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PARENT-REARED BOBWHITE SURVIVAL IN THE TEXAS ROLLING PLAINS

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ABSTRACT

Considerable research has been accomplished over the past 6 decades on the possible reasons for decline in the northern bobwhite (*Colinus virginianus*), henceforth known as the bobwhite. Restoring or restocking bobwhite populations by augmentation in areas that once held significant numbers has been a focus for many wildlife agencies and managers. Three main methods for augmentation of bobwhites currently exist: release of pen-raised birds, release of juvenile birds reared by Surrogator®, and translocation of wild bobwhites from one area to another. Of these 3 methods, only translocation has accomplished the goal of reestablishing bobwhite populations. Recently a new model developed by Tall Timbers Research Station in Tallahassee, Florida, USA, has successfully produced parent-reared bobwhite chicks from wild strain, which are raised by a surrogate parent in a simulated wild habitat environment. These birds have been released into the southeastern United States and successfully established new bobwhite population in areas of restored habitat. We designed a study to determine the viability of this rearing and release method for restoring depleted bobwhite populations in the semiarid, Rolling Plains of Texas. One hundred fifty nine radiomarked, parent-reared bobwhites were released in 2013–2014 on 8 ranches. One hundred five radiomarked, parent-reared bobwhites were released in 2014–2015 on 6 ranches. The survival rates were low for both years of the study with only 4 radiomarked birds surviving the first year and no birds surviving the second year. An apparent lack of predator-avoidance skills appears to be responsible for the high mortality rates that we estimated.

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Key words: anti-predator behavior, *Colinus virginianus*, parent-reared bobwhites, population augmentation

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