

## Return of the Bird

Researchers at Quail Field Day will share ways to improve quail numbers

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Written by *Kyle Spradley* (<https://cafnr.missouri.edu/?author=15>) · Photography by Missouri Department of Conservation · May 28, 2014



**B**radford Research Center (<http://bradford.cafnr.org>) is like many farms across the state in that each year they grow soybeans, corn and bountiful amounts of vegetables. For years, the center near Columbia never had quail on the property. It's a growing dilemma across the country due to habitat loss and spreading urbanization. But thanks to work in the last decade, researchers are seeing several coveys on a regular basis.

“We first started in 2003 with testing practical ways landowners can use to maximum productivity and leave enough habitat for the bobwhite quail to thrive,” said Tim Reinbott, Bradford superintendent. “Since then, we have seen a recorded 23-fold quail population increase at Bradford.”

Information about how Bradford helped bring back the quail and landowners could do so will be presented at the annual Quail and Native Pollinator Field Day on June 19. The free workshop runs from 1 to 7 p.m. and will include talks by experts on quail management. Topics will include quail ecology, herbicide selection, quail population dynamics, habitat restoration and what programs are available for assistance through the Habitat Help Desk.

A highlight of the afternoon will be a panel of landowners who have implemented several of the management practices.



Techniques such as field edge-feathering will be one of the many topics presented at the free field day on June 19.

“These folks have dealt with habitat management and implementation. They are landowners and will share what worked and what didn’t.” said Ray Wright, research specialist at Bradford. “To me, it’s great to hear from the average landowner and the success they have had. This is real-world, useful knowledge.”

Educational tours across the research center also will be offered.

“We will take you through our native plant pollinator restoration plot,” said Wright. “We’ll also take you past the field borders, cover crop plots, show which native grasses and forbs work best in times of drought and which practices help improve soil health.”

On the edge of a soybean-corn rotated field Wright and Research Specialist Terry Woods helped to transform an area of less-productive land into a native plant buffer zone. Each spring and summer the field blooms and attracts beneficial insects and pollinators.

“Many of those insects are great food for the quail as well,” added Reinbott. “Most of the things we are doing out here benefits a variety of wildlife and plants. Plus, it provides them a place for cover. Besides food, a protective habitat is extremely important to the quail.”

