

Spring 2009 Habitat Summary

This past week I was browsing at a barn sale studying some antique hand-planting tools not far out of Haslett and enjoying some good old-fashioned talk with the 75 year old proprietor when a rooster cackled just beyond his fencerow. We both smiled. He was especially excited because he told me he had not heard or seen a pheasant in what he guessed was 20 plus years.

Our hard work and efforts to restore habitat is working right here in our own back yards.

The headlines for the 2009 spring planting season -cold and wet. Usually this spells disaster for ground nesting wildlife. Hens nest later and clutches are smaller. New chicks are very susceptible to hypothermia. Mortality is very high. The late hatching increases the chicks exposure to machinery. Hay production is one of the biggest killers of wildlife that depend on undisturbed grasslands for nesting. When the chicks are small they cannot escape modern hay cutting machinery when it is operated at higher than average speeds. It is a diabolical situation. Farmers depend on crop diversity to survive. Wildlife depends on these grasslands for survival. This spring was a very big learning experience for myself. Even as I write there are some hayfields that have not had the first cutting removed. This wet weather also prevented the first crop of hay to be cut and removed. This single important factor has had a huge effect on nesting success. I believe this year will show continued growth in the local population.

Planting was challenging this year to say the least. Excessive rainfall delayed getting equipment onto fields. Everyone had this problem. Cold weather delayed germination. Sorghum especially needs warm soil temperatures. Make some notes this year and make the appropriate adjustments next year. For those that have had to suffer failure in their food plots consider a secondary crop. Buckwheat, turnips, sorghum can all grow but will likely only provide cover but not food. Buckwheat takes about 60-65 days to mature.

If you would like more information you can email me at: Morrowyellowdog@sbcglobal.net.