



# Quail Times

Spring 2022

## Invasive Species Spotlight

### Cogongrass

By: Jeff Fellers – Clemson Extension

Cogongrass (*Imperata cylindrica*) is a dense perennial grass that is one of the world's ten worst weeds. It can quickly displace other vegetation in pastures and forest. It was introduced from Southeast Asia in the early 1900s for soil stabilization. It has invaded 153 billion acres worldwide and infested one million acres in Florida. It is established in Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. It has also been found in South Carolina, but the Department of Plant Industry is working hard to control those locations and keep them from spreading.



Figure 1 Cogongrass (*Imperata cylindrica*) in bloom in early summer. Fred Singleton, Department of Plant Industry, Clemson University

There are three ways that you can identify cogongrass from other weeds.



Figure 2 Cogongrass seedheads appear in early summer. Steve Compton, Department of Plant Industry, Clemson University

1. The flowers are usually a light maroon color before they open during late April-May. (Figure 2)
2. The leaves are about 1.5-1.75 inches wide and usually have a conspicuous, offset midrib and that may appear white on older plants. (Figure 3)
3. The rhizomes are sharply pointed, segmented, and has a hard underground stem from which its roots emerge in dense mats.

When cogongrass is detected in South Carolina, the Department of Plant

Industries assists property owners in determining appropriate eradication methods. The Department of Plant Industries monitors all known cogongrass sites to prevent further spread. If you suspect you have cogongrass there is a reporting tool that can be found at the following web address.

<https://survey123.arcgis.com/share/819bc111c76f43a4b500eb275eedec40>



Figure 3 Notice the off-center, white main vein in cogongrass leaves (*Imperata cylindrica*). Mark Atwater, Weed Control Unlimited, Inc., US

While it may only be positively located in a few counties in South Carolina (figure 4), it is important to keep our eyes open for potential infestations. In order for South Carolina to minimize the impact of cogongrass, landowners need to contact the Department of Plant Industries if they suspect they may have cogongrass. Otherwise, South Carolina will end up like Florida and Alabama where the entire state is affected.

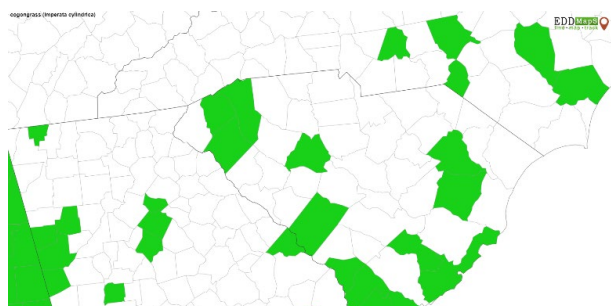


Figure 4 Map showing counties in SC that have had positive infestations of cogongrass. <https://www.eddmaps.org/distribution/usstate.cfm?sub=2433>

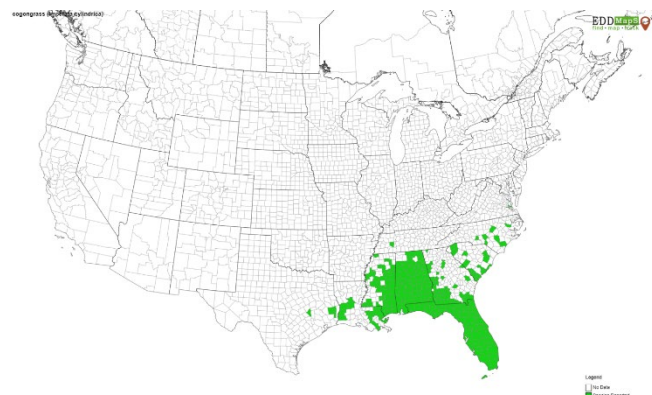


Figure 5 Map showing counties that have had positive infestations of cogongrass.

