

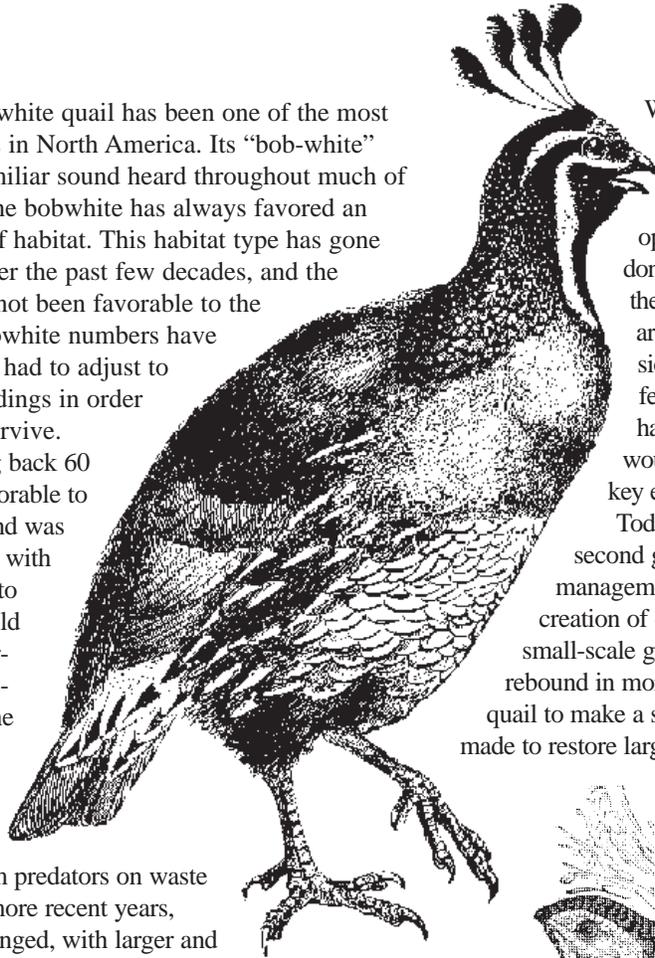


Bobwhite Quail Habitat: PAST AND PRESENT

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For decades the bobwhite quail has been one of the most popular game birds in North America. Its “bob-white” call was once a familiar sound heard throughout much of our nation’s farmlands. The bobwhite has always favored an early successional stage of habitat. This habitat type has gone through many changes over the past few decades, and the subsequent habitats have not been favorable to the bobwhite. As a result, bobwhite numbers have declined, and the bird has had to adjust to its ever-changing surroundings in order to find what it needs to survive.

Farming practices dating back 60 years were much more favorable to the bobwhite quail. The land was broken up into small fields with hedges and fencerows left to grow up in a mixture of wild vegetation. These areas surrounding the crops and pastures created diversity in the land, which provided good bobwhite quail habitat. This habitat provided the quail with cover for nesting and protection from predators on waste grain left in the fields. In more recent years, farming practices have changed, with larger and more advanced machinery and the use of pesticides and herbicides. The small farms of yesterday were enlarged and farmers began to grow and produce their crops in larger fields with fewer borders. The chemicals enabled farmers to keep their field edges and fencerows clear of any natural vegetation that normally grew in these areas. The bobwhite’s habitat changed drastically and the diversity of plant life decreased.



With this decline in habitat the birds become more limited in areas that could provide their basic needs to survive and reproduce. They found a substitute within clearcuts leftover from logging operations. Once these cutover areas were abandoned, they produced a variety of plant life that met the needs of the bobwhite quail. If these cut areas are left unmanaged they grow into a higher successional stage of plant life that bobwhites do not prefer. The cutovers must be managed to keep the habitat in early stages of plant succession, which would provide herbaceous and shrub species that are key elements in good quail habitat.

Today, the bobwhite quail can still be found in the second growth of clearcuts. With the use of wildlife management techniques such as controlled burning, the creation of cover strips and field borders and the use of small-scale grain fields, the bobwhite quail may begin to rebound in more traditional habitat types. For the bobwhite quail to make a significant comeback, a concerted effort must be made to restore large quantities of early successional habitat. ♣

