

***Wildlife Habitat on
the Farm: Six Views***

Photo by Ron Spomer

Kansas Wildlife

Land works hard in the Midwest. Probably no other piece of real estate on the globe is more productive. In 1980, U.S. farms, mainly in the Midwest, produced twenty-eight percent of all the feed grain grown in the world and eighteen percent of all the wheat. Some of this incredible production is due to the efficiency of American agricultural technology; much of it is the result of the hard work of generations of American farmers. But sophisticated machinery and sweat alone can't account for the abundance of our farm output. What sets us apart is the fertility of our prairie sod, perhaps the most unique, most valuable resource on the continent.

As the world has gotten hungrier and farming has drifted away from the hand-to-mouth family operation, the immense value of American farmland has been increasingly reflected in its price tag. The best tracts in the Corn Belt have sold for more than \$4000 an acre in the last few years, and, even at that price, willing sellers were hard to find. As chilly as the economic climate is at the moment, such land may still bring as much as \$3500 an acre.

When an acre of corn ground gets that expensive, it *has* to produce. There's no such thing as a "waste corner" where a little benign neglect can support a few pheasants and songbirds. While economics don't exert quite the same pressure on more marginal land, the dollar pinch leads to roughly the same result.

The conflict between farm economics and wildlife has been around for a long time. Aldo Leopold, founder of modern wildlife management, recognized it in the late 1920s and proposed what may be the only workable solu-

tion in his book, *GAME SURVEY OF THE NORTHCENTRAL STATES*. In his view, it was vital to "recognize the landowner as the custodian of public game . . . and compensate him for putting his land in productive condition. Compensate him either publicly or privately, with either cash, service, or protection, for the use of his land and for his labor, on condition that he preserves the game seed and otherwise safeguards the public interest. In short, make game management a partnership enterprise in which the landholder, the sportsman, and the public each derive appropriate rewards."

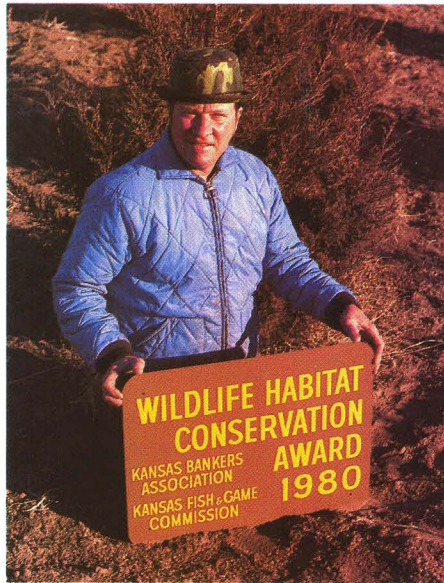
Since the 1930 appearance of *GAME SURVEY*, some progress has been made toward Leopold's solution. The Extension Service, Soil Conservation Service, and Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service have been established and directed to help the farmer with his conservation efforts. The federal government has undertaken sweeping programs like the C.C.C. in the Thirties and Soil Bank and Cropland Adjustment Program (C.A.P.) in the late Fifties and early Sixties. On the state level, trespass laws have been tightened and more state game protectors hired to help enforce them. Some states have reduced taxes on land that is left in wildlife habitat. A few have even paid farmers to set land aside. And there isn't a state conservation agency in the country that won't go out of its way to advise a farmer who wants to do something for wildlife on his land. The Kansas Fish and Game Commission's Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program (WHIP) is typical of programs that have been set up to help the farmer help wildlife.

If all these programs and agen-

cies had been in place in 1925, much of the Midwest's topsoil would still be growing corn and wheat instead of settling into the bayous of the Mississippi delta. Farmland would be more productive, and wildlife would be more varied and abundant. Unfortunately, the conservation effort on private land has generally failed to keep up with the intensifying economic demands made on the modern American farmer. In the short run at least, he sees wildlife as a losing proposition. Until more help and more money become available to support habitat development on private land, most farmers will leave wildlife to fend for itself. They feel they have no other choice.

The landowners who appear on the following pages take a different view of the situation. They have all made major commitments to wildlife on their property, each in a different way and for different reasons. What they seem to share is a way of looking at the land that parallels Aldo Leopold's classic statement of the land ethic:

"It of course goes without saying that economic feasibility limits the tether of what can and cannot be done for land. It always has and it always will. The fallacy the economic determinists have tied around our collective neck, and which we now need to cast off, is the belief that economics determines *all* land use. This is simply not true. The bulk of all land relations hinges on investments of time, forethought, skill, and faith rather than on investments of cash. A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise." □



Northwest

Ron Little

The Critser Farm

Bob L. Critser of WaKeeney, Kansas operates a wheat farm of 640 acres.