<https://www.eddmaps.org/distribution/usstate.cfm?sub=2433>

## Native Species Spotlight

### Little Bluestem

By: Gary Peters – NRCS

Once upon a time, little bluestem was considered part of the genus ‘Andropogon’ and considered one of the bunch grasses along with big bluestem, Indian grass, Eastern gamma grass, etc. but, is now considered distinct enough to stand apart from the other grasses, and it does!



When you think of the prairie and picture the waving grasses over the rolling hills you probably don’t realize what you envision mostly is the sturdy upright stems of the mighty little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*).

Often lumped in with a variety of other grasses commonly known as Broom sedge, Bushy beard, split beard, Broom straw, poverty grass, broom bluestem, broom beard grass, prairie beard grass, or small feathergrass, etc. little bluestem provides a blend of blue-, green- and purple-colored foliage creating a pallet of color throughout spring and summer, with fall bringing the deeper reds, coppers, straw blonde, and oranges.



Although small in stature, little bluestem is a giant as one of the primary species of the tallgrass prairies, shortgrass prairies, and the savannas of longleaf forests of

old. It is also the Perennial Plant Association’s 2022 perennial plant of the year: <https://perennialplant.org/page/2022PPOY> .

#### Characteristics

- native, perennial
- warm season, long-lived bunchgrass
- plants 1 to 4 feet tall, erect, large tufted, having occasional short rhizomes
- basal stems and sheaths flattened
- leaf blades are hairless, V shaped in cross section, keeled
- light blue-green when young turning reddish brown at maturity
- deep fibrous root system, semi-sod forming in sub humid zones
- twisted, bent awn and a single cluster of seeds per branch

- grow on a wide variety of soils best adapted to well drained, medium to dry, infertile soils
- drought and fair shade tolerance
- fair to poor flood tolerance
- preferentially on sites with pH 7.0 and slightly higher

So, how ‘good’ is little bluestem? Well for those that know a little about nutrition, crude protein is as high as 12-14% during the growing season and falls to about 4% in the dry standing stalks. Digestibility is up there too, approaching 60% in the spring through early summer, and dropping to the mid 30’s in the fall and winter.



According to the USDA, little bluestem is one of the most widely distributed native grasses in North America. Found throughout the U.S. it is a great soil stabilizer in a wide variety of conditions including dry, sunbaked, sterile, or acid soils, and in windblown, eroded, abandoned fields, ditches, or pastures. Little Bluestem’s root system is deep and fibrous, extending down five feet or more. These extensive root systems allow little bluestem along with other native grasses to withstand extended periods of drought. It’s propensity to quickly establish on disturbed soils makes it perfect for bare soil, banks and slopes, and restoration projects.

If you’re a rabbit or a quail, meadow mouse or sparrow, little bluestem provides valuable overhead cover from predators for wildlife throughout the summer, fall, and winter. According to the USDA, it’s one of the best grasses for nesting and roosting habitat around which is especially beneficial to quail here in the piedmont. The seed is eaten by a variety of songbirds as well.

It’s also valuable for insects, the rigid stems lending nesting material and structure for native bees, providing pollen for pollinators, and serving as a host plant for Henry’s Elfin butterfly, grape leaf folder moth, and skipper butterfly caterpillars.



Like other ‘fluffy’ seeded grasses, seeding areas to little bluestem requires a somewhat different technique. Prepare a loose soil seed bed, drill seed to 1/8” to 1/4” depth, or broadcast the seed and press the seed into the soil with a heavy cultipacker. The keys to planting native seeds is 1) not to deep

(1/4" max) and 2) good seed to soil contact (cultipacker). Relatively free of pests and diseases, once established little bluestem requires little maintenance beyond an occasional fire.

As for a little history, when little bluestem blanketed the prairies, various Native American peoples used it for insulation in moccasins to keep warm, and as 'fans' in ceremonial sweat lodges. Bundles of little bluestem stalks lashed together formed switches used by Native Americans, taught to the pioneers, used by our great-grandparents, and sold in gift shops today.

