



How to Help

Northern Bobwhites

This popular game bird has declined across much of its range in the Eastern United States due to habitat loss and fragmentation. Bobwhites need a variety of open and brushy cover types throughout the course of the year, and do not survive when these habitats are developed or converted to "clean" monocrop agriculture, tame pastures, or high stocking rate/short rotation industrial forest that eliminates grassy areas and woody shelter. Bobwhites can be helped by careful management of rural properties to ensure that these sedentary resident birds are able to easily walk between sites furnishing their various needs.

What Northern Bobwhites Need

Food: These quail forage in the morning and evenings for a wide variety of mostly seeds and some insects and green vegetation on or close to the ground. They look for food in a variety of mostly open habitats within their home range of 20 to 100 acres. Chicks need to be able to move easily across bare ground, and so require feeding areas with no more than 50 percent grass cover.

Nesting: Bobwhites nest in open grassy areas, building their nests under native bunch grass clumps that are usually 16 to 18 inches tall. Nests are often within a few feet of habitat edges including brushy fencerows or forest edges that provide cover.

Shelter: Besides grass cover, bobwhite groups (coveys) need shrubby or low growing woody cover for loafing and roosting during summer heat, winter snow and wind, or during inactive periods in the middle of the day. Between 5 and 25 percent of a covey's home range should be evenly distributed in this type of woody cover that is 3 to 6 feet tall.

How You Can Help

- Maintain a wide variety of plants and low woody vegetation on property.
- Consider planting small patches (2-3 acres for every 200 acres of habitat) of preferred winter food crops including corn, soybean, or sorghum.
- Plant or maintain fields or meadows of native warm summer grasses (prairie bunch grasses) that grow in clumps and allow chicks to easily move through fields.
- Avoid use of herbicides that kill native plants used for food, and application of pesticides that kill or poison insect prey species.
- Avoid manicured pastures dominated by one or two grass species.
- Plant or maintain fields or meadows of native warm summer grasses with at least 250 grass clumps per acre, but not more than one 12 inch diameter clump every 4 square feet.
- Manage grasslands with fire, grazing, mowing, or mechanical disking every few years, so that they don't become overgrown or so thick that birds cannot move easily through the grass.
- Plant or maintain woody hedgerows or thickets of native low growing shrubby species. Clumps of woody vegetation should measure at least 100 square feet, and preferably over 400 square feet. Preferred species include wild plum, blackberry, fragrant sumac, or roughleaf dogwood.
- Increase edge habitats which provide cover for daily movements. Smaller fields and narrow strips of woodlands increase the amount of useable edge per acre.
- More bobwhite habitat management information online at: landcare.nrcs.usda.gov/images/pdf/northern_bobwhite.pdf