Critser's enjoyment of the outdoors and his desire to learn farming led him to hire on with the previous landowner. After the owner's death, Bob inherited the land and moved to the farm.

Before Bob began working with the landowner, the farm had little wildlife habitat. When he started with the WHIP program, he added a number of tree and shrub plots on his land. He has planted over 500 cedar, plum, and autumn olive trees in six plots strategically located on south-facing slopes to gather heat during the cold winter months. He has set aside seventy acres of ungrazed rangeland and planted clover for nesting and fawning of wildlife in the area, and he has limited grazing on fifty more acres. These acres had been grazed moderately and offered few benefits to wildlife in general.

On his cropland, Bob has left weedy fence rows and practiced a summer fallow program. Around most of his farm field borders, he has developed excellent cover, discing a thirty-yard strip around the edge of his wheat stubble to allow forbs such as fireweed to grow. In addition, he has planted milo along the grass and tree plots for food, built brush piles in the rangeland, and

broadcast grain after severe winter storms. He is also interested in trying new techniques such as burning his rangeland to encourage native grasses and forbs and he is planning to convert twenty additional acres to wildlife habitat.

Bob's main goal in these efforts has been "to manage my land in a way to conserve natural resources rather than to accumulate wealth for myself," and he has done just that. He has seen an increase in wildlife such as deer, rabbit, quail, pheasant, and many species of nongame birds.

Because of the techniques Bob uses in his farming operation, he has managed to develop the habitat on his farm with little loss of income. He has built a small pond on his rangeland at his own expense to provide a water source for wildlife. Even though WHIP has not put any black ink in his ledger, Critser feels the program will benefit him in long-range conservation of soil, water, and wildlife.

An avid hunter and fisherman himself, Bob is happy to open his land to any sportsmen asking permission to use it for hunting and fishing. An old farm house on his farm is available to hunters during hunting seasons. Groups from Boy Scouts and school classes to the elderly visit his farm and are often taken hunting, fishing, or sight-seeing.

Why this commitment to wildlife? Bob explains it this way:

"I was born in eastern Kansas, where there was a lot of cover—trees, brush, water, and everything wild game needed to survive the bad winter. They had protection from the hazards of predators.

"I started hunting with my father when I was very young. At age five, I received my first rifle. At age nine, I received my first shotgun, a .410.

"My father told me about wildlife—the things they needed to survive, the places they needed to live. We moved to Great Bend when I was seventeen. It was an entirely different kind of cover for wildlife than I was used to—extremely flat land. I asked my Dad, 'where do the birds and animals live out here?' He laughed and said, 'It's not easy for them. They stay along rivers and in the wheat fields.' It was quite a shock to me to think anything could survive that way. I thought right then that something needed to be done.

"But the war was on, so I joined the U.S. Navy. After my stay in the service, I got married and later moved to WaKeeney with my family.

"Out there, I found even less cover for wild game. I worked in the oil fields and saw a lot of different styles of farming. I saw the start of land terracing—fence rows cleaned and milo fields cut to the ground. There wasn't anything left to protect the birds and animals. This has always bothered me. Still, there was nothing I could do about it. I was glad to see the reservoirs that were built through the fifties and sixties. I have seen game flock to those areas after the Fish and Game Commission of Kansas started their wildlife conservation programs. I liked this! I tried to help do what I could. I read books, talked with our biologists and game commissioners. I helped build fish plots at the lake with cedar trees, discarded Christmas trees, and tires.

"I've worked on this farm since 1954. I had two jobs for twenty years

as I was raising six children and needed more money than one job would bring in. Being on the farm was the greatest, as I could see a future here, my dreams. My children are all married now. We have ten grandchildren. I am trying to build this farm into a place where, in the future years, not only my children, grandchildren, but others also will have a place to hunt and fish.

"I'm proud to be a part of our conservation and wildlife habitat

improvement program. I will continue the rest of my life to help in what I can. I have taught and still teach youth in the Kansas Hunter Safety programs. I work with other youth groups showing them what has been done here on the farm. I have retired from the other jobs that I held, and live on the farm. We also travel to other states and enjoy hunting and fishing. I am presently fifty-four, and still going strong."