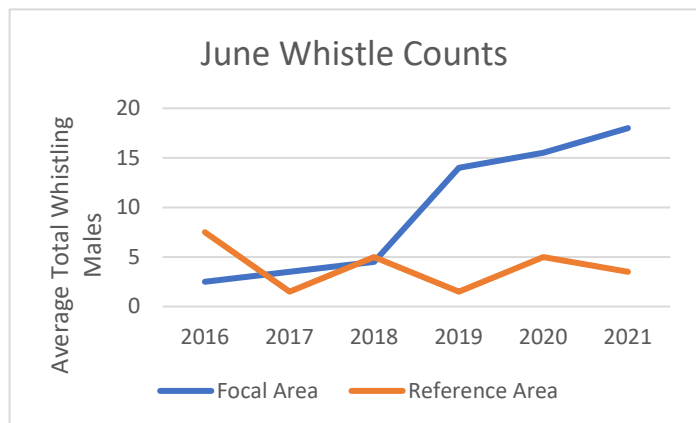
For more information about little bluestem contact your local NRCS or Clemson Extension Agent.

## Quail Population on the Indian Creek Wildlife Area Continues to Grow

**By: Jake McClain – Quail Area Coordinator**

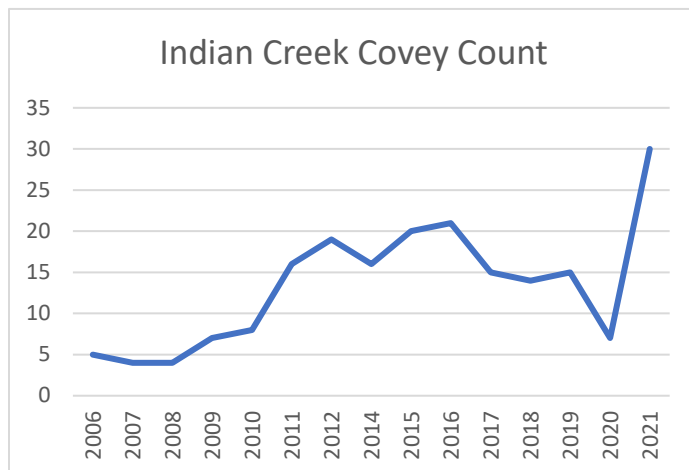
Any serious attempt to increase wildlife on a piece of public or private property should include population monitoring for the target species. Without collecting this population data, evidence of increased numbers of quail, deer, or turkey can only be anecdotal at best and therefore, not very convincing. Population monitoring is most informative when you implement a standardized, long-term survey. For quail, that means whistle counts in every June and covey counts every Fall.

The Indian Creek partners have been conducting Fall covey counts at the same 21-point locations (located on USFS lands) since 2006. Whistle counts have been conducted since the inception of the smaller Indian Creek Quail Focal Area and Reference Area (which is imbedded in the larger ICWA) in 2016. The Reference Area is used to compare population levels to the Focal Area (e.g., where all the habitat work is occurring). If the Reference Area and Focal Area show similar survey results, then we obviously are not doing our job in growing the quail population.



Luckily that has not been the case. The trends for both covey counts, and whistle counts have been positive over the years, indicating a growing population of quail (figs 1 & 2). Intensive thinning, a vigorous prescribed fire program, and other habitat work are the likely reasons for the population increase. This

past year (2021) was our best year yet, with a record breaking 30 coveys detected across the 21-point survey!



Surveys are not perfect, and many factors can impact the results of a count for a particular year. Weather is a big one. Coveys tend to be most vocal on clear, calm mornings and less so on overcast days. The results of the covey count in 2020 were likely low because of poor weather. This past year we got lucky and had ideal weather for our survey.

What about predator management? To date no predator management has been conducted on Indian Creek, save some feral hog trapping. Too many people falsely believe that growing quail populations is impossible because of the increased predator load on the landscape. While undoubtedly, trapping and removing nest predators can positively impact quail populations, it's encouraging to see that such labor-intensive efforts are not necessary to reverse the decline of quail populations.

