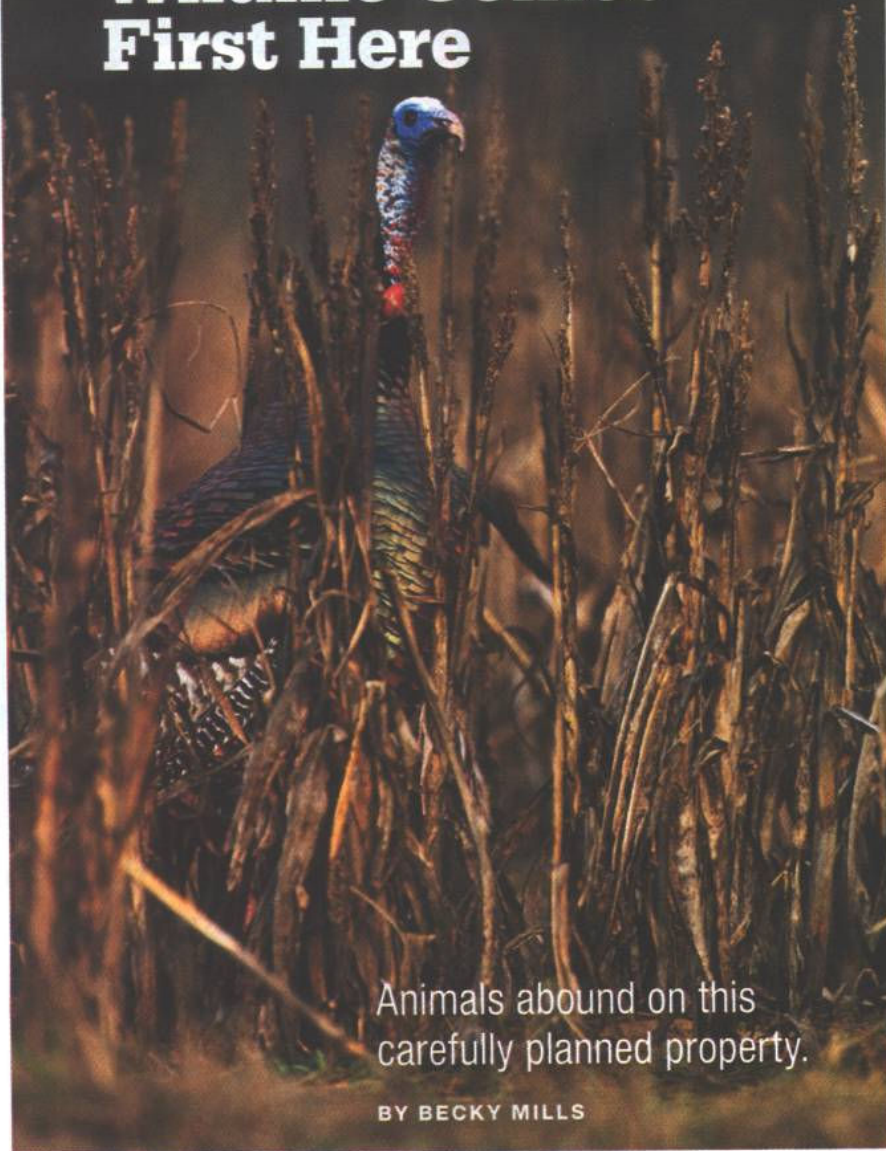


# Wildlife Comes First Here



Animals abound on this carefully planned property.

BY BECKY MILLS



Bobby Livingston

**T**he narrow dirt road to Bobby Livingston's gate is lined with the usual posted signs, warning trespassers the property is off-limits. There ought to be another sign or two tucked between the trees and underbrush: Caution: wildlife enthusiasts—be prepared for uncontrollable envy.

While the 600-acre former row-crop farm may look neglected, it is anything but. Since the Newberry, S.C., landowner bought the property in 1975, he and three of his boyhood friends have planned, plowed, planted and nurtured to create a wildlife hunting and viewing paradise. From

impressive white-tailed bucks to strutting gobblers to delicate hummingbirds, the property provides food and habitat for all.

And Livingston insists they are nowhere near through. "This place is a work in progress. The problem is I don't always know what direction."

No matter. Bill Mason, one of Livingston's cohorts, emphasizes, "The important thing is it is managed solely for the wildlife and trees—100%."

