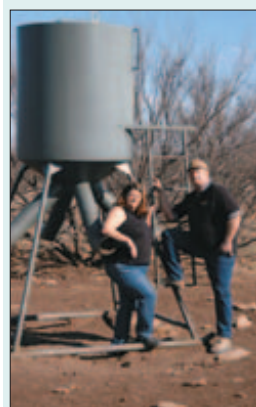
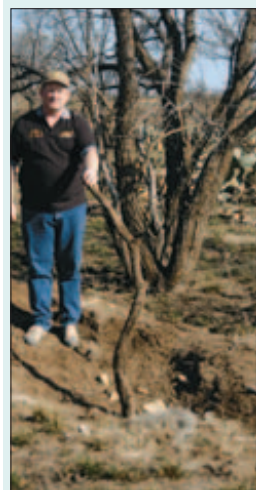


A habitat's basic needs

By J.T. SMITH



PACKING PROTEIN: Randy and Melinda Rifenburg check one of many protein feeders on the Newell Ranch, where deer pellets are fed to aid nutrition.



BUG HOLES: Because the Newell Ranch grubs vast amounts of brush, the depressions that are left catch precious water when it does rain. In turn, the water attracts bugs for quail. Brush also is left in patterns nearby to protect bobwhites from would-be predators.

If you want wildlife, decide what kind and what they need to survive — and thrive.

Ricky Linex, zone biologist, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service at Weatherford, Texas, cites three musts.

"Wildlife need food, space and water as habitat basics," he notes. That means more than just food supplement.

"You still need habitat," Linex emphasizes. "Food plots are just supplement. You need a natural habitat, too, that provides food for wildlife."

Your soil must produce the right plants for wildlife, just as it would for livestock. Deer consume 3.5% of their weight (on a dry weight basis) in food daily.

Common crop plants

Many plants usually thought of as agricultural commodities, like wheat, can be superb as wildlife forage.

Winter wheat is palatable, cold hardy and relatively inexpensive to establish. "But deer will eat beardless wheat all the way down," Linex cautions. "So mix some awned [bearded] wheat; that lets some go to seed for turkey later."

Of oats, Linex recommends Dallas oats and Horizon 315 oats for wildlife. Like the name, Dallas oats have done well in north-central Texas.

Rye is also a good wildlife food. "Rye is the most cold-

Key Points

- Many common agricultural plants work as wildlife food.
- Property owners should know limits of their land and climate.
- Plants grown for wildlife must fit habitat's soil.

tolerant of any winter cereal grain," Linex notes. "It's good in protein and very palatable."

Triticale, a wheat-rye cross, also can be seeded for wildlife. It has slightly larger seed than wheat. He suggests seeding 60 to 90 pounds per acre.

Legumes and clovers

Linex says among other cool-season plants, legumes like hairy vetch are popular with wildlife, and it adapts to soil pH as high as 8.

Austrian winterpea is good for wildlife, but seed needs to be inoculated with *Rhizobium*. Button medic also adapts to West Texas.

Some wildlife will munch clovers. But remember soil pH is more critical for clovers.

Linex cautions sweet clovers may not get enough rain in West Texas. Rose clover, a variety developed for Texas, has done well in the Overton region.

You can even seed purple-top turnips, just like a garden, at 3½ pounds of seed per acre. "Deer love turnips," he says.

Warm-season annuals

Lablab is a great warm-season annual for deer, Linex says.

They really love it in July, August, September and October.

He suggests planting lablab in 20-inch rows. Seed costs \$2

to \$3 per pound. Crude protein in August is about 22%.

Cowpeas, black-eyed peas and mungbeans are other good warm-season annuals.

As a general rule, for each section of ranch land, 19 acres should be devoted to food plots. Another way to figure



RICKY LINEX



BILLY WARRICK



DARCY TURNER

it is each deer requiring four-tenths of an acre in food plots.

Linex says perennials for food, such as Maximilian or awnless Bush sunflowers, can be planted in early spring. Other perennials include Engelmann daisy, Illinois bundleflower and velvet bundleflower.

Know your plants and soil

TEXAS A&M Extension agronomist Billy Warrick of San Angelo says know your limits.

"If there's lots of shade, like thick mesquite, you either need a plant or grass that will grow in shade, or find a more open area," he notes.

