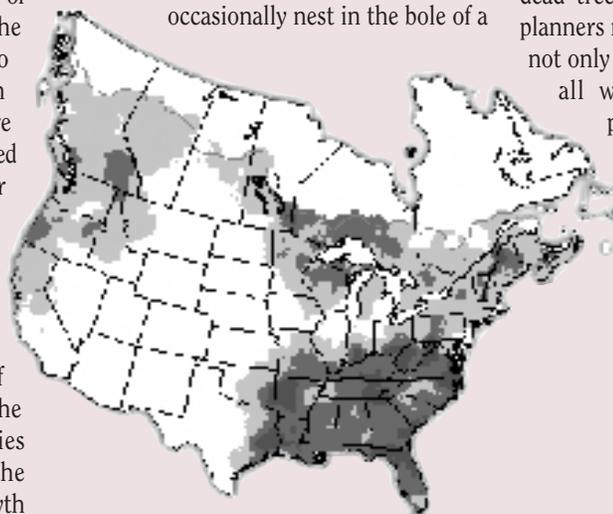
Tree cavities also are used for nesting. The male and female work together to excavate a cavity, from 15 to 80 feet up in a tree. This is normally in a dead tree or the dead top of a live tree, but they will occasionally nest in the bole of a

live tree. The cavity is lined with wood chips from the excavation. Sometime between mid-March to late-May the female lays 3 to 5 eggs. The male and female share the incubation as well as the duties of feeding and caring for the young, once they are hatched. After about one month the young will leave the nest, but continue to be fed by the parents. The young will stay with the parents throughout the summer, leaving in the fall to establish their own territories.

With the apparent extinction of the ivory-billed woodpecker, the pileated is now the largest woodpecker in North America.

Despite the large size, pileated woodpeckers do have predators. Many hawk species have been known to feed on these birds. Humans have also used the birds for both ornamentation and food. Indians used the crest of the pileated woodpecker to adorn the shafts of their ceremonial pipes. Pileated woodpeckers were sold for meat in city markets, although John J. Audubon described the flesh as tough and said it smelled “so strongly of the worms and insects on which it generally feeds, as to be extremely unpalatable.”

These large, impressive birds require lots of space. One bird can have a territory of over 150-200 acres. Because of the need for dead trees for nesting and feeding, forest planners need to leave dead and dying trees, not only for pileated woodpeckers, but for all woodpecker species. While the pileated woodpecker has shown the ability to adapt to younger aged forests, man can help by ensuring older aged trees and plenty of snags for foraging. **WI**



"Native" Vegetation Focus: Kudzu

By Dr. Jeanne Jones & Larry Castle

A "SOUTHERNESE" SAYING, OFTEN muttered in the bluff hills of Natchez to someone standing lazily, depicts the nature of this issue's featured plant — "Stand there much longer and the kudzu will cover you up." One merely has to travel the roads and streambanks of the bluff hills and delta of the Mississippi River to be reminded of the rate at which kudzu can grow! Originally native to China, this leguminous vine was introduced in the U.S. from 1920 - 1950 for erosion control and livestock forage. Over 2 million acres were planted to kudzu during this time period. In the following decades, kudzu spread beyond planted areas and now occurs throughout the southeastern United States, as far north as Connecticut, and west to Illinois, Nebraska, and Oklahoma.

Kudzu (*Pueraria montana*) is a member of the legume or bean family and resembles a butter bean vine on steroids! The plants exhibit twining or trailing semi-woody, many-noded stems that may reach over 100 feet in length. Roots are tuberous and may reach depths ranging from three to 18 feet beneath the soil's surface. Roots may arise along the stem from each node that contacts soil. Young, actively growing stems are round in cross section and are generally hairy and light green in color. As stems mature, they become less hairy, more woody, and brownish in color. The leaves are arranged alternately along the stem and are comprised of three leaflets that are pointed at the tips and lobed along the sides, if growing in direct sunlight. The middle leaflet is generally symmetrical with two lobes, whereas outer leaflets exhibit one lobe. Shade grown leaves may lack lobes on leaflets. Leaves are covered with fine hair on their upper surface and dense, silver hair on their underside. The petiole, which attaches the leaf to the stems, is covered with coarse brownish hair.

Kudzu flowers appear from June through September in leaf axils. The fragrant, pea-like flowers are borne in pairs, or sometimes threes, up the stalk. The flowers lower on the stalk open prior to the younger flowers at the stalk's tip. The upper petal of each flower is lavender pink to wine rose, with a yellow spot inside that serves as a nectar guide for pollinating insects.



The lower petals are deeper purple to red wine in color. Following visits by insects, pollinated flowers yield seeds that mature from September through January. Seeds are borne in clustered pods that resemble elongated butter bean pods. When mature, pods bulge with seed and are covered with brownish golden hairs that give them a furry appearance. Several native legumes have a growth form similar to that of kudzu; however, none of these native

Kudzu is classified as a nonnative invasive species due to the rate of spread and the tendency to dominate and exclude other native plants, including trees.

legumes exhibit the vine size, robustness of growth, or the hairy appearance of leaves, petioles, and seed pods of kudzu.

Kudzu is classified as a nonnative invasive species due to the rate of spread and the tendency to dominate and exclude other native plants, including trees. Spread of kudzu can occur from seed dispersal and rooting along stem nodes when vines contact the ground or are covered by leaf litter. Kudzu forms dense mats that generally exclude other plants, with the exception of blackberries and evergreen trees and shrubs. Monitoring and control of kudzu is conducted on many public lands to limit negative impacts to timber resources, native plant diversity, and wildlife habitat. Despite eradication programs, kudzu is still common along road and utility line rights-of-way and stream banks, where it out competes native herbaceous and woody plants.

Although kudzu is generally considered a pest species, the plant provides some benefits and is used for food and cover by selected wildlife species. Like other legumes, kudzu enhances soil quality by extracting nitrogen from the air, into its roots and the soil, through a microbial association in the nodules of its roots. Dense kudzu thickets provide excellent cover for young deer fawns and are favored locales for woodchuck dens. Kudzu is also the host plant for the larva of the silver spotted skipper butterfly.

As a spring and summer white-tailed deer browse plant, kudzu is truly outstanding. Most Southeastern deer browse ratings rarely rank kudzu in the list of forage species of value to deer, however. This is probably due to kudzu's nonnative status and limited geographic occurrence. Only Miller and Miller, in *Forest Plants of the Southeast*, mention kudzu. They rate the plant "excellent until killed by frost." Kudzu is a good indicator plant to observe to determine if a killing frost has occurred.

MDWFP biologists rate kudzu as highly preferred by deer in the summer and early fall. We regularly observe intensive deer utilization of kudzu, especially in areas of high deer density. Kudzu is heavily browsed during "droughty" summers, when native vegetation is particularly fibrous.

Many landowners have kudzu spreading across open acres or into fields where regular clipping is done to prevent it from continuing to expand. Deer readily utilize these areas as the clipped kudzu exhibits a growth spurt of new tender growth. The same condition occurs on many roadsides during the clipping done in the late summer.

Because of its invasive, nonnative status, and negative impacts to desired trees and other vegetation, we certainly do not recommend the transport or propagation of kudzu. In addition, kudzu is addressed in the *Mississippi Noxious Weed List* and the intentional transport or spread of it is illegal by various state statutes. **WI**

DR. JEANNE JONES is an associate professor and scientific illustrator in the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries at Mississippi State University. In addition to teaching, Jeanne conducts research on habitat restoration and management on public and private lands.

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The Hatch – What Will It Bring This Year?

HOW IS THE HATCH THIS YEAR? This is a question heard commonly throughout the summer by MDWFP biologists. Each year the MDWFP and other cooperators conduct a brood survey to determine what kind of hatch our turkeys had. This survey is conducted by field personnel with the MDWFP, Mississippi Forestry Commission, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and Weyerhaeuser Corporation. The survey takes place from June — August and participants are asked to record the date and number of hens, poults, gobblers and unknowns for each observation. The data collected during this survey allow the MDWFP to calculate average brood size and average number of poults observed for all hens. We use average number of poults per all hens observed because it accounts for each hen observed, whether or not they successfully reproduced. This gives us a better idea of what is going on in the population.

So how does the hatch impact our spring hunting seasons? The greatest impact probably is on the number of 2-year-old gobblers in the population. As many of you may know, the number of 2-year-olds tends to dictate how good (or bad) a season we will have, because they tend to be the most vocal birds in the woods and are a lot of fun to hunt. So there tends to be a 2-year time lag in the impact the hatch has on our quality of hunting. The most noticeable impact the hatch has on the next hunting season is the number of jakes observed by hunters. After an excellent hatch, we typically have a high number of jake observations during the following spring. The past couple of years are a good example of this. During 2001 and 2002 we experienced excellent hatches and, as a result, jake observations were high during 2002 and 2003. Subsequently, we had record levels of harvest and gobbling activity during the 2003 season, based on Spring Gobbler Hunting Survey (SGHS) data. We have not analyzed SGHS data from the 2004 season, but hunter reports indicate that trend will probably continue. The next couple of years may be different. Mississippi experienced a relatively poor hatch during 2003. We have received numerous reports from hunters that very few jakes were observed during the 2004 season, which also indicates a poor hatch last year. As a result, we expect to see a decrease in gobbling activity and harvest during the 2005 spring season, because there will probably be fewer 2-year-olds running around.

