WHY and WHAT TO PLANT: STAGE "One"

A cold, wet spring (like this year) can delay “peak-Hatching” by up to 2 weeks. The cold weather will not necessarily hinder incubation but may have caused “egg laying” to occur later in May.

After 23 days of incubation the eggs hatch and the hen will lead her brood to suitable feeding areas. (Brooding cover vs nesting cover). The chicks must stay close to the hen so periodically she can brood them to keep them warm. The hen will call to the chicks even when they are still in the egg. Later the hen uses this method to communicate changes which causes the chicks to scatter and freeze. That is why brooding cover needs to be just thin enough so these very, very small chicks (3”-4”) can navigate. Chicks communicate with 3 types of calls:

1. A hurried danger call
2. A plaintive call for lost chicks
3. A contentment call

When the chicks are from 1-3 weeks old mortality is the highest. Survival depends on available food sources, location of brood cover to food source and natural predation. Plants like wild flowers attract numerous types of insects which is key to survival. Broods that have to travel great distances in larger ranges suffer the greatest mortality. Chicks rely totally on protein to gain weight so their diet needs approximately 90% insects. Poor insect density means the chicks must roam far distances and therefore are susceptible to increase predation. Monoculture row crops in todays farm fields are usually void of diverse insect life.

Studies have shown that chicks will feed on at least 22 different species of insects. The more insects in your diverse habitat (forbs) the greater chick survival. Home gardeners like to grow diverse plants because these can also attract beneficial bugs. It has been determined that at 1-2 weeks of age chicks are growing at a rapid rate and require 27% protein. Some studies indicate that caterpillars, sawflies, and butterflies make up a great proportion of their diet.

That is why location of each habitat component (foodplot, nesting and brooding) is so important.

This small tidbit of information is a key to increasing upland birds to your habitat plan.