The success of growing the quail population at Indian Creek through habitat improvements should be a model for other public land entities and private landowners alike to take and apply elsewhere across the state and Southeast. The lesson is this: focus on the habitat and you can grow birds!

## Springtime Prescribed Fire

**By: Mark Carroll – SCDNR Wildlife Biologist**

Spring means it is time to set your clocks ahead and the process of succession back. Springtime prescribed fire is a very important tool used to manage understory plant communities for bobwhite quail. Woody competition from undesirable species, e.g., young sweetgum, can be controlled with fire to allow sunlight to reach the forest floor. Allowing sunlight to reach the forest floor is very important for production of the suite of grasses, forbes, and shrubs which quail need to thrive.

Spring burns are conducted from March through May. Appropriate timing within this timeframe depends on the conditions of each specific site. Fire ecology research suggests that March-May is the best time to burn for quail. Burning in

early spring will remove dead vegetation and provide disturbance but may not kill larger undesirable woody stems. If a burn is conducted too early, the fuels which carry the fire will be consumed and the woody stems will emerge unscathed in a few weeks. Where larger woody stems have overtaken an understory, late April - May burns may be necessary to reduce woody competition. If undesirable stems have outgrown the reaches of the flames, herbicide treatment or mastication may be required to reclaim the stand as productive quail habitat.

Fire frequency is another important prescribed fire consideration. Ideally, fires should be planned at times before woody stems shade out the forest floor and have outgrown the reaches of the flames. However, two- or three-year rotations generally serve well as a rule of thumb.

Do you need equipment to burn? We have the solution! You can rent everything you need from the Newberry Soil and Water Conservation District. Everything comes in an enclosed trailer for convenient transportation to your burn site.

To reserve the burn trailer, simply email: [NewberrySWCD.com/Burn](mailto:NewberrySWCD.com/Burn) or, call the Newberry Soil and Water Conservation District at 803-597-3160.

The burn trailer is stocked with basic firefighting tools and equipment available for landowners, practitioners, and professionals to use in Newberry and surrounding counties.

There is a daily fee of \$50 for the first day, and a \$10 fee for every day thereafter. A damage deposit of \$50 will also be required. Don't need a whole trailer full of supplies? Call us and we'll work with you to meet your needs on a case by case basis.



**Due to Funding we do not know how long we will be able to continue to mail this newsletter out by paper mail.**

**If you receive this newsletter by paper mail and would like to continue to receive it, please sign up for our email list serve.**

**Please send your name, mailing address, and email address to [fellers@clemson.edu](mailto:fellers@clemson.edu) and be sure to include Indian Creek email list serve in the subject line.**



## Northern Bobwhite

**By: Breck Carmichael – SC Bobwhite Initiative Biologist, SCDNR**

Bobwhites depend on early successional habitat grasslands, shrubby areas, and pine or oak savannahs. These habitats have the forbs, legumes, and insects that bobwhite need for food and the heavy or brushy cover for nesting, brooding and safety. To help reverse bobwhite declines, the USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and their partners are working with private landowners in 14 states, including South Carolina, to manage for high-quality early successional habitat through the *Working Lands for Wildlife Bobwhite Quail Partnership*.

NRCS, SC Department of Natural Resources through the SC Bobwhite Initiative, Quail Forever, and others offer technical assistance to help landowners manage for early successional habitat. This assistance helps producers plan and implement a variety of conservation activities, or practices, that benefit the bobwhite and many other game and non-game species. Technical assistance is free to producers.

Financial assistance helps producers pay for the adoption of conservation systems that improve early successional habitat, which benefits game and non-game species and can benefit grazing and forestry operations. NRCS has two ongoing projects through the [Working Lands for Wildlife](#) (WLFW) partnership. The first project focuses on pine savannahs, providing tools to landowners to manage for forests with wildlife openings and diverse understory vegetation the bobwhite needs. The second project focuses on grasslands where NRCS will help landowners replace non-native grasses with native grasses, forbs and legumes that benefit bobwhite and other wildlife, while creating alternative healthy grazing options for livestock.