Alright, back to the original question—How's the hatch this year? Annual brood survey data indicate the lowest hatch on record, which can probably be attributed to weather conditions. Many parts of the state received multiple days of rainfall during mid-May, a timeframe when a number of hens are still nesting. For the second consecutive year, the delta had the best hatch in the state, but even in the delta, hatch numbers were down from last year. As mentioned earlier, the impacts of a poor hatch usually are felt 2 years later. The bottom line is hunters can expect below average seasons during 2006 and 2007, after 2 consecutive years of poor hatches. So let's keep our fingers crossed for a better hatch next summer.

Spittin' & Drummin'

James Austin
Turkey Program Leader



Other contributions include the purchase of 2 mechanical turkey decoys to aid our conservation officers in the enforcement of turkey hunting regulations.

The NWTF has contributed to the "Acorns for Wildlife Initiative" at the local, state, and national level. This initiative is discussed in detail in this edition of Wildlife Issues. The Greater Jackson Chapter of the NWTF has committed \$8,000 over the next 2 years to help fund a research project evaluating enhanced oak seedlings. The MCNWTF has committed \$2,000 for funding various aspects of the initiative. Finally, at the national level, the NWTF has provided funding for growing the enhanced oak seedlings and for shipping them to Mississippi. Our hat goes off to the NWTF for supporting the conservation of our wild turkey resource in Mississippi.

Mississippi Wild Turkey Federation (MWTF): The Oxford Chapter of the MWTF assisted the MDWFP with habitat improvements on WMAs in District 2.

Conservation Organizations Partner With MDWFP Wild Turkey Program

National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF): During the past year, the Mississippi Chapter of the NWTF (MCNWTF) made numerous contributions to our turkey program. The production of our 2004 Wild Turkey Report would not have been possible without the assistance of the MCNWTF. They provided funds to print the report and postage to mail the report to over 5,000 individuals throughout the state. The MCNWTF also provided funding for 140 bags of clover mix to be planted on WMAs throughout the state. The mix contained durana white, crimson, and red clovers, which are all beneficial to turkeys and other wildlife. Combined with the 100 bags of clover mix purchased by the MDWFP, there was enough to plant approximately 480 acres within our WMAs.



They donated over 80 bags of a food plot mixture containing winter wheat, rye, oats, crimson clover, and Austrian winter peas. This mixture was planted on O'Keefe, Hamer, Malmaison, Calhoun County, Sardis Waterfowl, and Upper Sardis WMAs. We appreciate the efforts made by the MWTF in assisting with habitat management in North Mississippi. **WI**



Migratory Framework

By Richard Wells

THE MIGRATORY BIRD TREATY Act (MBTA) of 1916, ratified by the Canadian and United States governments, allows for the annual hunting seasons on various species of migratory waterfowl to occur. The U. S. Department of Interior, through the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), has the responsibility of providing and regulating annual hunting seasons on migratory game birds. It is also the responsibility of the USFWS to manage, monitor, and protect migratory waterfowl during their bi-annual migrations in the U. S., as many of these birds migrate from Canada to Mexico and South America.

The MBTA allows a framework for annual hunting seasons to occur from September 1 through March 10 each year. Within this annual framework, states have options to select a pre-determined number of days and season lengths for various species of migratory game birds.

The most important species of migratory game birds for which the MDWFP sets annual regulations are doves, ducks, and geese. For doves, the annual framework is September 1 through January 15 each year. For the past several years MDWFP has had two options in providing annual regulations for hunting doves. One is for a season length of 60 days with a daily bag limit of 15 doves per day. The other is for a season length of 75 days with a daily bag limit of twelve doves per day. With input from the public, including agency surveys, MDWFP has selected a season of 60 days and a daily bag limit of 15 doves per day for Mississippi hunters.

Setting annual regulations for ducks and geese is more complex than for most migratory game birds. The annual framework for ducks and geese is the Saturday nearest September 24 to the last Sunday in January each year. Management of North American waterfowl resources is divided into

Yockanookany WMA

By Lann M. Wilf

YOCKANOOKANY WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT Area (WMA) is a 2,600 acre parcel located in Attala County, approximately 12 miles east of Kosciusko, near McCool. This area is dominated by bottomland hardwood stands of varying age classes, with some old growth scattered throughout the area. Most of the upland stands have been harvested within the last 20-25 years and are now dominated by sweetgum, which have shaded out a large amount of deer browse. A 75-100 acre water tupelo swamp, which is virtually inaccessible, is located on the eastern boundary of the area.

The Yockanookany Canal, in addition to several oxbows of the old river, runs the length of the area. This makes the area highly susceptible to flooding with moderately heavy rainfall.

This area should eventually become one of the higher quality hunting areas for both deer and turkeys, since all hunts are permit only.

However, the channelized canal reduces the duration of floods within the area. These common floods refill the old river oxbows, which provide high quality fishing opportunities. These oxbows provide some duck hunting opportunities, as well. There is also a 25-30 acre, naturally flooded, shallow pond on the area, which is a known duck roost. Since this area is an active roost for most of the winter, waterfowl hunting on Yockanookany WMA will be limited to mornings only in order to preserve the roost.

Deer hunting on the area should be exceptional. Deer numbers appear to be high based on habitat conditions, which show indications of overpopulation. This area has not had any legal deer hunting opportunities in almost ten years, and has essentially been a sanctuary. Doe harvest in this area needs to be extensive in order to prevent long term damage to deer browse and habitat. Based on the lack of

legal hunting opportunities and the condition of deer browse on the area, there should be decent numbers of older age class bucks and more than adequate numbers of does available for harvest.

The turkey population is high, especially considering the susceptibility of this area to flooding. Floods in this watershed can occur very quickly after a heavy rain upstream. The active flooding regime does disrupt a large portion of the turkey nesting season, as well as cause birds to leave the area altogether after a heavy rain. However, when the area is dry, turkey hunting should be excellent.

The small game opportunities are primarily limited to squirrel hunting, because of habitat type. Squirrel numbers should be plentiful throughout the area, especially in older timber stands. Fair mast crop yields over the last couple of years should have maintained a huntable squirrel population, but the mast production has not been high enough to raise the population significantly. Rabbit populations have been low mainly because of lack of habitat, some of which can be attributed to deer overpopulation. However, the opportunity for rabbit hunting exists and is not limited in the WMA regulations.

Deer and turkey hunter success should be very high this year and the MDWFP is looking forward to offering public hunting on the area. The only practical way to control deer numbers is through hunting, and we are hoping to have the ability to provide ample opportunities this season. This area should eventually become one of the higher quality hunting areas for both deer and turkeys, since all hunts are permit only. Accessing the area will be a formidable challenge this season because of the condition of the roads, which is due to uncertainty in acquiring access to the area and weather conditions that have been less than favorable for dirt work. However, access should improve in the future, in addition to hunting opportunity and quality. **WI**

four administrative flyway councils. The flyways are the Atlantic, Mississippi, Central, and Pacific. Mississippi is one of the 14 states and three Canadian Provinces in the Mississippi Flyway. These flyway councils receive data from annual aerial and ground surveys on the breeding and wintering grounds in the U. S. and Canada, as well as annual harvest data from

the respective counties. After the data is received and fall flights of waterfowl are predicted, the flyways and individual states make annual hunting season regulation recommendations to the USFWS for the upcoming waterfowl season. Depending on the numbers of birds that are predicted in the fall flight forecasts, flyways and states select

dates, season lengths, and bag limits for their respective annual waterfowl hunting seasons. For the past several years Mississippi has selected an option that provides for a 60 day season length, which ends the last Sunday in January, with a daily bag limit of six ducks. **WI**

Facts and Opinions About Hunting Trends

THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF FISHING, Hunting, and Wildlife Associated Recreation was first conducted in 1955. Since that time, follow-up surveys have been done at roughly five-year intervals to allow trend analyses of participation levels. Considering 1955 as the standard for comparison and noting the changes over time, as a percent change from those initial values, yields some eye-opening results.

From 1955, hunting participation actually increased faster than population growth, until 1975. Since that time it has declined both in the total number of hunters and in relation to the overall U. S. population. This is troubling because the traditional base of financial, sociological, and political support for wildlife management has come primarily from hunters. Of particular concern is the trend over the three previous surveys (1991, 1996, and 2001.) Although the overall number of Americans who hunted changed little from 1991 to 1996, it fell a dramatic 7% from 1996 to 2001. The number of hunting days actually rose 9% from 1991 to 1996, but this indicator, too, dropped markedly between 1996 and 2001, falling 11%.

It is especially interesting to look at these trends in the context of the species hunted. For the National Survey, big game species are considered to be deer, elk, and turkey. The number of big game hunters went up 5% from 1991 to 1996, and the number of hunting days rose 9%, countering declines in small game hunting. From 1996 to 2001, though, participation dropped 3% while hunting days were essentially unchanged.