Bob's commitment to wildlife and

hunting has not gone unrecognized. He has been a recipient of the following awards: 1980 Kansas Bowhunter of the Year and 1980 Kansas Farmer of the Year through Kansas Bowhunter Association. He was a member of the Kansas 1978 team competing in the tenth Annual National Bowhunt in Douglas, Wyoming. The Critsers are also recipients of the first Wildlife Habitat Award in Trego County "which is our pride and joy for years to come." □

Mule deer

Ron Spomer



The Kimmell Ranch

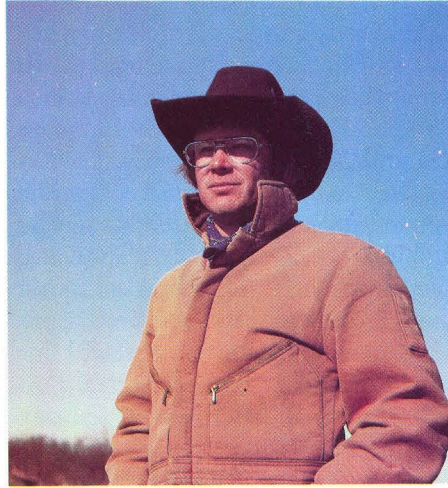
Located along the scenic Medicine Lodge River in southeastern Barber County, the Medicine River Ranch is a prime example of a working ranch. Owned by A.T. and C.E. Kimmell, the ranch is managed by A.T.'s son, Bill, who is thirty years old. The ranch covers 2,100 acres along both sides of the Medicine River. There are about 1,730 acres in prime grassland, eighty acres in forage, 100 acres in alfalfa, 100 acres in wheat, and ninety acres that are managed strictly for wildlife.

A.T. Kimmell is a state veterinarian and has had a clinic for a number of years, serving the ranchers in this area. Bill grew up in the outdoors, following his father on his visits to local ranchers and helping with the veterinary work. Hunting and fishing were an important part of his early life, and it shows in his attitudes about wildlife. The Kimmell brothers bought the property in 1972. At that time the ranch was billed as a "wildlife refuge," which it was, to some degree.

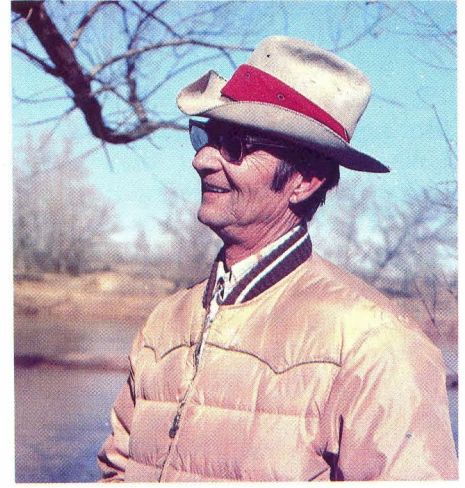
Bill Kimmell has managed the ranch since 1973, and, when asked how he likes his work, he admits that, "I enjoy it and can't think of anything I would rather be doing." A little background check on Bill turned up the fact that he has done his share of bull riding in the past. I imagine managing a 2,000-acre ranch is somewhat less nerve wracking.

When Bill took over managerial

Bill Kimmell



A. T. Kimmell



duties he found that, unlike most agricultural land, the ranch was overendowed with cover. Grasslands, trees, and shrubs were not managed properly and, in the case of the grass, old growth and duff were actually choking the stand out. Bill arranged with the local range technician with the Soil Conservation Service to set up a rotation grazing system. He has used this system since then, and the range improvement is very noticeable. Half the ranch operation is cow-calf, half is yearling or bred heifers. Cross fencing was installed and a rotation grazing period of twenty-one days established. Along with this, Bill is using controlled burning as a tool to keep his grass in good to excellent condition and composition.

When asked about the twenty-one day rotation, Bill said, "From my observation, wildlife tends to move in right after I take the cows off. They follow the same pattern." He went on to say that, "We have thirty-six miles of fence now so you ride fence often, but it's worth it when you see the grass and wildlife respond as it has."

When asked what farming practices he used that also help wildlife, Bill's response was typical. "On our forage operation, we always leave a strip for wildlife along the edge as well as in some of the corners. Rotation grazing also provides excellent nesting and brood-rearing cover for both quail and pheasants. From my

viewpoint, it looks like good grass management is also good wildlife management."