A tour of the farm also tends to contradict Livingston's statement on lack of direction. Wildlife food plots—a total of 65 acres—are carefully laid out across the property in a patchwork with hedgerows, hardwoods, pines and small fields.

Tina Brunjes, big-game program coordinator for the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources, approves. "Food plots need to be close to cover. You can have the best food plot in the world in the middle of a 500-acre pasture, and the wildlife won't use it.

"Areas of denser vegetation next to open fields get a lot of use because the animals can slip out and eat and still be close to a hiding place."

The food plots vary in size, but are up to 4 acres each. Livingston says the size is determined largely by practicality. His tractor-mounted sprayer holds enough herbicide to spray 4 acres.

Brunjes also recommends food plots of at least ½ acre or more. "They need to be big enough not to get eaten up the first day they sprout."

**YEAR-ROUND FEAST.** As for the ingredients, the food plots on Livingston's place provide a year-round smorgasbord of appealing plants.

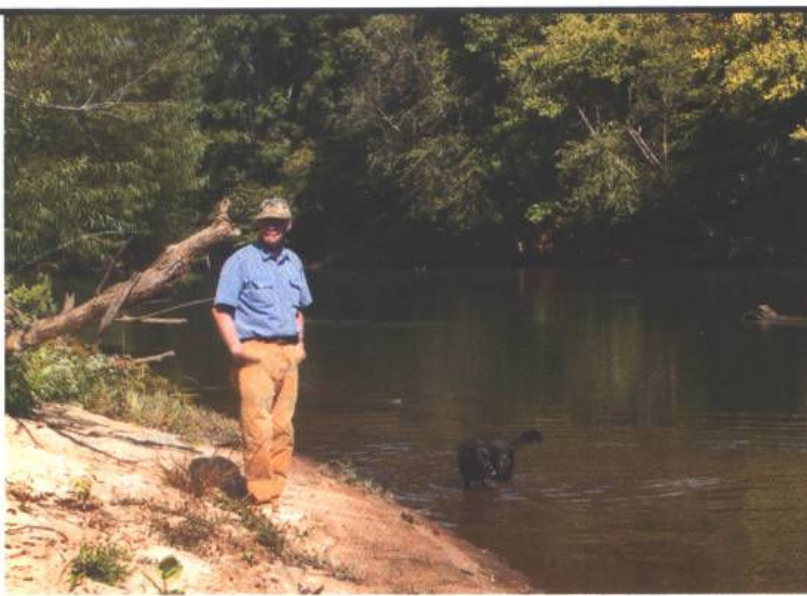
One of the favorites of the group for fall planting is their own deer-oriented recipe of crimson and arrowleaf clover, canola, Abruzzi rye, wheat and oats.

"The first year we thought we had to mix it exactly, and we called it rocket fuel," jokes Mason. Now they just use the markings on a 5-gallon bucket to measure the mix.

Summer planting for doves includes corn, sunflower and milo. They use an electric fence around the dove field to keep the deer from helping themselves.

But planted food plots aren't the only source of groceries for wildlife. Sawtooth





**A nearby water source is key. Livingston's property has several, including the Saluda River, a fish pond and a duck pond.**

and live oak, pear, apple, cherry and persimmon trees, honeysuckle, wild grapes, blackberry bushes and autumn olive provide both feed and cover for deer, turkeys, quail, doves, rabbits and squirrels.

**ROTATING STRIPS.** Livingston and his crew also rotate 100-yard strips in fields on a three-year basis. Brunjes says rotation has a couple of additional benefits. "It encourages the edge species, like blackberries, greenbriers, annual weeds like ragweed and sunflowers and tree seedlings—things wildlife love to nip the tops out of."

Another advantage to Livingston's three-year rotation is that it yields high-quality weeds and grasses in the spring when nursing does and antler-growing bucks need it.

The food and cover also appeal to quail, which have a reputation for being quite finicky when it comes to habitat.

**WINGED THINGS.** Livingston and company don't limit their efforts to the species they hunt though. Old, rusty wheelbarrows hold basil and parsley for the butterflies, while butterfly bushes and trees surround the cabin on the property. "We've counted 12 different species of butterflies," Livingston notes.

When they run the silage chopper through the sunflower field, Mason says, "We get hundreds of goldfinches."

Then there are the six hummingbird feeders kept filled when the tiny birds are in residence.