Within the big game grouping there were marked differences between the two species we have an opportunity to pursue in Mississippi. The number of deer hunters nationally in 1996 increased by 5% from 1991. Turkey hunters, however, increased by 27%. Deer hunting days were up 16%, but turkey hunting days jumped 37%

In the Wild Randy Spencer Wildlife Coordinator

By 2001, deer hunters in the U. S. fell by 4% compared to 1996. For the same period there were 14% more turkey hunters. Deer hunting days were up 2% for the period, despite the decline in hunter numbers. Mean-while, turkey hunting days climbed another 25%.



The trends in our state are reflective of those at the national level. They should not be surprising in the context of what has occurred with deer and turkey across their ranges in the country.

Expanding deer populations and widespread concerns of habitat destruction and disease problems associated with undesirably high deer numbers characterized the early 1990's. Liberalized either-sex deer seasons provided unprecedented opportunities for hunters to harvest deer. Perhaps, as a result, it became less of an accomplishment for hunters to kill

It is especially interesting to look at these trends in the context of the species hunted.

deer, to the point that motivation declined and, therefore, so did participation. Not only was it no longer a big deal to kill a deer, in many cases, it became hard work to keep populations at levels necessary to meet management objectives. We biologists have shared a realistic concern among ourselves for several years. We are afraid that we will eventually reach a point where we simply do not have enough hunters to control our deer populations by legal means. Maybe that time is closer than we care to admit.

So why did turkey hunting increase so dramatically through the same period?

Nationally, turkey stocking efforts continued to support range expansion, population increases, and resulting hunting opportunities for a species for which supply did not already exceed demand. Concurrently, in Mississippi, the last suitable unoccupied habitats were stocked and the burgeoning "new ground effect" was added to turkey populations beginning to recover from a natural low in a cycle. Fair weather turkey hunters returned to the sport in a big way, partially offsetting deer hunting declines and mitigating some of the overall losses in small game hunting.

Rabbit, squirrel, and pheasant make up the small game group for the National Survey. From 1991 to 1996 overall small game participation declined 9% and, concurrently, small game hunting days dropped 3%. The declines worsened from 1996 to 2001, with participation in small game hunting off another 22% and hunting days down 20%.

The rabbit and squirrel components of the small game group, available to hunters in Mississippi, showed across the board declines nationally from 1991 to 2001. Rabbit hunters plummeted 21% in 1996 and 33% in 2001, while rabbit hunting days were off 19% and 21% for the two surveys. Over those same times and surveys, squirrel hunters dropped 10% and 34% and squirrel hunting days were down 14% and 12%.

It is not difficult to rationalize the decline in rabbit hunting. Obviously, modern farming practices do not supply much critical early successional stage habitat. The same is true of some of the more intensive forestry management practices. Add to that the fact that rabbit hunting is primarily a dog hunting sport. Fewer and fewer modern hunters maintain packs of rabbit dogs for a variety of reasons. There is less access to good habitat, which lessens motivation. The expense of maintaining facilities and the upkeep of the dogs can be daunting. Conflicts with deer hunters are at least a concern. With less habitat and fewer hunters with dogs, it isn't hard to figure out what has happened to rabbit hunting.

[Cont. on 10]

Mississippi's "Acorns for Wildlife" Initiative



NATURAL RESOURCE PROFESSIONALS AND CONSERVATIONISTS with the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks (MDWFP), Mississippi Forestry Commission (MFC), Mississippi State University (MSU), National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTf), Georgia Forestry Commission (GFC), and the Mississippi Chapter of the NWTf have begun an Acorns for Wildlife initiative. This initiative is aimed at producing enhanced oak seedlings, which are grown according to protocols developed by Dr. Paul Kormanik, a hardwood researcher with the U. S. Forest Service (USFS). These protocols are designed to grow oak trees capable of producing acorns by ten years of age. Our goal is to produce enhanced oak seedlings that will be available to Mississippi landowners for improving wildlife habitat on their property.

During the fall of 2002, the MFC and MDWFP collected acorns that were grown according to Dr. Kormanik's protocol at the GFC Flint River Nursery. The NWTf provided funding for growing these seedlings. Approximately 5,700 seedlings were planted on wildlife management areas throughout the state during January 2004. During fall of 2003, the MFC collected 10,000 acorns from each of four oak species. Again, these acorns were shipped to the Flint River Nursery to be grown according to Dr. Kormanik's protocol. A portion of the resulting seedlings, which will be available in January 2005, will be used in a research project being developed by Dr. Andy Ezell of the MSU College of Forest Resources. The purpose of this project will be to evaluate survival, growth, and acorn production of enhanced oak seedlings as compared to standard nursery-run seedlings. The remainder of the seedlings will be available to private landowners throughout the state.

The story doesn't end there. Plans have already been made to collect acorns again during fall of 2004 and send them to the Flint River Nursery. This batch of seedlings, which will be available in January 2006, will be distributed to private landowners throughout the state. With continued cooperation from partnering agencies, this project will provide enhanced oak seedlings for the improvement of wildlife habitat for many years to come. It would appear the Acorns for Wildlife project has taken root in Mississippi!

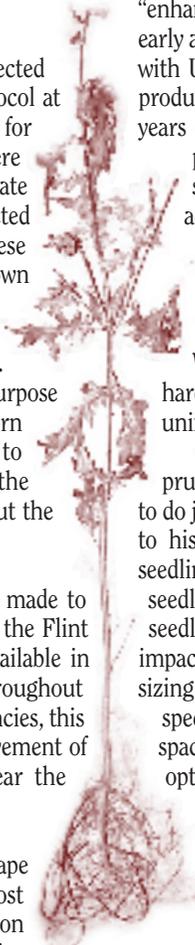
Why "Enhanced" Oak Seedlings? Mississippi's landscape has undergone many changes in the last hundred years. Most forests have been cut and abandoned to slowly regenerate on their own or have been replaced with agricultural fields, pine plantations, pastures, developments, or other land uses. For the wild turkey and other wildlife, the condition of the remaining forested landscape, especially stands of mast producing hardwoods, is a crucial aspect of their habitat requirements. In many areas, the quality and quantity of suitable hardwood forests available to wildlife have declined due to a lack of management and poor timber harvesting practices.

While silvicultural scientists have successfully developed efficient pine regeneration techniques through decades of study, hardwood research efforts and regeneration advocacy have not been as extensive. Furthermore, while many have long understood the importance of sustaining mast producing hardwoods for wildlife, forestry's historical direction and focus on pine research has continued to expand the economic returns gap between pines and hardwoods.

The good news is that hardwood research has finally been conducted that has resulted in a methodology for producing "enhanced" oak seedlings, which have increased growth rates and early acorn production. Dr. Paul Kormanik and a team of researchers with USFS have successfully grown many species of oak trees that produced a significant number of acorns before they reached ten years of age. For landowners with a wildlife interest, early acorn production is a strong incentive for planting the enhanced seedlings. Also, because these oaks are native, they are better adapted and suited to our physical and biological climate here in the Southeast. This can help maintain Mississippi's native plant ecology, while allowing us to better manage for wildlife.

What's Different About "Enhanced" Oak Seedlings? Most hardwood nurseries attempt to grow small seedlings that are uniform in size to facilitate machine planting. To do this they use standard nursery practices such as top-clipping, root pruning, and limiting water and fertilizer. Dr. Kormanik's goal is to do just the opposite - grow the largest seedlings possible. The keys to his success are selecting quality acorns, growing large-rooted seedlings, planting the seedlings in full sunlight, fertilizing the seedlings, and controlling herbaceous competition around the seedlings. His methodology is designed to optimize the factors that impact growth rates and acorn production. The process starts by sizing the acorns to be planted in the nursery. The smallest acorns, by species, are discarded. The remaining acorns are planted on wider spacing than standard nursery procedures and provided with optimal water, fertilizer, and minerals. After about one year in the nursery, the seedlings are lifted and graded. Since growth rates vary by species, each oak species is sized separately and the smallest seedlings are discarded. The remaining better quality or "enhanced" seedlings are bagged and approved for planting.

Landowners interested in planting the enhanced seedlings do not have to worry about what happens at the nursery. Their role becomes critical during the planting process and with the care provided during the first growing season. To achieve Kormanik's level of success with growth rates and early acorn production, it is essential for landowners to follow his protocol. The seedlings should be planted on an appropriate site, in full sunlight, using a six inch auger to create a hole large enough to accommodate the large root *[Cont. on 15]*



2003-2004 Waterfowl Season

IN THE WILD

[Cont. from 8]

THE SEASON DATES HAVE FINALLY been set! Mallard numbers and May pond counts were above the threshold for a 60 day season, so that is what the MS Flyway will be permitted to have this year. The 60 day, six duck bag limit is the most liberal season offered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) for the MS Flyway. The duck season dates are: Nov. 26-28, Dec. 4-24, and Dec. 26 to Jan. 30. Pintail and canvasback season will be open from Jan. 1-30. We were able to maximize the number of weekends available by splitting the season into three segments. Three season segments are the most allowed under the federal framework. Also, by having the duck season open as late as allowed (the last Sunday in January), we hope to time hunting opportunity for the highest probability of ducks being in Mississippi. The bag limit will be the same as last year. For detailed information on migratory bird season dates and bag limits, log on to www.mdwfp.com.