Are there any other management practices that he is planning for wildlife?

"I'm looking at a food plot or two down along the river when I get the time to put them in. I guess the main thing I want to do is just maintain the area in good condition. I'm pretty well satisfied with the situation now and will try to keep it that way." When asked if his ranching and farming for wildlife have caused him to lose money, Bill thought for a while before responding.

"You know, I haven't thought about that, but no, I can't say it has. Oh, we could get a few more bales of forage or graze another cow or two on that ninety acres but as far as losing money, no." A.T. chimed in with, "We have always felt that wildlife, livestock, and farming go hand in hand and we have operated with that in mind." Bill went on, "This sandy land here—you have to be careful with it. Done right, it will produce for you. I look at wildlife as being one-third of our operation—it all goes together."

My next question was economic in nature also: Have your wildlife efforts made you any money? Bill laughed while responding, "You bet. We lease our ground for pheasant and quail hunting, and we made more on this lease than we did on

260 head of steers. You have to consider that the cow market is not all that good, but leasing helps in other ways not related to money.”

Both A.T. and Bill mentioned trespass problems, but they point out that the lease holders do a good job of patrolling the place. Says Bill, “This relieves us of some of the bother of dealing with trespassers.”

During the course of the conversation it became apparent that both A.T. and Bill share a love for the outdoors in general and wildlife in particular. They both apply for firearms deer permits every year. When they draw permits, they both harvest nice bucks off their ranch. When questioned about their deer hunting experiences, Bill began laughing and gave the following account of deer hunting with his father, A.T.

“Dad is the kind of person who has a hard time sitting still. Opening morning we have our deer stands picked out, usually in a large tree near a deer trail. About mid-morn-

ing, if we haven’t gotten our deer, I will drive around and pick up whoever is hunting with me and Dad. Almost always, he’s not on his stand. We spend a lot of time looking for him and usually find him out walking around through the timber hunting deer. We feel that a stand is the most productive way of hunting deer if we could just keep Dad in his stand. Consequently, we fixed up a permanent blind on a windmill for him to use. It’s attached high up on the windmill braces and comes equipped with a floor, walls, and a space heater. He can let down a portion of one side to shoot from. The thing that keeps him in one place is the latch I put on the outside of the door.” Not wanting to get involved in a family discussion on this matter, I didn’t mention that “upstairs” deer hunting shack when A.T. joined us a little later in the day.

Has Bill considered leasing the turkey and deer hunting also? Bill responded by saying, “We have thought about that for some time

since the turkey flock has developed to some 200 birds and the deer seem to be everywhere. My feeling is that we could, but it will take a lot more planning than we do for the bird lease. Every deer hunter wants to shoot a big old buck, and we know you have to take some does, too. I don’t know, maybe we will. Time will tell.”

Bill, Charlie Swank (district game biologist), and I drove down to the ninety-acre wildlife area, and on the way, passed through a heavy catalpa grove.

“This grove is really a fine place to see turkeys in the spring,” said Bill. “I often have friends and neighbors in to watch them gobble and strut. They even get some good pictures when they sit still long enough.”

The wildlife area we visited was all fenced and had a lot of heavy cover. Bill indicated that, “It looks like it’s about time for another fire. This year’s growth has been real heavy and there’ll be a lot of duff come spring.” Charlie, too, thought

Antelope



a fire might be warranted given the right set of circumstances.

"Running a fire on sandy land, you have to be a little more critical in your timing than you do on harder ground."

From the wildlife area, we took a tour down along the Medicine River and picked up A.T. On the way, A.T. was somewhat concerned about the lack of beaver signs.

"I know that oil rig that went over and spilled all that salt water in the river got some beaver. I haven't seen any since that happened last spring. We've got plenty of new-growth cottonwood and willow, and I'd like to see a few around. Is there any way to pick some up?"

Charlie fielded the question by answering that, "Beaver will come back into the area over a period of time. If we have a damage complaint, though, we'll live trap a few and try to get them down here."

The river bank was marked by deer sign. Turkey tracks as well as the tracks of raccoon and opossum

were very much in evidence. Bill was feeling a little philosophical and we got to talking about the outdoors, ranching, and wildlife in general.