Warrick asks, "Are you going to level up the land, or deal with the existing slope?"

He says so much comes down to soil. "If your topsoil is shallow, that's going to limit your [wildlife forage] production for sure," he says. "Three feet of topsoil would be great."

Darcy Turner of Turner Seed Co., Breckenridge, Texas, strongly agrees.

"What's your soil type? What's your parent material

base? How deep is your topsoil?" Turner asks.

He says you're going to have many problems if your answer is: "I don't know."

Turner has been in the family seed business since 1978 after earning his agronomy degree from Texas A&M, and his company is known far and wide beyond Texas. But the best seed in the world isn't going to work if it's matched to the wrong soil — or just horrible soil.

"One fellow in South Texas had a high pH, a little lime rock and just a 'pinch' of topsoil," Turner recalls.

Great seed couldn't have helped that guy.

"It wasn't the seed, but the land," Turner says.

Briscoe Jr. honored for lifetime work

TEXOMA TALK

By J.T. SMITH and DAN CRUMMETT

TEXAS and Southwestern Cattle Raisers

Association presented its Lifetime Steward Award to **Dolph Briscoe Jr.** to highlight the group's 130th annual convention in Fort Worth.

Briscoe was honored for "a lifetime of contributions to Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association and the livestock industry in Texas, the U.S. and internationally."

A quintessential Texan, Briscoe is the elder statesman of Texas politics. His roots to the land run deep. The Briscoe family settled in Texas in what is now Fort Bend County in 1832. **Andrew Briscoe** signed the Texas Declaration of Independence,

LIFE STEWARD: Legendary rancher Dolph Briscoe Jr. of Uvalde, Texas, was honored with the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association's Lifetime Steward



Award to highlight the 130th annual convention.

led a company of volunteers at the Battle of Jacinto in 1836 when Texas won its independence, and was appointed first judge of Harris County. **Dolph Briscoe Sr.** moved the family to Uvalde in 1910, and established the family's cattle business.

Dolph Briscoe Jr. gave a "lifetime" of service to the cattle industry. He was only 9 when his father became TSCRA president in 1932. Briscoe Jr. grew up among rancher-leaders and under-

stood their concerns. Later, as a government and beef industry leader, he influenced programs that provided ranchers solutions to some of their biggest problems.

Briscoe Jr. served in the Texas Legislature from 1949 to 1957, and was Texas governor 1973 to 1979. He also was TSCRA president, chairman of the National Livestock and Meat Board, and chairman of the Mohair Council of America.

In 1949, Briscoe passed historic legislation to establish the Farm-to-Market Road program that helped develop rural Texas. In 1960, as TSCRA president, he headed a group that raised \$3 million to encourage federal and state leaders to establish the Screwworm Eradication Program in Texas and the Southwest. Ranchers widely consider the program the most important to the industry. USDA estimates U.S. livestock producers benefit by

more than \$900 million each year from the program.

More honors

A former U.S. representative who spearheaded the 2002 Farm Bill and two brothers who helped create an ice-cream empire have received Texas A&M Distinguished Texan in Agriculture awards.

Former **U.S. Rep. Charles Stenholm** of Ericksdahl and **Ed and Howard Kruse** of Blue Bell Creameries, Brenham in Washington County, were recognized for outstanding leadership and significant contributions to Texas agriculture at the 2007 Ag Forum in Austin.

Stenholm was a member of the U.S. House for 13 terms and also led the Rolling Plains Cotton Growers Association.

Ed Kruse is Blue Bell board chairman; Howard Kruse is president emeritus of the company.

But saving the bobwhite will take more than the Newell Ranch management, Rifenburg assures. It's got to be a coordinated effort with neighbors across the entire Southwest. Otherwise, survival chances for the bird are slim to grim.

"It's so serious, I know one rancher who is laying off hunting an entire season," Vinson reports.

Texas A&M Wildlife specialist Dale Rollins of San Angelo, Texas, says man can't make it rain, but doing other things to help quail through stewardship is vital at this crucial time.

Newell Ranch is not a newcomer to conservation. It was recognized with the Texas Chapter of the Wildlife Society's "Land Steward Award" in 1995.

You can contact Rifenburg at 325-762-2053 or write him at P.O. Box 637, Albany, TX 76430.