The Four B’s of habitat and hunting techniques produced this success.

**Beans**
Each area we hunted was associated with a soybean field. These fields had been harvested, and a lot of residual waste beans were on the ground providing an excellent food source for the birds. No-till fields are ideal for providing extra forage for quail and other wildlife.

**Briars**
Most of these bean fields were bordered by extremely thick cover dominated by briars of every description. This thick cover (and when I say thick, I mean really thick!) obviously provided excellent protection for the birds from predators.

**Blood**
By the end of the day my hands, face and legs (even with briar pants) were bleeding. The dogs’ ears, tails and shins were bleeding. At lunchtime when I met Alan, he looked like he had already been on the losing end of a cat fight. Not only was the cover thick, but in many cases it was 10, 15 or even 20 feet tall. Most people would probably consider most of it all but un hunt able. At times I was unable to bulldoze my way though and had to retreat to take a different route or simply get down and crawl through. This type of hunting is obviously not for the weak-hearted, nor the thin-skinned. But the birds were there. Many of the coveys we found were wild. We were

“Beans, Briars, Blood and Beepers.” Alan subsequently invited me to join him and the elder Stephensons on a hunt, so in early February 2003 I had the pleasure (and the pain) of experiencing quail hunting Stephenson-style. I can now attest to the fact that our acronym was extremely accurate!

By the time we met at noon on Saturday, Feb. 1, the Stephensons had already spooked six coveys and had nine birds in the bag to show for their efforts. After really hurting myself eating far too much lunch at a very fine establishment called Cherry’s Bar-B-Q, we started hunting around 1 p.m. We hunted five or six different places around the junction of Wilson, Greene and Wayne counties. By the time we called it a day at a little after 5 p.m., we had hunted just over four hours. We found 11 more coveys and added 12 more birds to the bag for a total of 17 coveys with 21 birds in the bag for the day. Each covey that I saw contained at least 15 birds, some more than 20. These are impressive numbers, to say the least.
Conservation Opportunities for Your Land

Trying to take advantage of landowner assistance programs. A couple of years in the 1990’s I had not done a lot of work. I had been working with a group of people with wide-ranging farm and wildlife interests. Our goal was to reach consensus about needs specific to North Carolina for the 2002 Farm Bill. The first recommendation from this group was unanimous—program delivery needed to be simplified.

Another aspect of the farm plan is the concept of wildlife. Some successful landowners have key traits in common: a commitment to the project, persistence and an effective working relationship with an array of agencies and contacts.

How can you go from dreaming about having more wildlife on your property to making it happen?

Step one is developing a plan. Your plan can come from a number of sources. Some successful projects started as Forest Stewards’ plans prepared by a commission stewardship biologist and a N.C. Forest Service forester, or a consulting forester. Others began as farm wildlife plans written by one of the commission’s district technical guidance biologists, a Soil and Water Conservation District technician, or a Natural Resources Conservation Service district conservationist or a team with participation from several agencies. If species at risk or rare habitats are involved, a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist may participate in the plan preparation. Some landowners have involved wildlife consultants, Ducks Unlimited, Quail Unlimited or local land trusts in plan writing. The key is to locate resource professionals with whom you can effectively communi- cate your goals, objectives and abilities and then remain involved in the process.

Your plan can implement a wide range of wildlife projects, from enhancing quail habitat to converting cropland to native grasses or restoring Piedmont seasonal wetlands. Projects can involve a few acres to thousands of acres. The highest priority projects for funding will provide benefits to declining or at-risk wildlife species or habitats. Even projects that primarily address other resource concerns can be designed to provide wildlife benefits. For example, buffers designed to benefit water quality can be managed in “wildlife friendly” vegetation, or croplands converted from row crops to conservation use can be planted to perennial native grasses.

After formulating your plan, you can explore the need for funding assistance and the opportunities available. Your plan preparer can facilitate this step. Depending upon the funding program, financial assistance can range from paying a portion of the installation cost to an annual rental payment for five to 15 years. Other funding opportunities have expanded in recent years, but with the help of your plan preparer you should be able to narrow down the options for your project.

A last follow-up of programs that provide funding opportunities. The list does not provide detailed information, but it gives an idea of the opportunities available.

Don’t let the complexities confuse you. Armed with a sound plan, clear goals and well-defined objectives, a landowner can work with resource professionals to match objectives with pro- gram eligibility and negotiate the maze of conservation opportunities.

National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) offers a variety of programs that provide financial assistance for improving or enhancing wildlife habitat. NRCS has a team of professionals to work with you to develop and implement your plan. NRCS works with other federal, state and local partners to deliver these programs.

Programs are designed to provide financial assistance to landowners for activities that benefit wildlife and improve water quality.

NRCS Division of Soil and Water Conservation
(Agriculture Cost Share Program) cost-share projects on farms to protect and enhance water quality. Supports best management practices for nonpoint source pollution.