In both of these projects, WLFW is providing technical and financial assistance through the NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program, a conservation program of the Farm Bill, the largest funding source for conservation on private lands. Habitat restored for the bobwhite benefits many other species, including turkeys, deer, rabbits, gopher tortoises, bog turtles and many different songbirds, including the Bachmann's sparrow and prairie warbler.

If you're interested in technical and financial assistance from the WLFW partnership, please contact your [local USDA service center](#) or the SC Bobwhite Initiative at [scbobwhites@dnr.sc.gov](mailto:scbobwhites@dnr.sc.gov) or call 803-734-3940. An WLFW partner in your community will help you develop a conservation plan customized to your land, and if you're interested, apply for financial assistance through Farm Bill conservation programs.

Source: USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service

## **South Carolina to Issue Handy New Card for Ag Sales Tax Exemptions**

### **By: Eva Moore, SC Department of Agriculture**

In 2022, the South Carolina Department of Agriculture is rolling out a handy new card for farmers to use for agricultural sales tax exemptions.

South Carolina state law offers several sales tax exemptions for items used in agricultural production. For many years, farmers have had to fill out a paper form, the ST-8F, to receive these exemptions.

But after April 1, 2022, farmers must instead show their SCATE (South Carolina Agricultural Tax Exemption) card to retailers to demonstrate they are eligible for these exemptions. The program is similar to Georgia's GATE card, but unlike in Georgia, South Carolina users do not need to meet a minimum farm income threshold to be eligible.

It's important to understand that state law is not changing. Farmers will still be able to receive the same exemptions as before.

A SCATE card costs \$24 and is good for three years. You can apply for your SCATE card starting Feb. 1, 2022 using the online portal at [scatecard.com](http://scatecard.com). You must apply and pay online; there is no paper application.

You'll need the following information in order to apply:

- Taxpayer ID Number – personal [SSN] or business [FEIN]
- Valid email address
- Credit card or bank account number

Questions about SCATE? Contact the South Carolina Department of Agriculture at [scate@scda.sc.gov](mailto:scate@scda.sc.gov) or 803-734-2210. For questions specifically about tax exemptions, you can email the South Carolina Department of Revenue at [FarmExemption@dor.sc.gov](mailto:FarmExemption@dor.sc.gov). You can also read the FAQs at [scatecard.com](http://scatecard.com).

## **Belfast Field Day – May 21, 2022**

### **By: Crista Lukoski – Newberry Soil and Water Conservation District**

We're having a Forest Management Program field day and you're invited to join us. This is a unique opportunity to learn more about management strategies for bobwhite quail from some experienced biologists in the field.

This event will be held on May 21, 2022, at South Carolina Department of Natural Resource's Belfast Plantation and Wildlife Management Area located at 9850 Hwy 56, South Kinards, SC 29355. For those not needing continuing forestry education credits will be a nominal attendance fee of \$20 which includes a BBQ lunch. For those who wish to earn continuing forestry education credits the cost will be \$40 which does include lunch. **There are 4 hours of Category 1 continuing forestry education credits and 1 hour of SC pesticide credits available.**

#### **Topics to Be Covered Will Include**

An Introduction to the Belfast Plantation, the benefits of timber thinning, wildlife foods, beneficial native plant species, benefits of prescribed burning strategies, the use of chemical treatments.

Our wide variety of quality speakers representing numerous state and federal agencies will be there to answer any questions you may have!

If you are interested, please RSVP to:

Crista Lukoski at 803-597-3160 or

[Newberrysoilandwater@gmail.com](mailto:Newberrysoilandwater@gmail.com)

Checks should be made payable to "Newberry SWCD"

and mailed to Newberry Soil and Water Conservation District, 719 Kendall Rd., Newberry, SC 29108

by May 15, 2022, to reserve your spot