"You know," Bill said, "sometimes my mind gets so full of beef prices or the lack of them, wheat prices, whether to buy steers this year or plan on bred heifers that I just have to get away. I'll saddle up and take a ride down here along the river and maybe put up a covey of quail or bust a buck out of one of the plum thickets. Awhile back, I came up on a couple of bucks fighting it out down in a little hollow. These times seem to get my mind off the everyday work load, and I find I'm a little more relaxed and can think better when I get back."

After a day on the ranch, I could understand what Bill was saying. Just being there was soothing.

On our way out of the area, Bill said, "I feel we can afford to leave some ground and cover idle for wildlife. You more than make up

anything lost by the improved range condition."

After dropping Bill and A.T. off at the cattle pens, we stopped and took a few pictures of the longhorn bulls he uses to breed his first-time heifers. One big, red longhorn steer was sharing the pasture with the bulls and posed for us. A nostalgic ending for what had been a fine morning visiting with people who share a deep feeling for the land and all that goes with it.

Before leaving we made one more stop just outside the main entrance. There, on the gate, side by side, were two signs, one indicating that this ranch had won the Soil Conservation Service's Soil and Water Conservation Award, and the other the 1980 Wildlife Habitat Conservation Award. One got the feeling that, at least in this place, the land is in good hands. □

Ron Spomer

Jackrabbit

Ron Spomer



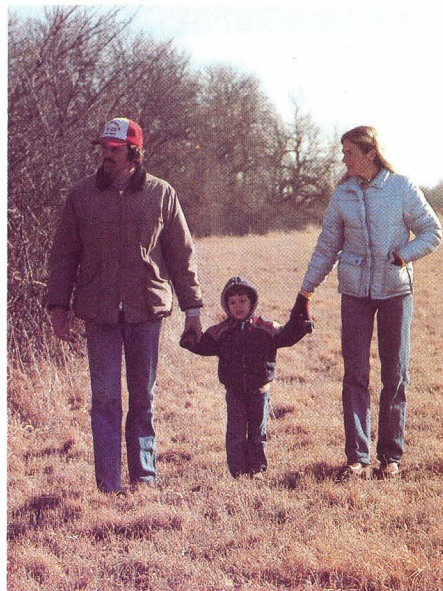
Northcentral Steve Sorenson

The Burr Farm

I was to have met Steve Burr at his home northwest of Salina, but I found him with his four-year-old son Jed trimming trees on his farm two miles farther south. These four acres of trees had been planted in the spring of 1980 under the WHIP program as a combination firewood plantation-wildlife area. Steve feels periodic trimming of the thornless honeylocust and walnuts helps the young trees get a good start. His black lab, Sadie, was trying to locate some pheasants that were using the weeds growing in the tree rows and was occasionally kicking out a hen.

Steve was also marking some "thornless" honeylocust trees that had turned out to be not so thornless. A losing battle with a honeylocust several years ago left him with scars enough to convince him to eliminate the trees before they present the same potential problem. His comment about the high percentage of thorny renegades was not favorable.

Steve started farming in 1973 when he and his wife, Ginny, purchased 160 acres of wheat ground adjacent to Mulberry Creek. Approximately three-quarters of a mile of riparian timber and five-eighths of a mile of hedge provided the only habitat on the farm. In 1976, they acquired an additional eighty acres of native prairie, where they subsequently built their home, then added another cultivated eighty acres in



1977. Steve began farming his father's ground in 1981. This 700-acre operation produces wheat, milo, alfalfa, and prairie hay.

Steve isn't your typical landowner. He received a degree in wildlife biology from Colorado State University in 1970 and has worked in the national wildlife refuge system with the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. He has a strong interest in nongame wildlife and currently works nine months of the year as a regional representative for the National Parks and Conservation Association, a private organization based in Washington. The three months "off" each year are reserved strictly for farming. As a representative of the Kansas Audubon Council, Steve currently serves as chairman of the Kansas Nongame Wildlife Advisory Council, a nine-member organization that advises the Kansas Fish and Game Commission on expending funds generated through the nongame income tax check-off system.

He is also concerned about the increasing permanent loss of agriculture land to non-agriculture purposes, such as urban sprawl, highways, and reservoir construction.

"We don't see it as much in Kansas," he says, "because of the vast amount of agriculture land in the state. But the problem is here and we can see some of the effects especially around urban centers in Kansas."

Steve's farming operation reflects his concern for all wildlife. While much of his interest resulted from early hunting experiences with his father, his personal commitment has gone beyond that point.