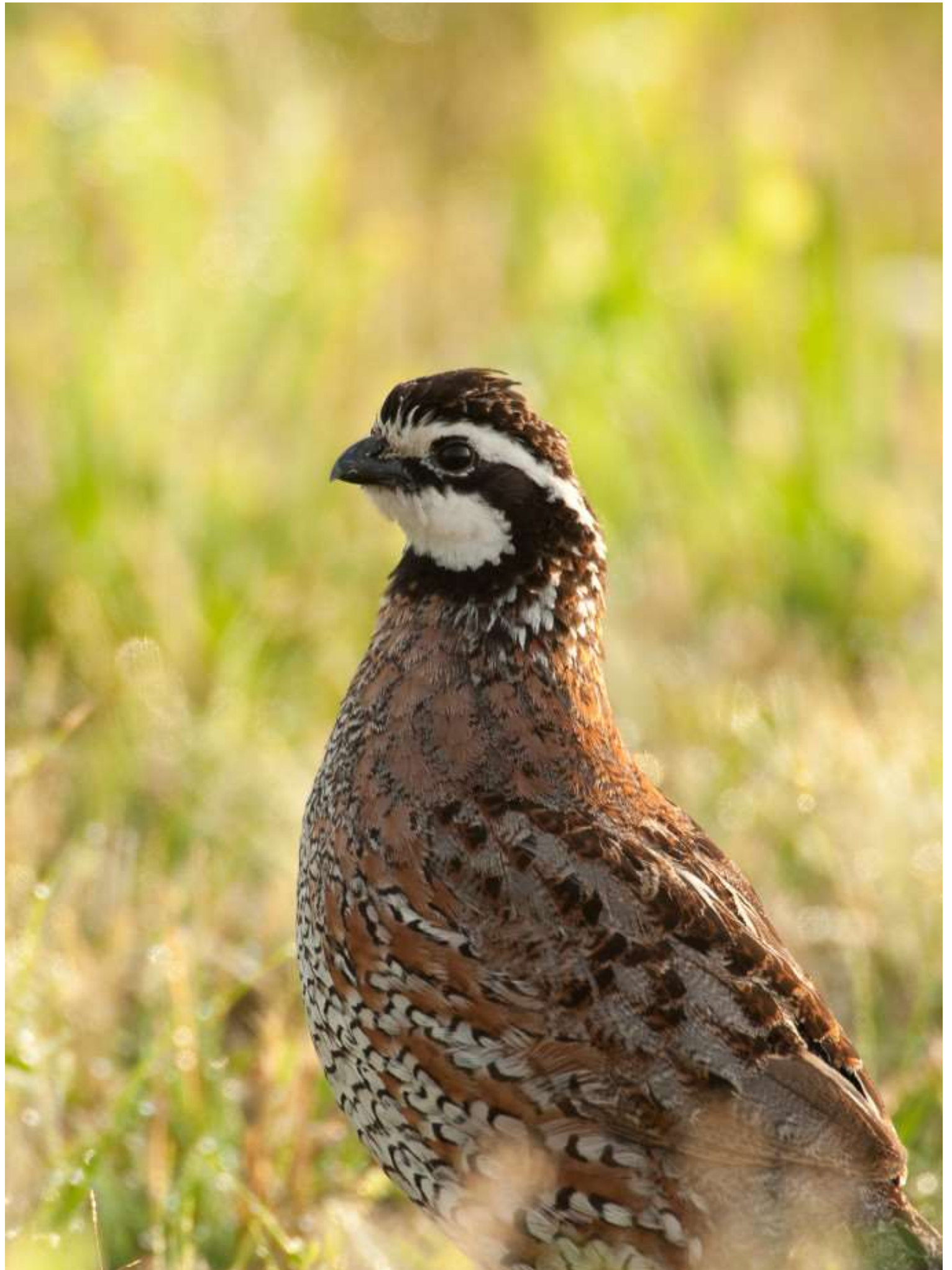
Often used techniques such as “edge feathering” where a woodland and crop field meet to create escape cover can really help improve habitat. This technique thins the edges of the woodland by cutting trees near the edge and allowing shrubs and annual plants such as ragweed to thrive. This creates cover and food source for quail from the seeds.

These feathering techniques can be enhanced by using plants that produce a year-round food supply. Adult birds can utilize annual crops like sunflower and millet “food plots” that keep their seeds during the winter. Reinbott maintains these plants at varying heights so the ground-dwelling birds can get a meal despite any depth of snow.

“You look out at some of these fields during the winter months and it’s just barren out there,” said Reinbott. “Create some shelter for these birds as well as a food source.”

Quail have always been a good indicator of a diverse environment on one’s property.

“When you lose quail it means that many other species are suffering,” said Wright. “The term indicator species is used to describe this role. In some ways it shows the degradation of the area, but with a little effort this can change drastically and even help out the turkey and deer populations if desired.”





Reinbott and other researchers are always asked about is the investment worth it. “I definitely think it is,” proclaimed the superintendent. “We need to be more conservation minded these days.”

The annual field day is a collaboration between the MU College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources; Missouri Department of Conservation; NRCS; National Wildlife Federation and Quail Forever.

Located 11 miles east of the MU campus on 591 acres, [Bradford Research Center](http://bradford.cafnr.org/) (<http://bradford.cafnr.org/>) has the largest concentration of research plots in crops, oils and related disciplines in Missouri. As a research laboratory and outdoor classroom, faculty and students investigate wastewater management, entomology, pest and weed control, alternative crops, organic transition techniques and the impact of hailstorms. Bradford engages the community through workshops, field days, corn mazes, the Tomato Festival, and native plants and pumpkin giveaways, and partners with University organizations, including Campus Dining Services, to improve MU’s sustainability.

For more information about Bradford and a calendar of future events, visit the center’s new website at [http://bradford.cafnr.org](http://bradford.cafnr.org/) (<http://bradford.cafnr.org/>) or call 573-884-7945.

For high-resolution press-quality photos, visit <http://bit.ly/mdcquail> (<http://bit.ly/mdcquail>) to download bobwhite quail images from the Missouri Department of Conservation.

Give to CAFNR (<https://securelb.imodules.com/s/1002/giving/index.aspx?sid=1002&gid=165&pgid=5006&cid=9137&dids=229.230.231.232.233.234.235.236.237.238.239.503.504>)

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