



2020 SPRING E-BULLETIN

QUAIL-TECH ALLIANCE

2020 Spring Whistle Count Report

By: Rowdy White, Q.T. Manager

This May marked the 11th year of spring whistle count data collected by the Quail-Tech Alliance, but it certainly was not a year like any other. Travel restrictions due to COVID-19 nearly canceled counts, and once they were approved, the restrictions had a major impact on how we conducted counts this year. It was solely due to the understanding of our anchor ranches and the willingness of our research technicians to wake up at 2 A.M. to drive across the ecoregion that counts were successfully completed this year. We owe them many thanks, and without them there would be no Quail-Tech Alliance.

The average for the Quail-Tech Alliance overall was 2.51 males heard per point this year, down 0.67 from last year. While it is never enjoyable to report a decrease, I must point out that on an ecoregion level, we fell less than one bird per point. Much like in 2013, the breeding population potential is there for explosive growth if conditions are right. We cannot control the rain part of the equation, but we can make what is present go further by taking an integrated approach to quail management. That starts with conservative grazing with the intention of protecting nesting cover, careful brush management to preserve the best woody cover, promotion of natural food by stimulating

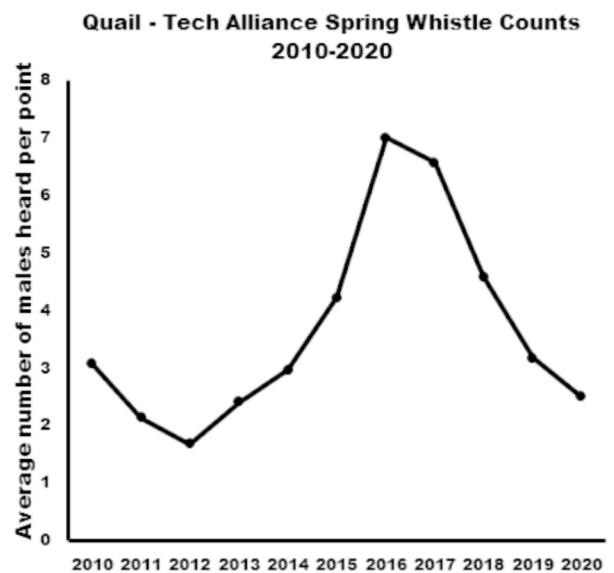


Figure 1. Spring whistle counts averaged across the Rolling Plains Ecoregion.

forb growth, targeted nest predator control before nesting season to promote nest success, and broadcast supplemental feeding. Not every tool is needed in every situation, but a willingness to adapt management practices to the conditions present may be the difference between an increasing or decreasing quail population.



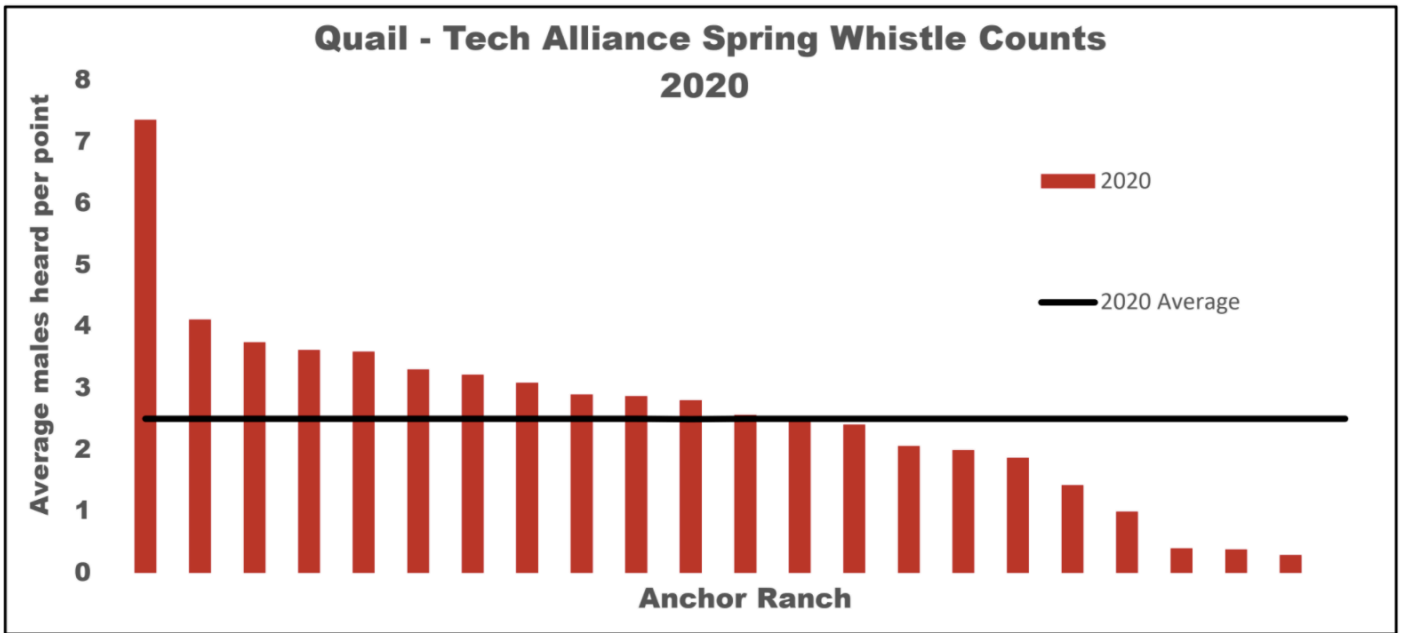


Figure 2. Spring 2020 whistle count results per ranch in the Quail-Tech Alliance, arranged from highest to lowest abundance.

In more positive news, Joshua Luft, one of our graduate students, had his first nest hatch on May 26th. So far Josh is tracking 23 nests. While the average clutch size is 12-13 eggs, the average on Josh’s project has been 16.46 eggs per clutch (high: 20 eggs; low: 13 eggs).

Overall nest success is 44% and chick survival is 16%. While this does not sound like great news, it is actually much improved upon the 28 to 30% nest success and 2 to 9% chick survival that we have suffered the past 3 years. Josh is still finding and tracking new nests, so these data will change as the summer progresses. Josh has also observed a male incubating a nest, so hopefully the hens are already attempting second nests!



Figure 3. Male bobwhite perched in a tree, whistling for a mate, Dickens county, Texas. 2020.

Once again, we are thankful for the generous support of Park Cities and Cross Timbers Quail Coalition, the Burnett Foundation, Mr. Chuck Ribelin, and all of our anchor ranches. Without you, this would not be possible.

