

Oklahoma Quail  
by James Dietsch

Looking for wild bobwhites? The Sooner State is consistently one of the top three quail-hunting states in the country, and, arguably, has some of the best bobwhite quail hunting in the world. Some of Oklahoma's landscape has remained unchanged for years and is considered prime quail habitat, and decorating that prime, autumn, Oklahoma landscape with bird dogs and hunter orange makes a perfect picture. As a resident of Oklahoma, I have had the pleasure of trekking this landscape for over 30 years, and would like to give you an "Okie's insight" on where to hunt quail if you and your dogs would like to plan a visit.

Oklahoma quail season dates generally run from early November through mid-February (for the 2003-2004 season, it's November 8-February 15). The purchase of a non-resident, five-day hunting license is \$35, which allows you to hunt quail with a daily bag limit of 10. For those non-residents interested in hunting pheasants, too, you must purchase an annual non-resident license for \$85. The pheasant season in Oklahoma runs December 1 through January 31, and the daily bag limit is two roosters.

Oklahoma has several public hunting areas - Wildlife Management Areas (WMA's) - that deserve a visit if you want to hunt on your own. These areas offer good quail hunting throughout the season, which lasts for over three months; but several of these WMA are closed to quail hunting during the deer gun season from November 22, 2003 through November 30, 2003. Oklahoma has adopted a new deer gun season that may close some WMA's for 16 days instead of the regular nine days. You can confirm the dates, regulations, and view the WMA maps on the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation website at [www.wildlifedepartment.com](http://www.wildlifedepartment.com), then click on "Hunting."

Two of my favorite WMA's to hunt for quail are Cooper and Fort Supply. Both are located in northwestern Oklahoma, just 12 miles northwest of the town of Woodward on Highway 270. For lodging, there are several hotels located in Woodward that cater to hunters and their dogs. There is also primitive camping, in designated areas, available on both properties.

On the north side of Highway 270, just minutes northwest of Woodward is Hal & Fern Cooper WMA, one of the state's newest and attractive additions. There are 16,000 acres of rolling sand hills covered with sand plum, thickets,

sagebrush, and other prairie grasses - ideal quail habitat. The property is divided by the Beaver River, and the river bottom is fairly open with cottonwood, elm, and scattered cedars and dogwoods.

Last season, my hunting partner and I dropped a bird over a thicket, located south of the river, that was so large and thick, we both thought we would never retrieve that bird - only to find one of my Brittany pups appearing from the thicket with the quail. The habitat at Cooper is ideal, but one warning: Dog boots are a must! The stickers were so bad last season that it would stop most dogs in their tracks without boots. There is an entrance to the south side of the property from Highway 270 where you will find posted regulations, maps, and hunter success reports. There's also an entrance on the north side of Cooper that allows easy access to the property north of Beaver River.

Right across from the Cooper WMA on the south side of Highway 270 is Fort Supply WMA - 5,550 acres of similar habitat that you can't ignore while you're in the area. The public hunting area surrounds Fort Supply Reservoir, an 1,800-acre lake. Last season I was able to harvest a lone pheasant from this area along with several quail while hunting in late December. Hunting hours close at 4:30 p.m. on both Cooper and Fort Supply WMA's.

Another one of my favorite public hunting areas is Black Kettle National Grassland WMA. It is located in far western Oklahoma near and around the town of Cheyenne. You will find many land tracts totaling 30,826 acres of prime quail habitat scattered throughout the grassland that should keep most bird hunters and their dogs busy for the five-day, non-resident license period, even if you hunt wide-ranging pointers. Many of the tracts at Black Kettle have remained unchanged for many years, so weather usually dictates the quail population. Lodging is available in Cheyenne, with public hunting tracts located in all directions just minutes out of town. I had the pleasure of hunting Black Kettle with a former Oklahoma upland game biologist who was nice enough to show me some special tracts that held several good-sized coveys. I'd tell you where, but he swore me to secrecy.

If you prefer a guided hunt, I have a couple of recommendations, both located in the same great quail-producing areas of western Oklahoma. The Selman Ranch and Rush Creek Guide Service both offer great hunting with lots of acres to hunt, lots of birds, and down-home hospitality.

Sue Selman runs the Selman Ranch Hunting Lodge and Reserve in Buffalo, Oklahoma, 24 miles north of Woodward on Highway 34. You may contact Sue by calling (580) 256-2006, or e-mail her at selmanranch@nwoknet.net. When you contact her, make sure to ask her about her new book entitled Buffalo Creek Chronicles. I suggest you purchase the book before your visit to hunt the 14,000-acre ranch. It details the rich history and traditions that the area has to offer.

Another place to book a guided hunt for wild quail is with Danny Pierce and Rush Creek Guide Service. I know a lot of great quail minds in the industry, which I call "bird nerds," but Danny is different - he's a genuine "bird brain." He thinks just like quail and can put you on the birds. Located in Reydon, west of Cheyenne, Danny offers quail hunting in both Oklahoma and the Texas panhandle. Rush Creek Guide Service can be reached at (580) 655-4690. You may also purchase a non-resident five-day hunting license to hunt quail in Texas for \$35. The quail season in Texas is open the Saturday closest to October 28th through the last Sunday in February, with a daily bag limit of 15.

For over 30 years, bird hunting in Oklahoma has consumed my fall and winters with many memories of family and friends, good dogs, favorite guns, and lots of birds. Get out your calendar and plan your trip. Early season quail hunting in Oklahoma can be great with lots of birds, but the weather can sometimes be too warm in early November for good dog work. Late-season hunting in January and February becomes more challenging because the birds have been hunted and adapted to the pressure. Some of my favorite hunts have been late in the season with snow on the ground.

Whether you plan an early- or a late-season visit to Oklahoma to hunt quail, would like to hunt on your own, or would like the assistance of a guide, you should help me decorate the Oklahoma landscape with bird dogs and hunter orange during an upcoming season.