"I was a real estate broker when I started farming, and with an adequate outside income, I wanted to try out some different farming practices that allowed production to stay high and also benefitted wildlife."

One of his ideas involves reducing the drying effect of the hot Kansas winds. Steve has divided one field with three-row shelterbelts planted 400 feet center to center. Each shelterbelt consists of a tree row with a row of shrubs on each side.

"The tree species planted were selected because they grow to forty feet when they mature. A shelterbelt will protect plants for a distance of ten times the height of the tree downwind. Each shelterbelt should protect the soil for 400 feet, where I've planted another shelterbelt. When these trees mature, they should drastically reduce wind desiccation on row crops and thus increase my yield."

Many people would say that what Steve expects to gain from eliminating wind desiccation will be lost to the tree roots sapping the moisture. At one time this was probably true, but recent work by the Fish and Game Commission has demonstrated you can have your shelterbelt and produce grain adjacent to it by using a root plow. The root plow is nothing more than a twenty-four-inch single shank ripper that severs the lateral roots which spread to the adjacent crop field and sap moisture from summer crops. By using a root plow once every four to five years, average yields of row crops can be produced right up to the shelterbelt. This permits the shelterbelts to break the wind without causing any unwanted side effects.

To date, Steve has reseeded thirty acres back to native grass and forbs and planted 20,000 woody trees and shrubs.

"When we first reseeded the grass," he says, "all we had were

native grass species. We've started to incorporate native forbs by planting any seed we can get. I think landowners could use some more advice on plant materials," Steve adds. "Having a desire to plant native forb species isn't enough if you don't have a good seed source. We enjoy the various native wildflowers and have made an effort to incorporate them in our plantings as much as possible. But it's almost impossible to locate a good source for many of the species, other than hand harvesting a few seeds here and there and starting your own seed source."

The scarcity of commercial seed sources has led Steve to believe that he may find more profitable ways to use his restored prairie than cutting it for hay.

"I'm planning to plant about five acres of lowland to pure stands of native water-tolerant grasses like Kanlow switchgrass. I hope to harvest these areas for seed and market it. If it looks profitable, my father has several acres on his land that he would be interested in sowing to native grass."

While he's happy with his decision to re-establish prairie on some of his property, Steve feels he may have made one mistake with the re-seeding. He planted in large blocks which reduced the amount of prairie edge to a minimum. The edge between two kinds of cover always provides a greater variety of food and cover and is more attractive to wildlife as a result.

"I should have planted it in strips," he says. "With that kind of pattern, I could have farmed through the grass and increased the amount of edge on the acreage I converted." He does what he can to create edge by cutting his native hay in strips and leaving some grass. He also leaves a few weeds along his fencerows and field edges. "The farm isn't as 'pretty' as some in the neighborhood," he says, "but the birds really like it."

The habitat development has encouraged more deer to use the farm, a development Steve's father sees as a possible threat to his young or-

chard stock. Steve does his best to keep the deer on their toes by harvesting one when he gets a permit, and he occasionally allows a bowhunter to try his luck. Besides the whitetails, he hasn't noticed any new wildlife species so far. "At least, nothing spectacular. We haven't had a peregrine falcon set up housekeeping yet."

The Burr family is looking forward to the new animals they expect to see as cover on the farm becomes more varied. They already spend many hours watching wildlife around the two ponds next to the house and the bird feeding station in the front yard. Ginny likes to jog along the road by the home eighty with Sadie, and seeing different critters adds to the overall enjoyment of the daily outing. "The quail are my favorite," she says. "A covey finally moved in down by the pond, and I get to see them quite regularly now."

Converting good cropland, especially bottomland, to permanent wildlife habitat is expensive. Although the native grass does provide some income as hay, it doesn't match the cash that small grains can yield. On the other hand, the prairie doesn't cause nearly as many headaches.

"Money wasn't the short-term reason for developing this habitat," Steve points out, "but I think there's room for these kinds of plantings on a working farm. Gross income isn't any kind of measure of the success of a farm or a farmer. I believe in net profit, which is why I still farm with a 1964 Case tractor and small equipment. It would be nice to own a new four-wheel-drive tractor, but the annual interest alone would ruin my entire operation. If I can make money from a hay crop or a harvest of prairie seed, why should I till my ground every year and add to my overhead?"