Cupped & Committed

Scott Baker

*Migratory Bird
Program Leader*

requirements that allow Mississippi to put the conservation order in place. It is very important that each hunter who requests a permit completes and returns the survey, so that we are able keep this additional hunting

Mallard numbers and May pond counts were above the threshold for a 60 day season

opportunity. To show you how interest has grown in Mississippi, below are some results of the light goose conservation order hunter

	<u>2002</u>	<u>2003</u>
Total participating hunters (hunters receiving a permit)	395	678
Number that hunted during the Conservation Order	236	390
Total number of light geese taken under the Conservation Order	3,600	7,955

Light Goose Conservation Order: The conservation order on light geese has been in place for several years now, with hunter participation and success increasing each year. This conservation order has been a productive tool for decreasing the continental population of light geese, which has exceeded the carrying capacity of the habitat, especially the Arctic where they nest each summer. The conservation order is not a hunting season, but a period when light geese can be taken by means that would be illegal during a waterfowl season (i.e., unplugged gun, electronic calls, and hunting 30 minutes past sunset). A hunter who wishes to participate in the conservation order must call the MDWFP District Three office at (662)459-9759 to receive a free permit prior to hunting. Hunters must supply their mailing address so they may be sent a survey, after the conservation order has closed, to report their hunting success. The survey data are used to comply with USFWS reporting

surveys for the 2002 and 2003 hunting seasons.

Wood Duck Banding and Trapping: The 2003 banding season was the best yet for MDWFP, with 196 wood ducks banded. Jim Willcutt, an Oktibbeha County conservation officer, banded 146 wood ducks. Not only was Jim the 2003 "Wood Duck Bander of the Year" for MDWFP, he also set the record for the most wood ducks banded by an individual within the agency. Jim is quick to point out that he did not do this alone, but it was a combined effort of several people within the District One family. The 2004 banding season might set another MDWFP wood duck banding record, perhaps even doubling the 2003 total. The increased knowledge we are gathering from Mississippi's resident waterfowl species, through banding, will hopefully lead to additional wood duck hunting opportunity for our hunters. **WI**

It is the squirrel hunting situation that I just cannot explain. Admittedly, I'm biased by a 40-year dedication to what is my absolute favorite hunting activity. (Undoubtedly, this bias is enhanced by an even longer appreciation of biscuits and squirrel gravy.) There just is no obvious reason to me as to why squirrel hunting is so rapidly diminishing. The only potential explanation that holds any merit to me is the widespread availability of deer hunting opportunities. Hunters now do, indeed, often begin their hunting careers with deer, rather than small game. But there is more to it than that, somehow. Squirrels are abundant, easily accessible, and relatively inexpensive to pursue. Action is frequently non-stop, which makes squirrel hunting excellent for young hunters with limited attention spans. It does not require much time to have a good hunt. It can be as challenging as you choose to make it. While hunting with dogs is a beloved method to some, it is no longer prevalent and is only one good option, not a requirement.

No, there is something more. Maybe I cannot exactly identify the reasons for the decline of squirrel hunting, and hunting generally in the U. S., or maybe I am just not willing to accept them. Maybe it is the combination of urbanization, demographic changes, and social values that we so often hear espoused as the reason hunting is declining. Or maybe it is something even more insidious. Maybe Americans as a whole are losing their connection to wild places and wild things. I hope that is not the case, because that possibility frightens me more than all the others combined.

I plan to take my kids squirrel hunting as soon as youth season opens. I hope a lot of others do the same. It just may be what it takes to begin to reverse a trend. **WI**

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Nutria: Furbearer Species Spotlight

NUTRIA (*Myocastor coypus*), pronounced “new-tree-ah,” are large, semi-aquatic rodents with voracious appetites. Averaging 12-15 lbs, they are active both day and night, although primarily nocturnal feeders. Persons who are not familiar with nutria may mistake them for beaver or muskrat. Indeed, a close exam will find characteristics of both. Though smaller than a mature beaver and larger than a muskrat, the head and main body of a nutria are more like a beaver, while the tail is much more similar to that of a muskrat. Only the hind feet are webbed. They have large incisors, like the beaver, that are orange in color.



Nutria are not native to Mississippi, or even the United States. They were introduced worldwide from South America, during the early 1900s, with the original intent of fur farming. They became established in Louisiana during the 1930s. The freshwater marshes were ideal habitat for them and their population grew to over 20 million by the 1950s. Their accelerated expansion was boosted partly by a huge storm surge, from Hurricane Audrey in 1957, that pushed the animals farther inland. At that time, they also began to spread into coastal Mississippi. They have since moved northward and are now even occasionally found in the northern counties of Mississippi. Once an important fur species, as many as 1.3 million were trapped annually during the 1960s and 1980's in Louisiana. The harvest has since dropped to as low as 30,000 in 2001. Louisiana nutria pelt prices peaked at \$8.19 in 1981, but declined to below \$2 by 1987.

Mississippi nutria populations are not nearly as dense as those found in Louisiana, mostly due to abundant preferred habitat available in the Louisiana coastal freshwater marshes. Mississippi's nutria harvest was only 9,500 in 1986, and current annual harvest is around

1,000 per year. Though once prized, nutria pelts have recently averaged as low as \$0.36. The selling price per pelt did rise to \$1.25 at the Mississippi Trappers Association fur sale in 2004. Most nutria are caught incidental to beaver trapping efforts. However, when nutria are encountered on private lands, landowners are quick to realize their pesky characteristics. Nutria are known for burrowing into levees and dikes, much more so than their cousin the beaver. Nutria can quickly multiply, giving birth to two litters per year with an average of four to five young per litter. Nutria are sexually mature at four months old and have a gestation of 130 days. The lifespan of the nutria is around 6.5 years.

Nutria are almost entirely herbivorous, but they occasionally eat freshwater mussels and crustaceans and will dig for snails, when the opportunity arises. They prefer the basal portions of plants, but may eat several parts or even the whole plant. The plants they eat include cordgrass, bulrush, spikerush, chafflower, pickernelweed, cattail, arrowhead, and flatsedge. During winter, the bark of trees such as black willow and bald cypress may be eaten, as well as roots, rhizomes, and tubers. Nutrias also eat crops and lawn grasses found adjacent to aquatic habitat. One adult nutria will consume an average of three pounds of vegetation per day — 25% of their total body mass!

The intensity of their grazing, causes soil erosion and loss of habitat on which many other species depend. Nutria were introduced to areas all across the U.S. because they were thought to be a natural method to control invasive vegetation, such as water hyacinth. These efforts proved ineffective, however, because nutria prefer native plants to invasive nonnative plants. Due mostly to these relocations, nutria are now found in 40 states and three Canadian provinces.

Louisiana estimates that over 100,000 acres of freshwater wetlands have been destroyed due to high densities of nutria. The greatest damage has been in and near freshwater marshes. The disruption of marsh ecology can have long-term

effects on many species. For example, 98% percent of the fish and shellfish harvested from the Gulf of Mexico are dependent on coastal wetlands. Soil erosion and water quality can also be greatly affected. Due to declining fur market prices, trappers currently have little incentive to harvest nutria. As a result, populations have reached dangerous levels in some areas.

Louisiana recognizes that valuable resources will be affected or lost if nutria population densities are not managed. A cooperative incentive program was initiated in 2002-03 among the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources, the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration, and the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program. The goal is to harvest 400,000 nutria annually in specific parishes where habitat destruction is confirmed. After a comprehensive registration process, qualified landowners may receive a payment (bounty) of \$4 for each tail submitted at specific collection sites. Regulations and requirements are carefully administered to insure harvest is occurring in areas registered within the program. Satellite imagery has been used to compare pre-program and post-harvest habitat changes. Habitat recovery is already being realized in some registered areas after only two years of the program.

Management of nutria populations is an important task, even in Mississippi. Monitor nutria populations closely if they exist on your property. Trapping can be a very effective tool to manage nutria populations. Techniques used to trap muskrat and beaver are generally effective on nutria. The Mississippi Trappers Association, at (601) 535-2806, can help you contact local trappers in your area. **WI**

Some information provided by “Nutria in Louisiana,” Louisiana Department of Wildlife & Fisheries.



New Bobwhite Buffer Practice Offered within CRP

THE USDA FARM SERVICE AGENCY (FSA) recently released some very exciting news for private land managers interested in improving bobwhite quail habitat on their property. The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) Northern Bobwhite Quail Habitat Initiative will create 250,000 acres of quail habitat across the range of this important species! Specifically, the new initiative introduces a conservation practice (CP-33) intended to create 250,000 acres of buffer habitat along agricultural field borders.

A fact sheet released by the USDA in August 2004 states, "The initiative partners FSA with landowners, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 32 state fish and wildlife agencies, Quail Unlimited, the Southeast Quail Study Group, Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited, the National Wild Turkey Federation, and other conservation groups, including local conservation districts." The FSA estimates that this initiative could increase quail numbers by 750,000 birds annually, while also benefiting numerous other wildlife species associated with similar habitat types! This buffer practice will also reduce soil erosion and protect water quality in agricultural areas by trapping field sediments and nutrients.

