

# Quail, boom or bust for 2005-06 season?

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Quail are famous for their "boom and bust" cycles. In other words, in good years there are lots of quail, in poor years there aren't any. Quail have high reproductive potential that lets them recover from the worst years quickly. Good quail years are dependent on several factors; good carryover of breeding pairs from the winter, timely rainfall, mild temperatures, lots of food and good range/habitat conditions. Fortunately for us, the Rolling Plains, for the most part, has been experiencing these conditions for the last 2 years, which means lots of quail.

Based on Texas Parks & Wildlife Department (TPWD) Quail Surveys and landowner observations, this will be a quail season to remember. The Texas Parks & Wildlife Department conducts annual roadside quail surveys to monitor population trends. These surveys are com-

pleted during the first two weeks of August using 20-mile routes. The same routes are driven every year, and some routes in the Panhandle have been surveyed for 30 years. The survey route is driven during the hour after sunrise or the hour before sunset and quail counted along the route are recorded as singles, pairs, and coveys. The number of birds in a covey and size of the birds in the covey (adult vs. juvenile) are also recorded. Jackrabbits and cottontails are also counted while driving the survey route.

When conditions are good for quail production other species also do well.

Quail numbers look good for the Texas Panhandle, which includes 56 counties, basically an area from the top of the Panhandle south to Andrews County and east to Jones and Hardeman County. Based on our surveys over the last 30 years we have averaged 18.2 birds per survey

route. This year we observed 30.8 birds per route compared to 15.7 birds per route last year. That's a 50% increase over last year. As a matter of fact, we have not observed this many birds on our survey routes since 1987!

This is the year to get the bird dogs out of the kennel, buy plenty of shotgun shells and spend as much time out in the field as possible, since this could be a year to remember as far as quail hunting is concerned.

## Judging antlers in the field

UVALDE — White-tailed bucks often seem to shrink in the interval between squeezing the trigger and approaching the downed quarry.

"Bucks often fall victim to the malady known as ground shrinkage," said Dr. Jim Cathey, Texas Cooperative Extension wildlife specialist at Uvalde.

"Perhaps the buck's antlers shrunk because of the sun's glare, faulty equipment, or just maybe there was a heavy dose of adrenaline flowing through the hunter's body. An active imagination coupled with poor antler-judging skills is usually at the root of the problem," said Cathey.

He said the good news is that steps can be taken to hone skills necessary for scoring deer in hand or on the hoof.

Several systems are available, but Cathey said the Boone and Crockett Club has long been recognized as the big game records keeping authority for North America. For a tutorial on the process, see the club's online scoring page and guidelines at [www.boone-crockett.org](http://www.boone-crockett.org).

"Once you understand the system, take time to note a few pointers that can prevent ground shrinkage," said Cathey. "It is best to be vigilant and mentally score the deer as it approaches you unaware of your presence, not in the excitement when the question becomes shoot or don't shoot."

"Begin by assessing the main beam length. Next judge the tine lengths, and then circumference measures. In the interest of time, do this for only one side of the rack and multiply by two. Don't forget to add the spread (one time) to your tally. Practice this skill and test yourself against known scores before going to the field. This method would give a perfectly symmetrical score, but slight deductions can be worried about later."

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