Farm Services Agency
Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) projects highly eroded cropland or offers conversion of cropland to long-leaf pine ecosystems during periodic sign-ups. A continuous sign-up is available for buffers between cropland and streams or wetlands.

Conservation Reserve Enhanced Pro- gram (CREP) cost-shares the establish- ment of water quality buffers and pro- vides annual rental payments for those buffers in several of North Carolina’s watersheds.

N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission
Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) cost-shares habitat improvement for declining wildlife species.

Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) re- stores wetlands converted to agricultural use prior to 1985.

Farmland Protection Program (FPP) pro- motes farmland development by purchasing easements.

N.C. Division of Forest Resources
Cooperative Upland-Habitat Restoration and Enhancement Program (CURE) supports creation and enhancement of early successification habitats in selected focus areas. Program is currently closed to new participants.

Red-cockaded Woodpecker Safe Harbor Program supports habitat enhancement for red-cockaded woodpeckers in some areas of the state.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Private Stewardship Grants Program supports projects that enhance habitat for threatened and endangered species, species-at-risk and at-risk ecosystems.

Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program assists with the restoration and enhance- ment of priority habitats including wet- land, longleaf pine forests and prairies.

Land Trust for North Carolina
Conservation easements provide long- term land protection through a number of mechanisms. Regional land trusts have similar goals.

Private Conservation Organizations
Numerous private conservation organi- zations support habitat improvement projects.

Terry Sharpe, Agricultural Liaison Biologist, N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission
Continued from page 1

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Fall 2013

Native Warm-Season Grasses

The Upland Gazette
www.ncwildlife.org, to read about more native grass species.

Grasses should be purchased and planted based on pure live seed (bulk weight minus trash, weed seed and unsound seed). Seed labels typically list germination rate as the percent of seed that germinate during the test period plus “hard seed,” which are alive but dormant. Seed dormancy staggered germination to reduce risk to the entire grass plot from a catastroph-ic event. But, if you are working to establish a sod previously killed by herbicide. The availability of no-till drills that will handle and accurately place fluffy-seeded species in the top 2-3 inches of soil makes this method practical. The combination of Roundup and a plateau herbicide allows the establishment of Indian grass, big bluestem and little bluestem into treated Bermuda and fescue sod. Follow label instructions for proper herbicide application.

Squirrels don’t need unnatural feeding to thrive. To reduce squirrel diseases, avoid practices that attract several squirrels to one place. P.S. Squirrel fibromas can be confused with tick infestations or warbles. Reports of figroma outbreaks in gray squirrels involving more than a few individuals are extremely rare. If you are aware of any squirrels developing multiple fibromas, it is likely that this is due to high population densities of either squirrels or both. It is also possible that concentrations of gray squirrels around bird or squirrel feeders increase the likelihood that multiple individuals become infected. In addition, it is likely that as squirrels with multiple fibromas be-come more dependent on artificial food sources, they will frequent feeders more often than normal squirrels.

Land Managers’ Toolbox

Attention to Detail

Tracking down and purchasing good seed, controlling competi-
tion and precise planting require attention to detail. One of the Wildlife Commission’s district technical guidance biologists or the local Natural Resources Conservation Service district conser-
vationist can help you develop a plan. Additional resources are available from the pasture.com Web site and the publication “Na-
tive Warm Season Grasses for Virginia and North Carolina,” avail-
able from the Division of Wildlife Management, (919) 733-7219.

Squirrels don’t need unnatural feeding to thrive. To reduce squirrel diseases, avoid practices that attract several squirrels to one place. P.S. Squirrel fibromas can be confused with tick infestations or warbles. Reports of figroma outbreaks in gray squirrels involving more than a few individuals are extremely rare. If you are aware of any squirrels developing multiple fibromas, it is likely that this is due to high population densities of either squirrels or both. It is also possible that concentrations of gray squirrels around bird or squirrel feeders increase the likelihood that multiple individuals become infected. In addition, it is likely that as squirrels with multiple fibromas be-
come more dependent on artificial food sources, they will frequent feeders more often than normal squirrels. U.G. Do all squirrel species get fibromas?

P.S. Fibromas have been reported only for gray squirrels and occur infrequently. U.G. I know rabbits are dangerous to humans. Can squirrels get rabies?

P.S. Yes, but it is highly unlikely that a squirrel will pass fibromas onto another animal. Often when a rabid animal bites a squirrel, the squirrel dies immediately. It is also more susceptible to predators once the rabies virus causes the squirrel to lose its normal mental functioning. U.G. Can I get rabies from eating an infected squirrel?

P.S. No, these lumps are called “fibromas”—a poxvirus infection that causes benign tumors. They normally disappear with time. As a squirrel can have just one tumor or many of different sizes. P.S. What animals are infected by warbles?