"We'll get 40 to 50 to 60 here at one time," says Tom Westwood, another hunting buddy and habitat worker. He refers to their logbook and says, "The first one came this year on March 31."

This same meticulously kept logbook also records every chore involving wildlife management—from herbicide use to fertilizing the fish pond. The four friends also make note of game animals harvested and predators dispatched.

Brunjes says, "For wildlife, this patchwork quilt design is the best plan of all. Raggedy tree lines and hedgerows and grown-up fields may look ugly to some people, but to wildlife they are beautiful." ►



## Year-round work, year-round pleasure

*Habitat improvement is a year-round chore on Bobby Livingston's property. But, thankfully, enjoying the fruits of the labor also lasts all year. Here is a calendar compiled by Livingston and friends Bill Mason, Tom Westwood and Jimmy Ray Pruitt.*

### JANUARY

- ✔ Not many chores, but dove season is in until the middle of the month. Rabbit, squirrel and quail season are in all months.

### FEBRUARY

- ✔ More rabbit and squirrel hunting.
- ✔ Equipment maintenance.
- ✔ Plant trees, including sawtooth oak, live oak, autumn olive and pear trees.

- ✔ Pick up the game feeders in mid-March, before turkey season starts.
- ✔ Put out hummingbird feeders.

### APRIL

- ✔ Plant first crop of sunflowers the first week in April. This year the group is trying a new variety that is herbicide-resistant.
- ✔ Fertilize clover with 0-20-20.
- ✔ Fertilize the pond again if needed.
- ✔ Keep hummingbird feeders filled.

### MAY

- ✔ Plant corn the first week in May.
- ✔ Put clover-friendly herbicide on clover plots. "We try to do all of it before the quail and turkey start nesting," Livingston says.
- ✔ Put game feeders back out.
- ✔ Continue to fertilize pond when needed.
- ✔ Fill hummingbird feeders.

### JUNE

- ✔ Plant another crop of sunflowers the first week of June.
- ✔ Plant brown-top millet, sorghum and Egyptian wheat for the doves.
- ✔ Plant the edges of fields in tall-growing plants like sorghum for turkey and deer.
- ✔ Soil-test the land that will get the winter mix of clovers and small grains.
- ✔ Fertilize pond when needed.
- ✔ Fill hummingbird feeders.

### JULY

- ✔ Continue to soil-test if not finished in June.
- ✔ Fish—although that activity is usually enjoyed year round—and continue to fertilize pond when needed.
- ✔ Start to spray ground for winter clover/small-grain mix.
- ✔ Start plowing for winter food plots.

- ✔ Use the silage chopper to start cutting strips in the corn, sorghum and sunflowers for the dove field.
- ✔ Fill hummingbird feeders.

### AUGUST

- ✔ Spray edges of timber to control brush and briars.
- ✔ Mow millet strips in dove field.
- ✔ Run more corn, sorghum and sunflowers through silage chopper for doves and songbirds.
- ✔ Continue to spray herbicide on areas where the winter forage mix will be planted.
- ✔ Mow lanes on leased land.
- ✔ Fertilize pond if needed.
- ✔ Fill hummingbird feeders.

### SEPTEMBER

- ✔ Plant winter forage mix the first part of the month.
- ✔ Check deer stands, and repair them if needed. There are 60 deer stands on Livingston's land.
- ✔ Dove hunting season begins.
- ✔ Plant clover the last two weeks of the month, if it has rained.
- ✔ Fertilize pond if needed.
- ✔ Continue to keep hummingbird feeders filled.

### OCTOBER

- ✔ Hunt deer.
- ✔ Continue to check deer stands and maintain them.
- ✔ Fertilize fish pond if needed.
- ✔ Take up hummingbird feeders when the hummingbirds quit using them.

### NOVEMBER

- ✔ Same as October.

### DECEMBER

- ✔ Same as October and November.
- ✔ Clean out and repair the 30 bluebird houses on the property.



### MARCH

- ✔ Start breaking land for part of the food plots.
- ✔ Mow and/or plow the edges of the fields to keep scrub trees from taking over.
- ✔ Get herbicide put on, and plow when the weeds green up in the fields. "We try to get it done before mid-March when the rabbits start nesting," explains Livingston.
- ✔ Trim limbs from road edges to prepare for the Saluda County quail hunters.
- ✔ Fertilize the fish pond when the water reaches 65 degrees.