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## Local quail decline stumps local experts

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Jorge Cruz  
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Brad Dabbert, an associate professor in Texas Tech's Department of Natural Resources Management, is working with other Tech professors and partnering up with Quail First Incorporated to form the Quail Tech Alliance in an effort to understand why the quail population is declining.

Three years ago, the National Audubon Society listed the Northern Bobwhite Quail as the No. 1 common bird in decline. From 1967 to 2007, the bird's population decreased from 31 million to 5.5 million.

Dabbert said the Bobwhite Quail's population stretches from the southeastern United States toward the Rolling Plains region of the United States, essentially east of Lubbock.

Dabbert and the Quail Tech Alliance ultimately hope to uncover the reasons behind the drastic quail decline.

"We're accomplishing this by enrolling ranches in about 38 counties," said Byron Buckley, a graduate student working under Dabbert, "where we're measuring population sizes, using supplemental feeding, taking blood samples and garnering as much information as possible to discover the reasons behind the quail decline."

In the past, Dabbert said, the quail decline was associated with the amount of rainfall in the area.

"We had a good amount of rainfall; however, many areas did not see a bounce of the population as expected," Dabbert said.

One of the major effects of the quail decline in the area is the economic impact it will have on the hunting industry, he said.

Steven Presley, associate professor of the Institute of Environment and Human Health at Tech, also is working alongside Dabbert to help uncover the reasons behind the quail decline.

Presley said the quail-hunting industry in Texas is a "multi-billion dollar industry," and the Lubbock economy will potentially feel the effect.

Quail hunting is an aspect of the local economies, and if the quail population goes away, there is a trickle-down effect ultimately creating an economic turnover in the rural communities in the area depending on the quail hunting industry, Buckley said.

Dabbert said the reactions of most hunters are counter-intuitive to what most people may think.

"Hunters are the ones putting up the money for the research," Dabbert said. "Hunters are very conservation-minded, and many have temporarily stopped hunting the quail in order to not disrupt their population."

Another major effect potentially arising because of the sudden drastic decline of the quail population is the ecological impact to the surrounding West Texas region, Presley said.

He said when a population crashes as quickly as it has during the past several years, there is a concern other wildlife species may be next.

"If there is a disease that is affecting the quails, it may also be affecting other species like the dove," Presley said.

Dabbert and the Quail Tech Alliance hope their efforts, as well the efforts of other Tech professors, uncover the factors contributing to the sharp quail decline.

"Hopefully we can find the magic bullet that tells us the reason that the quail population is declining," Buckley said, "and fix it or find a way to stop it to allow the quail population to flourish once again."

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