

Rolling Plains Quail Field Day Should Offer Some Interesting Insights

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ROBY - Dr. Dale Rollins, Texas AgriLife Extension Service wildlife specialist at San Angelo, wants anyone interested in quail to come out to "the ranch" on Sept. 25 for a day of learning devoted entirely to the pint-sized dynamos.

The ranch is the Rolling Plains Quail Research Ranch located 11 miles west of Roby on U.S. 180. The field day will run from 9 a.m. until 2 p.m..

Topics to be addressed include various experiments with quail and their habitat management. There will also be a discussion on forming a Western Rolling Plains Prescribed Burning Association for area landowners interested in using prescribed fire as a management tool.

Rollins, who is the 4,700-acre ranch's director, said that since 1993 he and his graduate students have been tracking quail across much of West Texas using radio telemetry. But since 2007, however, most of the efforts have been centered on the Fisher County property.

Their findings will be on the field day's agenda.

“Before we proved otherwise by using radio telemetry, most students of quail believed bobwhites were the monogamous 'Ozzie and Harriets' of the bird world,” Rollins said. “But through the use of this technology we've learned that their mating system is, shall we say, a bit more 'flexible' than once thought. We've documented hens 'double-clutching,' or laying more than one nest incubated by different males.”

But quail aren't the only animals being fitted with radio telemetry on the ranch. Rollins said there are also some “high-tech” coyotes and raccoons roaming the ranch.

“We had four coyotes and eight raccoons wearing GPS collars this summer,” he said. “The GPS collars stay on for five weeks then fall off. The collars record a way-point every five minutes at night so we can evaluate how thoroughly these predators search for quail nests.

“Knowing this will help us evaluate various habitat types to see if any offer any better protection against predation than others.”

Three Texas Department of Agriculture continuing education units will be offered to private applicator license holders.

Individual pre-registration is \$10 per person by Sept. 18 and \$20 thereafter and at the door. The fee includes a catered lunch.

To pre-register or for more information, call 325-653-4576 or see <http://www.quailresearch.org> .

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