

# THE CASE AGAINST PEN-RAISED QUAIL

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Taking the negative on any matter is always risky and usually difficult to defend. Therefore, I will try to keep my remarks in a positive frame. To do this I will point out reasons that make me feel released birds are unnecessary in our situation. I won't attempt to deride the entire concept of released birds, but rather point out reasons that they don't fit into our management goals in this area.

Some points to consider:

1. I am not defending the success of, or viability of my colleagues' program. His and others' success in introducing birds is well documented.
2. But in the context of this discussion or debate I refer you to the title of this gathering- North Texas Quail Symposium.
3. We have the habitat and environment to sustain large huntable populations of wild bobwhites. This is what we must work to maximize, using what we are blessed with from nature, combined with front line research and technology. Then we will supply what no one else can, namely a sustainable population of wild birds. Leave the pen-raised, released birds to those areas with no core stock or habitat to sustain wild birds.
4. Many are hoping for released birds to be a panacea or easy-out, quick fix for poor management practices.
5. Have your cake and eat it, too? No way! This is not an "out" for the cherished dream of many ranchers (stockmen who are primarily livestock oriented) who seek the mythical, unobtainable maximum return from grazing and wildlife on the same land. Habitat deficient landscapes are no more useable to released birds than natives, except in the most basic "put and take, shoot the same day" preserve hunt, which is available in many

locales.

6. I question, rather, the reason why released birds are necessary. Remember where we are. Management, conservation, and a balance with agriculture are the way to prosper in the quail game. Let's take advantage of our bounty and utilize what we have. We can produce wild birds for far less cost than our southeastern counterparts, and we do it with regularity, weather not withstanding. I use the bird counts and covey contacts on the Melton Ranch during the drought-plagued '98-'99 season, for example.
7. The quality of the released birds has been raised to a high level by my associate, and I concur that there is a place for them, but not here in the Rolling Plains. Here we can do more for less money than anywhere in the range of the bobwhite today. We don't want to come to depend upon, or reach the point of, resorting to released birds if we don't have to. Furthermore, it is being done very well (look at the ads in Quail Unlimited Magazine) all over the former traditional range of the bobwhite, i.e. the southeastern U.S. Leave it to them. They are making the best of their situation (declining or extinct native birds, changing agriculture, etc.). We don't have to play that game, yet, and hopefully never will.

What we offer in Texas, south and north, is the last great expanse of wild bird habitat. And there appears to be no change in store for this habitat in the future, i.e. no switch to coastal burmuda- pine plantation type of agriculture. Lets keep what we have, maximize it with management, conservation, and sound grazing practices (those with an eye toward the real value of the hunting resource), and we won't need to utilize released birds, no matter how refined their presentation becomes.