Although gray squirrels are the most common primary host of bot fly larvae, they also afflict fox squirrels, red squirrels and cottontail rabbits. Infestations...
THE CURE PROGRAM IS MIDWAY through its first five years, and much has happened. When we first began, we didn’t know what to expect, but the response from participants and outdoors enthusiasts has been universally positive. Since the first identification of focal areas in 2000, CURE has evolved into three fully operating cooperatives, expanded to special areas on four game lands and engaged its first corporate partner.

Phase I—Private Cooperatives
For many years, Wildlife Commission biologists worked one on one with landowners, at each landowner’s request. Biologists wrote plans for small plots and large farms—some were carried out with great care while others fell to the wayside. We knew the potential for quality early-successional habitat was there on these private areas, but the haphazard nature of our system was not turning the tide for early-successional species.

Enter the cooperative concept. By creating partnerships between wildlife managers and landowners, we could overcome the pitfalls of our earlier attempts to increase populations of quail, rabbits, songbirds and associated wildlife in North Carolina.

Commission biologists have written 42 management plans for private landowners on three cooperatives. As it turns out, our landowners are a pretty enthusiastic bunch. Ten percent—1,632 acres—of their land is managed using wildlife enhancement practices, which exceeds our initial expectations. By using creative solutions, we’ve found that wildlife habitat can be integrated on a working farm, whether it means converting fescue field borders to native plants or thinning an overgrown pine stand.

Each cooperative has its unique characteristics as noted below. At Rowland field borders worked well. Forested areas have good potential there as well. The challenge has been to thin out crowded pines so finches and sparrows can thrive. But what a start on the transition to our new emphasis.

Future directions
We are proud to see the CURE program induce funding synergy. To begin, the CURE program started with funding from the Wildlife Commission’s Wildlife Endowment Fund, but soon we secured a National Wildlife Federation grant to offset some costs. Then the Wildlife Commission has expanded the private cooperators’ plans until 2006. Finally, interest from Murphy-Brown has enabled us to enter the cooperative concept.

Field borders

Coveys per Party Trip
0.30 0.20 0.10 0.00

Flush per Party Trip

Figure 1. Grouse Hunter Survey Summary Data, 1984 – 2002

2002–2003 N.C. Avid Hunter Survey Summaries

Grouse

A total of 68 avid grousers hunted on 956 hunts during the season. Following the long-term trend, the 2002–2003 season grous flush rates were slightly lower than the 4.32 flushes/party trip (2.5 percent) while the harvest rate remained unchanged at 0.59 grous bagged/party trip (Figure 1). The grous flush rate in the southern Mountain region (4.75 flushes/party trip; up 1.7 percent) was somewhat higher than the flush rate in the northern Mountain region (2.26flushes/party trip; down 22.9 percent) (Figure 2). Flush rates were lowest in October (3.23 flushes/party trip) when the leaves were still on the trees (Figure 2). Then the leaves dropped and enabled us to extend the private cooperators’ plans until 2006. Finally, interest from Murphy-Brown has enabled us to expand the program onto new properties, but without shouldering the entire burden.

Mourning Dove Banding Study Starts this Fall

The mourning dove, Zonaida macroura, is one of the most widely distributed and abundant birds in North America. Mourning doves are a popular game bird in 36 of the lower 48 states with more individual doves harvested than all other upland game birds combined. In North Carolina about 41,000 hunters harvested more than 800,000 mourning doves last hunting season.

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### 2003–2004 Seasons and Bag Limits for Small Game in North Carolina

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species</th>
<th>Season Dates</th>
<th>Daily Bag</th>
<th>Possession Limit</th>
<th>Season Limit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dove</td>
<td>Sept. 1 to Oct. 4&lt;br&gt;Nov. 24 to Nov. 29&lt;br&gt;Dec. 17 to Jan 15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodcock</td>
<td>Dec. 17 to Jan. 15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quail</td>
<td>Nov. 22 to Feb. 28</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grouse (males only)</td>
<td>Oct. 13 to Feb. 28</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pheasant</td>
<td>Nov. 22 to Feb. 1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rabbit</td>
<td>Nov. 22 to Feb. 28</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grey and red squirrels</td>
<td>Oct. 13 to Jan. 31</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fox squirrel*</td>
<td>Oct. 13 to Dec. 31</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Fox squirrel hunting is permitted only in the following counties: Anson, Bladen, Brunswick, Cumberland, Duplin, Greene, Harnett, Hoke, Johnston, Jones, Lenoir, Moore, New Hanover, Onslow, Pender, Pitt, Richmond, Sampson, Scotland, Wayne.

**Report Banded Birds**

Call 1-800-327-BAND (2263) to report banded birds. This is a 24-hour-a-day hotline during hunting seasons, Monday through Friday. During the off-season, hours are 7 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Voice mail is available. Hunters can report harvest birds through the Internet at [www.pwrc.usgs.gov](http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov). Select “Bird Banding Lab.” Hunters can keep the bands and will be provided a certificate identifying the bird’s age and sex, and the date and location where it was banded.

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