Steve also points out that the conversion to prairie has saved him some tax money. "My county taxes went from \$5 to \$1.50 an acre when I made the native grass plantings. Landowners could use more tax

breaks of this sort.

"And speaking of government assistance," he goes on to say, "I wish Fish and Game would give me more help with my plantings when they're just getting started. I realize that the Commission lost its CETA and YACC federal help, but taking care of 10,000 young trees can really be time consuming."

The Burrs are by no means finished with their habitat establishment. Steve plans to divide his farm into smaller fields and add to his crops. He hopes to raise beans, clover, alfalfa, sunflowers, and millet as well as milo, wheat, and native hay. He's committed to building variety into his operation.

"I feel a healthy farm has to be diversified. A variety of land uses insulates the farmer from drastic fluctuations in specific markets and protects the natural fertility of his land. Wildlife is an indicator of the health of a farm. The more diversified the wildlife, the healthier the land." □

Hen turkey on nest

Chris Madson



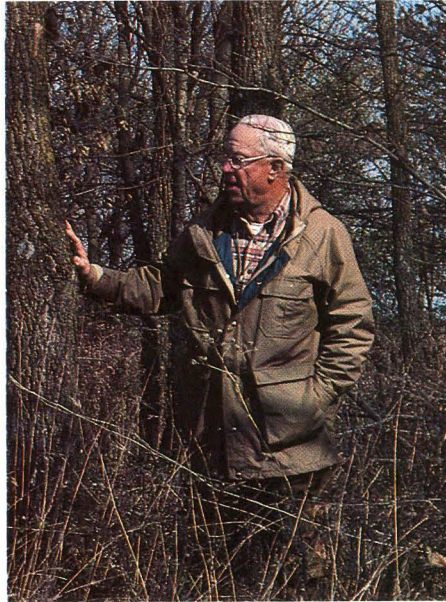
The Roberts Farm

O. E. “Jack” Roberts is 71 years of age and can still build fence with the best of them. Fences have consumed a lot of his time since he purchased his 480 acres of Chase County land in 1966. Even though he was employed at the time, Jack wanted some property for part-time employment and a hobby for his later retirement years. His farm is a diversified operation with grazing on 257 acres and a crop rotation on 157 acres. There are forty acres of hay and twenty-six acres managed intensively for wildlife. The farm had about forty acres of creek bottom land which was in fair wildlife cover when Roberts took title. The creek is spring fed and flows year round providing water for the local wildlife residents.

Soon after his purchase, Jack recognized the need for some conservation work on his land. He entered into a cooperative agreement with the Chase County Conservation District to seed native grass on erodible sites, put in grassed waterways, and build terraces, and also called in an extension forester to do some timber stand improvement work.

When asked how he got into the WHIP program, Jack responded, “I looked into the program after the bad winter of 1978-79. I lost most of my quail and I wanted to do something about it.” Jack contacted the

O. E. Roberts



Fish and Game Commission, and the local biologist, Rick Tush, began working with him to develop wildlife habitat. Rick says of Jack, “His attitude towards wildlife and habitat made my job pretty easy. Jack already had some good ideas in mind, like fencing out a seven-acre tract and leaving odd areas and fence lines undisturbed. All I did was offer my assistance and encouragement.” The fenced-out plot now has a good stand of native grass, brush, and a half-acre milo food plot. In severe weather, this food source will help get quail by. Jack has fenced a number of odd areas and planted them with a variety of native forbs (flowering native weeds) to provide a valuable source of native food. He has also seeded a two-and-a-half acre area along the creek to native grass to provide a nesting area for quail and has built brushpiles in and on the edge of the timbered areas.