Research in Mississippi, North Carolina, and other states has documented significant benefits of field border buffers to bobwhite populations. Members of the Southeast Quail Study Group have advocated the inclusion of bobwhite friendly buffer practices into Farm Bill programs for many years. This new practice dovetails perfectly into the Northern Bobwhite Conservation Initiative, the regional quail recovery plan. All of us who are concerned about quail should applaud the FSA for implementing this exciting new CRP practice.

Small Game News

Dave Godwin
*Small Game
Coordinator*

To be eligible for this practice, cropland must be suitably located and adaptable to the establishment of bobwhite quail. Also, the applicant must satisfy basic eligibility and cropping history criteria for CRP. For more information on the CRP Northern Bobwhite Quail Habitat Initiative, contact your local county FSA office or go to www.fsa.usda.gov.

MDWFP Continues Mourning Dove Banding Project

MDWFP personnel trapped and banded mourning doves in each region of the state again during the summer of 2004. Approximately 1,000 doves were banded in Mississippi this summer, bringing the two-year total to over 2,000 birds. MDWFP is partnering with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and 26 other states to conduct this research project. This study will provide wildlife managers with important information on dove movements, survival, and harvest rates. We have already seen some very interesting results from hunter-reported band recoveries during this study. For example, doves banded in Mississippi in 2003 were

harvested in Alabama, Tennessee, Missouri, and even North Carolina! Hunters should check for bands on doves they harvest and report banded birds by simply calling the toll-free number listed on the band.

MSU Hires Quail

Research Associate

Mississippi State University, in partnership with MDWFP, recently hired Rick Hamrick to serve as Research Associate on the Bobwhite Quail Research Program. Rick has a B.S. in Wildlife from MSU and an M.S. from the University of Georgia, where he most recently worked as a Research Associate. Rick will be working closely with MDWFP and Dr. Wes Burger on numerous quail projects. His primary objective will be to develop a Mississippi-specific step-down plan from the regional Northern Bobwhite Conservation Initiative. We are excited to have Rick working with MDWFP on this plan! **WI**



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MDWFP TECHNICAL STAFF MEMBER ELECTED CHAIR OF QUAIL STUDY GROUP

MDWFP SMALL GAME COORDINATOR Dave Godwin was recently selected as Chair-elect of the Southeast Quail Study Group (SEQSG). The SEQSG is comprised of over 125 wildlife professionals from state and federal agencies, universities, and private organizations. The SEQSG is guided by a seven-member steering committee. The group also has six standing committees addressing agricultural policy, forest management, funding, habitat implementation, publicity, information and education, and research. The SEQSG holds an annual meeting, usually in the fall. While updates on quail management and research efforts are given, this meeting primarily gives the committee members an opportunity to actively develop and take action on various quail issues.

The SEQSG was formed in 1995 and has made significant contributions to the conservation of quail and other wildlife during the past decade. The objectives of the SEQSG include:

- Identifying factors responsible for population declines of bobwhites and other associated early successional wildlife species.
- Identifying gaps in knowledge about bobwhite population dynamics and ecology.
- Developing and implementing solutions to habitat and population management problems.
- Providing sound, scientifically based information to stakeholders, administrators, and policy makers.
- Developing and implementing solutions to specific bobwhite population, habitat and management problems.
- Perpetuating the tradition of the sport of wild bobwhite quail hunting.

Godwin was a charter member of the SEQSG in 1995, and has represented MDWFP on quail-related issues since that time. MDWFP Wildlife Division Chief Larry Castle said his agency understands the importance of participating in regional and national conservation efforts. "Accomplishment of state agency mission statements is no longer achieved solely by the regulatory process. Multi-disciplined partnerships and state agency participa-

History of Deer & Turkey Populations in Northeastern Mississippi

By Bobby Wilson



DEER AND TURKEY WERE ALMOST non-existent in northeastern Mississippi around the turn of the century. Populations remained low in most areas through the mid-1960's. Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge, Holly Springs National Forest, and Tombigbee National Forest harbored the only huntable deer populations. Deer seasons were first offered in most counties in this part of the state in the late 1950s.

Turkey seasons were established in some counties in the early 1970s, but most counties were not even stocked until the late 1970s and early 1980s. Early turkey trapping for the stocking effort was done mostly in the Mississippi Delta. Later, turkeys were trapped in central and southern Mississippi, in areas that had well-established populations, and translocated throughout the northeastern part of the state.

Land ownerships in northeastern Mississippi are quite small when compared to other parts of the state. The average landowners in northeastern Mississippi own less than 40 acres. This made protection and management of the wildlife resources very difficult. Many landowners were discouraged and frustrated because they did not have control of sufficient acreages to effectively manage wildlife resources.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, many sportsmen and landowners started to lease hunting rights on land and form landowner associations. This trend offered more protection, control, and an opportunity for managing the resources. Land-owners now

could control thousands of acres rather than small tracts. This was especially important for increasing populations of deer and turkey, species with home ranges much larger than 40 acres.

This control and management of larger tracts helped encourage sportsmen and landowners. They were eager to manage and conserve the resources in order to have good, huntable populations in their home counties. A cooperative attitude between sportsmen, landowners, and local wildlife officials was certainly the key to bringing deer and turkey populations back in northeastern Mississippi. Today there are huntable, growing populations of deer and turkey in all of the counties in the region. **WI**



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tion in collaborative regional conservation groups like the SEQSG will be critical to future wildlife management success for many species," Castle noted.

According to Reggie Thackston, SEQSG Past-chair and Georgia DNR Quail Program Leader, "The SEQSG, since its inception in 1995, has played a vital role in the development and promotion of science-based policies, programs, and

practices to address the severe decline of northern bobwhite quail and certain other grass-forb dependent wildlife species. We are very pleased with the election of Dave Godwin to Chair-elect of the Steering Committee, as his outstanding skills and dedication will continue the SEQSG standard of excellence and strongly contribute to the Group's mission of bobwhite restoration." **WI**



The January 11, 1966, Leaf River Game Management Area Any-Deer Hunt

THE LEAF RIVER WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT Area was established as a game refuge in 1940 on property owned mostly by the U. S. Forest Service in Perry and George Counties, Mississippi. At the time of establishment, there were a few native deer reported by government workers on Deep Creek and at the head of Whiskey Creek. Stocking of deer and turkey was done in 1940-41 with deer from Mexico, Texas, and the Ran Batson Refuge in Pearl River County, Mississippi.

The refuge originally had 33,000 acres cross-fenced into three "pastures," a 1,300-acre "deer corral," and a 100-acre "turkey corral." By 1945, approximately 400-500 deer and 100 turkeys inhabited the area. The refuge was opened to hunting in 1954 as a game management area. In 1959, another 11,000 acres were added. By the late 1950s, the deer herd showed signs of having reached dangerous levels and some summer mortality occurred in the early 1960s.

During 1964-65, Biologists Bob Noble and Bob Mills conducted extensive surveys of range and deer conditions on the area. Their findings were typical of those found on overpopulated deer ranges everywhere. Deer sizes had decreased, antler development was poor, and available foods were of poor quality. "Through years of heavy browsing pressure, the quality deer foods had been almost exterminated. In the late winter, deer were forced to eat lesser gallberry, wax myrtle, horseshoe, and other unpalatable and non-nutritious plants," Noble wrote.

In previous hunting seasons, hunter surveys were conducted to determine the number of deer seen per day per hunter and the ratio of antlerless to antlered deer. Hunters reported seeing 9.33 antlerless deer per legal buck. The ratio was assumed to be higher, since deer not positively identified as antlered or antlerless were not counted.

A one-day "any deer" public hunt was conducted on January 11, 1966, after the

regular statewide season closed. The objective of the hunt was to begin a gradual reduction of deer numbers on the original 33,000-acre still hunt area to alleviate the intensive pressure on desirable browse species. There was much sentiment against killing does in general, and on Leaf River Game Management Area in particular. So it was thought that hunter participation would be light and there would be no need to limit hunter numbers.

Hunting pressure, however, was much greater than anyone expected. A total of 3,311 hunters checked in and a total of 904 deer was harvested, or 1 deer/36.5 acres. Hunter success was 27%, or 1 deer/3.7 hunters.

Noble stated, "We accomplished in one day what we had anticipated would take three years of limited antlerless hunting."

Eight hundred forty-two (93%) of the 904 were classified as antlerless deer. This antlerless segment was comprised of fawns of both sexes, adult does, and adult bucks with antlers less than 4 inches in length.

Of the 904 deer harvested, biologists examined 322 (36%) and collected weights, ages, and other biological data. Approximately 50% of the total harvest was adult does, 2.5 years of age and older. The average live weight of these 2.5+ does was 77.3 pounds. The average live weight of this group during 1993-2002 was 89.1 pounds. For spiked- and forked-antlered 1.5 year old bucks in January 1966, the average live weight was 62 pounds, compared to 89.7 pounds during 1993-2002.

Although deer numbers were obviously very high and deer quality was very poor, the public was not ready for such a deer harvest on a relatively unexploited deer herd. South Mississippi newspapers called the hunt "The Deer Slaughter on Leaf River" or "The Leaf River Massacre."

Data collected in the late 1960s and early 1970s were very similar to that of the 1966 hunt. Deer quality did not improve in the few years after the 1966 hunt because the habitat could not recover from the severe overbrowsing that quickly. It took years for the habitat to get into the sorry shape it was in, and it would take years for it to recover, if it ever would.

Even today, District 6 Biologist Kathy Shelton and Area Manager Dwight Morrow report heavy browsing pressure on less desirable plant species and a total absence of desirable species. Perhaps the range has never recovered to what could be considered "good" deer habitat, but through proper management of the forest and wildlife resources, deer quality is better than it has been in many years.

From the early years on Leaf River we learned that in a fairly short time deer herds, even on poor-quality soils, could grow beyond what the habitat was able to support. We also learned that an attempt at reducing deer herd numbers on public hunting lands over a few years, while controlling hunter numbers, was more acceptable than what transpired on January 11, 1966, on the Leaf River Game Management Area.

Noble stated, "We accomplished in one day what we had anticipated would take three years of limited antlerless hunting. The fact that herd reduction was accomplished so quickly and so dramatically has worked against any real acceptance of antlerless deer hunting in South Mississippi. It would have been much better had the herd been reduced gradually over three years of limited doe hunting. The Leaf River hunt should serve as an example to Commission biologists in the future. The number of hunters participating in antlerless deer hunting on state wildlife management areas must be controlled, whereby the kill can be regulated within reason." **WI**

Oak Seedling Project

[Cont. from 9]

mass. A specific fertilizer mixture, which is provided with the seedlings, is applied at planting. The last step, which is essential, includes controlling herbaceous competition by using a weed mat or applying herbicide, at least twice during the first growing season, directly around each seedling.

Obviously, there is more effort involved with establishing enhanced oak seedlings than the traditional method of machine planting small seedlings. Therefore, wildlife enrichment plantings or "oak food plots" are currently the best application for these seedlings. Establishing them on one or two acre "plots" in multiple areas on a property would produce a significant number of acorns for wild turkeys, deer, and other wildlife. Wildlife enrichment plantings can be established in existing food plots, a field corner, or in a portion of a pasture. An excellent opportunity to improve wildlife habitat and diversity is to plant the oak seedlings in part of an area to be planted in pine trees or establish them in existing pine plantations at the time of first thinning. In the future, with potential developments in planting techniques and equipment, widespread oak regeneration using these improved seedlings could be possible.

How Do I Get Seedlings? A limited number of cherrybark, Nuttall, water, and willow oak seedlings will be available in January 2005. Currently, we are maintaining a contact list of individuals interested in planting the enhanced seedlings. When we know more specific details about seedling availability, seedling and fertilizer costs, cost-sharing opportunities, and distribution procedures, an order form will be sent to those individuals on the contact list. If you are interested in purchasing enhanced oak seedlings, please provide your name, mailing address, and e-mail address by e-mailing:

ron.seiss@mdwfp.state.ms.us
or by calling
(601)-432-2213 WI

Fall Turkey Hunting:

[Cont. from back cover]

Turkeys also can be scattered off of the roost. Most knowledgeable fall hunters will tell you that this must be done in total darkness, otherwise the turkeys will fly in the direction of the rising sun and will not be scattered very well. There also are some less aggressive methods for hunting turkeys during the fall. One of these is the typical spring hunting scenario — trying to call birds in off of the roost. Just like in the spring, turkeys tend to be very vocal on the roost and locating them during the fall is much like locating them during the spring. The biggest difference is hunters should use their turkey calls for this task rather than the trusty owl hooter or crow call. This method is more passive than scattering a flock and it can be more difficult. As many of you may know from hunting during the spring, the larger the group of birds, the harder it can be to call them in close. Just like spring turkey hunting, hunters typically try to get as close to the turkeys as possible, then set up and try to call them into range. Another technique is to find a food source or some other area that turkeys frequent and simply wait them out. When using this method you may want to call periodically in an attempt to spark the interest of a group of turkeys that may be nearby. Areas where turkeys may be found in the fall include hardwood forests and harvested agricultural fields. In hardwood forests locate oak trees that are dropping acorns and then look for signs such as scratching and droppings to determine if turkeys are in the area. Prospecting, or walking and calling, is another spring turkey hunting method that can be effectively employed during a fall hunt.

The Ultimate Challenge — Harvesting a Gobbler During the Fall: Harvesting an adult gobbler during the fall can be very challenging. During the spring, longbeards are "looking for love" and it sometimes carries them in the direction of a waiting hunter. During the fall, gobblers have all of their wits about them and their judgment is not clouded by lust. Therefore, if you have the desire to harvest a mature tom in the fall, your turkey hunting skills and woodsmanship certainly will be tested! Breaking up flocks, which is a very popular technique for fall turkey hunting, is not usually very effective for harvesting adult gobblers because they do not have a very strong flocking instinct. For that reason, breaking up a flock of gobblers may result in nothing more than a broken up flock that has no desire to get back together.

The Biology of Fall Turkey Seasons: Spring gobbler-only seasons and fall either-sex seasons are different from a biological standpoint. Because hunters only are allowed to harvest gobblers, our

spring turkey season has virtually no impact on turkey populations or reproduction. A very few gobblers do most of the breeding, creating a surplus of gobblers in the population. Therefore, it is very difficult to harvest enough gobblers to prevent most hens from being bred. Spring gobbler-only seasons impact the number of gobblers that are carried over from one year to the next, which may affect hunt quality, but do not impact reproduction. Fall either-sex seasons, however, have the potential to impact population levels. Removing hens from the population reduces the number of hens that will be nesting the following spring. However, there are a number of states that have had fall either-sex seasons in place for many years without negatively impacting populations.

Research suggests that harvesting 5-10% of the fall population will not prevent turkey populations from continuing to grow. Other research has suggested that fall harvest may simply compensate for natural mortality that would have occurred anyway. Most states that have fall seasons place more emphasis on spring hunting opportunities and view fall seasons as a way to provide limited opportunities for those individuals who would like to hunt turkeys during the fall. These states keep a close eye on harvest levels during the spring and if they begin to decline due to poor hatches, fall either-sex seasons can be shortened or even closed. It is important to realize that turkey populations fluctuate naturally regardless of fall or spring harvest levels. Turkey populations are determined by annual reproduction or "the hatch," which, as we all know, can vary tremendously from one year to the next.

The bottom line is that fall turkey hunting can be a lot of fun without harming turkey populations. If you get a chance to do some fall hunting, either in the areas where it is allowed in Mississippi or in another state, I encourage you to give it a try. Also, as you take to the woods in pursuit of other game this fall, keep an eye out for turkeys and think about how much fun it would be to hunt a "Thanksgiving Butterball!" **WI**

NEW FALL TURKEY HUNTING PERMIT

Beginning in 2004, any resident or non-resident who hunts turkey during a fall turkey season must purchase a fall turkey hunting permit in addition to a hunting license allowing the taking of turkey. The fall turkey hunting permit is included in the resident sportsman's license and the resident lifetime sportsman license. A fall turkey hunting permit may be purchased by calling 1-800-5GO-HUNT or at the MDWFP Jackson Office.

Supplemental Feeding: You Decide

THIS TIME OF THE YEAR IS AN ESPECIALLY busy time for our technical staff. Hunters are preparing for the upcoming deer season and they want to know what they can do to produce that trophy buck everyone wants to harvest. Hunters call us to ask questions or request us to visit their property to give them recommendations on how to produce larger bucks. One topic most hunters inquire about is supplemental feeding of deer. Hunters and land managers have many questions concerning this topic. The purpose of this article is to provide them with information that can be used to make management decisions for the betterment of the deer population on their property.

Supplemental feeding is defined as the placement of artificial food, such as protein pellets, designed to increase the nutritional intake of a deer population. It is legal in Mississippi to feed deer; however, it is illegal to use feed (pellets, corn, etc.) to bait deer for hunting. For the remainder of this article supplemental feeding will be referred to as feeding. The advantage of feeding is increased nutritional intake when nutrition is a limiting factor. If nutrition is a limiting factor of a deer population, feeding can be used to improve antler production, body weight, and reproduction. Before considering feeding, three things should be done:

- Improvements to the natural habitat.
- Deer population reduction to below carrying capacity of the habitat.
- Implementation of harvest strategies which allow bucks to reach 3.5 years of age or older.

Although feeding has benefits, there are many disadvantages associated with this practice. Due to the unnatural concentration of animals associated with feeding, the probability of disease transmission among deer and other wildlife species, such as turkeys and raccoons, increases. Some diseases of concern for deer are chronic wasting disease, hemorrhagic disease, and tuberculosis. For non-target species, disease concerns include, but are not limited to, avian pox and blackhead for turkeys and rabies for raccoons. The unnatural concentration of deer due to feeding can also negatively impact habitat. One study conducted in Texas reported that deer ate the less common, more nutritious plants at a higher rate when fed a supplemental ration compared to deer that were not fed. This can lead to overutilization of high quality plants, leaving only lower quality plants. Over time this would alter the vegetative community. A study in Maine concluded that overbrowsing of

concentrated deer occurred within a one-mile radius of feeding stations.

Concentration of deer due to feeding can increase social interactions among deer that can lead to increased aggression and fighting resulting in broken antlers, injuries, and deaths. Feeding can disrupt normal movement of deer. Studies have shown that deer use portions of their home range more intensively when fed. Feeding deer can also result in overpopulation. As nutrition is increased, reproduction and survival can increase. If surplus animals are not harvested, deer can become overpopulated, which will again lead to habitat degradation.

*This article was intended to provide facts
about supplemental feeding, not opinions.*

When feeding deer, people may not realize that they are also feeding other animals. Non-target animals include raccoons, opossums, and skunks. These animals are predators of ground nesting birds. Their concentration can negatively impact the survival of quail and turkeys, which are also attracted to feeding stations. One study conducted in Texas reported that the presence of feeders decreased survivorship of turkey nests. Feral hogs will also eat deer feed. Once hogs are lured into a location by feed, they will destroy habitat while also eating the feed intended for deer. Their nutritional intake can increase from eating the feed, which can lead to increased reproduction. More hogs equals more habitat degradation. Once hogs move into a location they are extremely hard to remove.

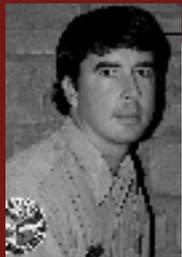
If the above disadvantages do not steer you away from feeding deer, there are some things that can be done to improve what many people in this state practice. First, the deer population should be held below carrying capacity of the natural habitat before feeding is started. Once the population is below carrying capacity, a good feed should be chosen. The feed chosen by most deer researchers and managers is a protein pellet consisting of 16-20% protein. Feed should be made available to deer during the spring and summer. This will allow deer to eat a high protein ration when bucks are growing antlers and does are carrying fawns, giving birth, and lactating. Feeding deer during the hunting season should not be practiced to avoid non-compliance with baiting laws in Mississippi. Additionally, all deer habitat in Mississippi provides the minimum protein requirements for body maintenance during winter months.

Since most protein pellets do not stand up to normal weather conditions, a feeder that keeps the feed out of the weather is needed. Avoid feeders that dispense feed onto the ground to prevent contamination by feces and urine from animals. Use feeders designed to reduce access to non-target animals. Feed should be supplied on a constant basis during spring and summer to avoid digestive problems of deer. The amount of feed supplied should be gradually decreased as the winter months approach. The number of feeders to use is determined by habitat quality, deer density, and management goals.

If a feeding program is chosen as a deer management tool, data must be recorded and analyzed to determine if the feeding program is economical and actually making improvements in biological parameters such as antler production, reproduction, and body weight. If one chooses to feed, the level of deer management should already be at a point where biological data are routinely collected. If not at that level, feeding should be reconsidered. If baseline biological data are not available, comparisons cannot be made between pre- and post-implementation of the feeding program for the determination of success or failure. The above is the same for financial records. Financial records should be kept to determine the cost of managing a deer herd for a property pre- and post-implementation of a feeding program to determine if the cost is feasible.

The expense and time of a feeding program can be substantial. An alternative to supplemental feed is the use of spring and summer food plots. Supplemental plantings, such as soybeans, iron and clay cowpeas, Alyce clover, and American jointvetch can, literally, produce tons of high protein food on a per acre basis at a relatively low cost.

This article was intended to provide facts about supplemental feeding, not opinions. As of this writing it is not illegal to use supplemental feed in Mississippi. Many people do it. However, some may be doing it without being informed about the pros and cons. Whether you are using supplemental feed or trying to decide if it is for you, weigh out the potential benefits and problems to decide if it fits into your management plan. Can it improve antler size and body weight? Yes. Will it produce a trophy buck overnight? No. Are there biological concerns? Yes. Can supplemental feed alone help you meet your management goals? No. Can supplemental feed be used in a management plan to help meet objectives? Yes. Good luck in making your decision and have a successful hunting season. **WI**



By Brad Young

Black Bears in Mississippi: Past and Present

PERHAPS NO OTHER state in the southeastern U. S. is as rich in bear hunting tradition as Mississippi. The vast acreages of bottomland hardwood forests and impenetrable canebrakes of the Mississippi Delta were home to high densities of black bears at the turn of the century. The lure of hunting bear from horseback with the aid of dogs created some of the earliest legends of bear hunting, while attracting many dignitaries and heads of state from across the country. Of course, no other bear hunt is quite as famous as the Teddy Roosevelt hunt. It took place at the turn of the century in Sharkey County and led to the creation of the now famous Teddy Bear. For those who don't know, legend has it that the president refused to shoot a bear that had been lassoed and tied to a tree by his guide, Holt Collier, a bear hunting legend in his own right. A political cartoonist caricatured the event in "Drawing the Line in Mississippi," which showed the president turning his back on a small bear being restrained by a rope. A toymaker requested the president's permission to name his small stuffed bears "Teddy's Bear." The rest, as they say, is history.

Today, the once majestic bottomland hardwood forests of the Mississippi Alluvial Valley have been reduced to scattered and isolated remnants of their former glory. Many of the vast swamps and lowland areas which served as safe havens for thousands of bears throughout Mississippi have been drained and cleared so that the fertile black soils can be used for agriculture. By 1980, more than 80 percent of the bottomland hardwood forests of the Mississippi Alluvial Valley had disappeared. And what became of the black bear population that was once so great as to bring the President of the United States to the Mississippi Delta? Black bears were listed as endangered in Mississippi in 1984. The Louisiana black bear, which is the subspecies that occurs in the southern half of the state, was listed as federally threatened in 1992. There are only small differences in skull size and shape between the American black bear in north Mississippi and the Louisiana black bear which is found in the south. MDWFP biologists currently estimate the Mississippi bear population at 40 to 50 bears in the entire state — and that's being generous.

Most of the bears in the state are found

along the drainages of major rivers such as the Mississippi, Pearl, and Pascagoula, although bears can and have been known to show up just about anywhere. Most of the bears found in the state are believed to be transient males that have wandered across state lines. They are the dispersing products of breeding populations of bears that border our state in Arkansas, Louisiana, and Alabama. So how can Mississippi have such few bears and no documented reproduction while populations continue to grow just across our borders? The answer is simple. Mississippi is lacking in female bears. Female bears generally establish a home range partially within or adjacent to their mother's home range and, therefore, are less likely to disperse across state lines like the males. Adult females have been known to have home ranges of up to 20,000 acres, while adult males can easily cover two to eight times that area. Considering these facts, it's easy to see why the majority of bears found in Mississippi are males and why the population is so slow to naturally expand.

There is good news, though. Black bear sightings in Mississippi have been on the rise in the last few years. It is difficult to determine, whether this is due to an increase in the actual number of bears in the state or if it is the result of increased public awareness of bears. Either way, it is an encouraging sign. The majority of sightings have come from counties bordering the Mississippi River and from coastal counties such as Jackson, Harrison, and Stone. Almost everyone that reports seeing a bear or bear sign on their property is genuinely excited about the possibility of having the bear in the area. To tell the truth, most of the people who report bear sightings have likely had bears in the area for years. They would never have caught a glimpse of these shy creatures, though, without being made aware of the bears or without the use of motion-sensor cameras.

Habitats for bears, as well as countless other species of wildlife, have been on the mend, especially in the Delta region of the state. Through government programs such as the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) and the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), thousands of acres of marginal farmlands have been planted in bottomland hardwood species of trees. In years to come, these replanted areas will not only provide

increased habitat for bears, but will also serve as corridors linking isolated patches of hardwood forests found on public lands throughout the Delta. Studies have shown that bears favor areas with the least amount of disturbance from humans, yet another testament to their shy nature. It has been widely believed that, due to the endangered status of bears in the state, any area that contains bears is greatly restricted from any habitat manipulation. In fact, quite the opposite is true. Bears utilize many different kinds of habitats within their home ranges. While they may use mature hardwood forests for hard mast and den trees, bears also benefit from cutover areas that provide escape cover and soft mast food sources.

Trapping efforts are under way to learn more about the bears that make their home here in the state. Early this summer, a bear was sighted on the Twin Oaks WMA in Sharkey County. After a couple of weeks of pre-baiting, traps were set, and on June 17 a 235 lb. male bear was caught. The bear was in molt, so it had a relatively thin coat of hair, but was in very good condition otherwise. As an interesting note, he had no tail, whatsoever. The bear was given ear tags, a PIT tag (a small microchip injected under the skin), a tattoo, and a radio collar. The radio collar will allow us to keep track of the bear so that we can learn more about his movements and habitat preferences. Thus far, the bear has been fairly cooperative, staying in and around the Twin Oaks area and showing a fairly routine travel pattern. Whether he remains in the area (or county for that matter) remains to be seen. Our hope is to have several bears collared throughout the state so that we can make better estimations about population numbers and habitat utilization in different regions of Mississippi.

To learn more about black bears in Mississippi, or to report a bear sighting, contact the Mississippi Museum of Natural Science, at (601) 354-7303, or call your MDWFP district office. By learning all that we can about the Mississippi black bear, we can work together to restore a vital part of Mississippi's natural legacy. **WI**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - BRAD YOUNG is a black bear biologist with the Mississippi Museum of Natural Science.

Photo by: Bo Sloan

DU Presentation

Ducks Unlimited, in appreciation of their long standing partnership with the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks, recently presented the agency with this beautiful pintail print for display in its administrative office. From left to right in the photo, Ron Seiss, Assistant Chief, and Larry Castle, Chief, Wildlife Division, accepted the print on behalf of MDWFP from Ducks Unlimited staff members Curtis R. Hopkins, Southern Region Director of Conservation Programs, and Chris Cole, Director of Conservation Programs for Mississippi, Alabama, and Tennessee. Since 1977, the MDWFP and DU have been working together to help ensure that waterfowl are produced on the breeding grounds in Canada. In addition, this partnership increases wintering habitat in Mississippi. Their most recent joint project was the restoration of 1,535 acres of wetlands on the O'Keefe Wildlife Management Area in Quitman County. **WI**



Youth Hunting Opportunities in Mississippi

By Jerry Hazlewood

MANY YEARS AGO, WHEN I WAS A youngster growing up on a farm in rural Clay County, hunting and fishing were my favorite pastimes. To go hunting or fishing, all I had to do was pick up my gun or rod and reel and walk out the door. Wildlife and farm ponds were within easy walking distance and surrounding landowners didn't mind who hunted their land. My how things have changed! Most kids today live in urban situations where video games and organized sports occupy their free time and easy access to good hunting land and fishing ponds is rare.

Many organizations and agencies, including the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks (MDWFP), realize the need to offer hunting, shooting, and fishing opportunities to youth. These opportunities range from introductory events to guided hunts. Some examples are Hunter Education courses, the 4-H Shooting Sports Program, wildlife extravaganzas, and fishing rodeos. There are even sportsman groups that will escort youth on hunting and fishing trips.

The MDWFP is taking steps to aid in recruiting youth hunters and fishermen by

promoting special events for youth, offering special hunts and hunting areas for youth, eliminating or reducing license fees, and providing special seasons for youth hunting only. Youth hunters and fishermen under the age of 16, whether residents or non-residents, are not required to purchase a license. There is also a reduced fee license for non-residents 16-18 years of age. Beginning this license year, the youth seasons for squirrel, deer, and turkey have been extended to include the entire week prior to the regular opening date, rather than just the weekend prior to the regular opening date. These special seasons apply to private lands only, but most MDWFP wildlife management areas offer the same opportunity. Specific dates for each species can be found on pages 16-17 of the 2004-05 Outdoor Digest. To find out which wildlife management areas offer special youth opportunities, and for contact information, see pages 22-24 of the digest. To find out about other youth events or opportunities in your area, call your local MDWFP district office. The district office locations and contact information can be found on page 21 of the digest.

I offer a challenge to you.....get a kid involved in hunting and fishing. WI

Hunting Club Cooperatives

By Ken R. McCool and Chad M. Dacus

Several years ago, Weyerhaeuser Company decided that providing better quality outdoor experiences for many sportsmen could be accomplished by establishing Hunting Club Cooperatives (HCC). The first of what is hoped will be many cooperatives is underway this year near Scooba, Mississippi, in Kemper County. The Cooperative project has involved many individuals and required many hours of work to become a reality. With many activities already underway, and others in the planning stage, the most exciting times are yet to come.

The Cooperative is comprised of six clubs that lease approximately 11,000 acres of land from Weyerhaeuser Company in Kemper County. They also lease or control several hundred more adjoining acres. The 11,000+ acres are contiguous and have several miles of Weyerhaeuser roads traversing the property. These clubs have enjoyed great success in the past and, like most clubs, they are looking to improve the quality of their hunting experience. The six clubs chosen to be involved in the project are: Cliff's Hunting Club, East Mississippi Sportsmen Hunting Club, Holley Hunting Club, Kemper County Hunting Club, Little Scooba Hunting Club, and Scooba Hunting Club. The clubs are reporting increased membership inquiries from hunters that have heard about the project.

This HCC project is being conducted in cooperation with the MDWFP and the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTFF). There is also tremendous interest from Mississippi State University and BASF because of the Quality Vegetation Management work that is planned for the HCC.

Harvest guideline criteria options have been established for participating clubs in cooperation with the MDWFP. Each club will also be given a list of management options that the clubs can implement on their own to enhance wildlife habitat. The

opportunity to interact with wildlife biologists from several organizations is an added benefit to all participants.

Management activities that are already underway on the property include:

- Erecting new gates for access control.
- Signs designating the boundaries of the area.
- Re-establishment of 20 foot wide fire lanes throughout the property and seeding them with wildlife friendly plantings.
- Selection of timber stands that will receive Quality Vegetation Management treatments over the next three years.
- Conducting deer health checks.
- Clearing several acres between rows for food plot plantings on tracts recently prepared for tree planting.

The HCC is an innovative approach to improving habitat and creating a better outdoor experience. Great success can be realized from this approach, and many other clubs are already inquiring about the opportunity of establishing their own cooperative. **WI**

ABOUT THE AUTHORS - KEN R. MCCOOL is a forester with Weyerhaeuser Company. **CHAD M. DACUS** is a wildlife biologist with MDWFP.



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**Take a Walk
on the 'Wild' Side...**
(of the Web, that is.)



For comprehensive information about Mississippi's white-tailed deer and other wildlife, visit our website at www.mdwfp.com. On the home page, click 'Everything you want to know about your favorite wildlife.' You will find: ■ Interactive question and answer forums ■ Management and biology articles ■ Turkey and deer records ■ Photo galleries, hunting forecasts, and more.

Fall Turkey Hunting: Chasing That Elusive "Thanksgiving Butterball"

IT'S THAT TIME OF YEAR AGAIN. Mississippi's sportsmen and women are getting ready to put down their fishing poles and pick up their bows and firearms to begin another year of hunting. September brings with it thoughts of dove fields and early season teal opportunities. The die-hard bowhunters have already been in their back yards practicing in preparation for the October 1 opening of the archery season. The squirrel hunters, who also know their time is coming in October, are getting ready to sight in their favorite .22 or dust off the old smooth bore. It is an exciting time of year for hunters, knowing that they will soon take to the field in pursuit of their favorite game. Amidst all of this anticipation, turkey hunting is probably the last thing on anyone's mind. Turkey hunting in Mississippi, as well as many other southeastern states, has traditionally been a springtime pursuit. As the chill of winter begins to melt away and the trees begin to green up and the dogwoods start to bloom, hunters take to the field in pursuit of the wild turkey. For most hunters in the South, the waning days of summer just do not ignite the desire to hunt turkeys. In some states, however, hunting turkeys during the fall is a bigger tradition than hunting them in the spring.

Many states have had either-sex fall seasons in place for years. In fact, over 50% of states have a fall turkey season of some kind. Most southerners would classify fall turkey hunting as a northern or "Yankee" tradition, which is not necessarily true. The majority of southeastern states, including Mississippi, have a

fall turkey season in some form or fashion. Missouri, which is often boasted about as having some of the best spring turkey hunting in the nation, also typically has a fall harvest of around 30,000 turkeys. Our fall either-sex season here in Mississippi, which began in the 1960's, occurs on private lands in portions of seven counties along the Mississippi River. It lasts from October 30 - November 12, and from December 2 - 15, with a bag limit of 2 birds per season. Some of you may be wondering how much fun can it be to hunt a turkey that is not gobbling, or even capable of gobbling, as is the case with a hen. To answer that question, let's take a closer look at what fall turkey hunting is all about.

The Lure of Fall Turkey Hunting: Fall is a great time to experience the thrill of turkey hunting. Turkeys tend to form large flocks during fall and winter, so hunters can expect to see lots of turkeys. As a result, fall seasons offer a great chance to observe and learn about turkey behavior. Turkeys also are very vocal during this time of year, giving hunters the opportunity to learn calling techniques from the greatest teacher of all — the wild turkey. Hunters also get a chance to practice their calling techniques because, unlike spring turkey hunting, it is very hard to "over-call" during the fall. All of these things add up to making you a better spring turkey hunter. Also, don't forget about the kids! Fall turkey seasons are a great opportunity to introduce youth hunters to the sport that we all enjoy so much.

The "How-To" of Fall Turkey Hunting: There are a lot of strategies for hunting

turkeys during the fall. One of the most productive and enjoyable techniques is to "bust up" a large flock of birds and then attempt to call them back together. The first step is to locate a flock of turkeys, at which point the chase is on, literally! Once a flock is located, use whatever means available to separate them as much as possible. Most hunters try to get as close as possible before running amongst a flock of turkeys, because it tends to startle them more and thus leads to a better scatter. Many a fall turkey hunter has been spotted sprinting towards a group of turkeys waving his hands like a madman and hollering at the top of his lungs! The only thing that could be more fun than breaking up a flock of turkeys is watching someone else do it! During fall and winter, turkeys tend to stay in large groups, so once you have broken them up, their flocking instinct will have them trying desperately to get back together. Following the scatter, most hunters will move a short distance towards the area where the largest group of birds went and then sit down and give everyone (the turkeys and the hunter) a chance to calm down a bit. After waiting about twenty or thirty minutes, let the calling begin. As I mentioned earlier, it is difficult to over-call during the fall, so don't be bashful. If you think turkeys are vocal during the spring, you haven't heard anything yet. Hunters will hear a variety of turkey talk including yelps, cutting, cackling, kee-kee runs, and even gobbling. Also, it is not uncommon to have multiple turkeys calling in every direction if you scatter them well enough.

[Cont. on 15]

Wildlife Issues

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