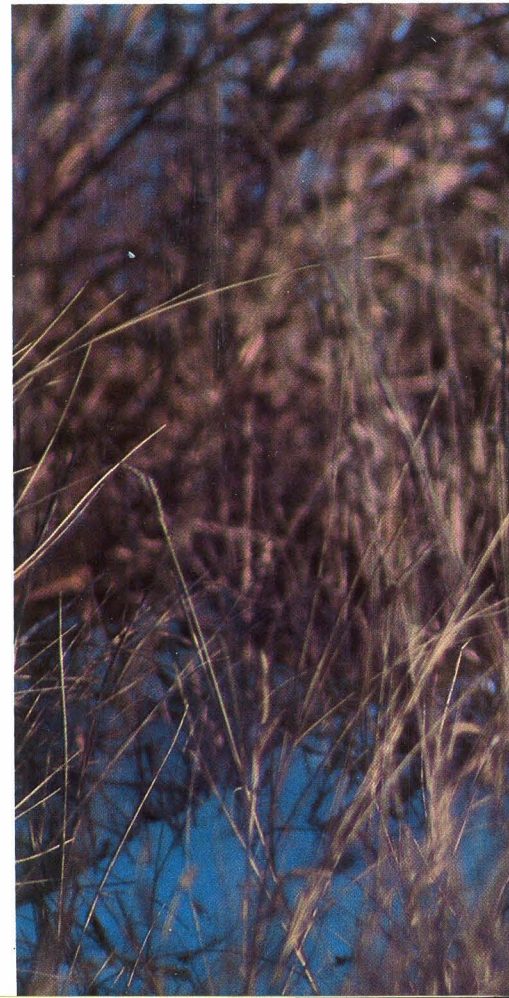
Asked if there is anything else he plans on doing, Jack responded “Perhaps some shrubs and forbs along the two waterways. Also, I’ve got some low ground in one of the crop fields that has poor drainage and floods often. I’m thinking about developing this area into a three- to four-acre marsh. It’s going to take some work and money, building a dike and control structures. But this is in the future. I’m also repositioning some of my fences between the

crop and rangeland to provide a little more nesting cover.”

Asked if he could see any improvements in his wildlife populations, Jack said, “Yes, there seem to be quite a few more quail on the area and some pheasants and rabbits are showing up, too. The deer numbers are definitely on the increase also.” Raccoon and beaver sign wasn’t very noticeable and Jack suspects that, “The beaver lost out during the 1980 drought. I only have one colony left.”

Increasing wildlife numbers have not brought any new problems from hunters. “I don’t have a lot of unwanted trespass,” Jack said. “My neighbors have been very helpful in controlling this sort of thing since no one lives on the property. I don’t lease the hunting or fishing privileges. I want to provide my friends with a place where they can enjoy these activities. I like to hunt too, although there is more to it than just bagging game.”

The changes Jack has made on his property haven’t been without cost, but he isn’t too concerned about that



at the moment.

"My only capital outlay has been fence material and grass seed. The labor I provided myself with my tenant providing the necessary equipment to get the job done. I can't say that my WHIP efforts have made me any money, but the program wasn't intended for that purpose. I got into the program to do something for wildlife on my property. Of course, some of the things I've done will be useful in the future, like reseeding the erosion prone land. That will save soil and, consequently, dollars. But I don't think WHIP should be thought of as a program for profit."

This last comment led to another question, this time somewhat philosophical, about Jack's feeling for wildlife.

"The esthetic value of wildlife is the most important part of the WHIP program. To me, there is nothing more exciting than seeing a good pointer go down hard on a covey and a little Brittany backing the point. I've looked into an old hollow log and seen a nest of baby coons and

watched a big buck loping across my wheat. I remember these things and they bring me enjoyment. You know the first blank I filled out on my last year's income tax form was the donation to the Kansas non-game wildlife improvement program."

Jack was raised on a farm, so getting back to the land came naturally. He remembers trapping fur for a few extra dollars and with the first money he received he bought a .22 rifle.

"Wildlife has always fascinated me. My father taught me the value of it," he says, "and, many times, wildlife was actually a source of meat for our table."

Jack realizes that all conservation programs are an ongoing process; terraces have to be plowed up, grass burned periodically, brushpiles renovated occasionally, timber stand improvement work done from time to time, food plots maintained, and specific plantings of trees, shrubs and grass made where appropriate. He also knows first-hand that this kind of upkeep can be a lot of work.

"I believe Fish and Game could

improve WHIP by increasing their assistance on habitat development. A stronger cooperations with 4-H clubs and offering of scholarships to KSU in wildlife might be helpful. Encouraging local sportsmen clubs to help with the program would help, too. We also need to develop a better relationship between farmers, ranchers, and sportsmen."

Jack's efforts have won him the Soil Conservation Service's Soil and Water Conservation Award as well as the Wildlife Habitat Conservation Award. He takes great pride in these awards and one gets the impression that he will keep moving ahead on habitat and conservation improvements on his land.

To Jack, the esthetics of the countryside is soothing and enjoyable. "I have always enjoyed the bluestem and wild flowers of the Flint Hills. The timber along the creek is very colorful each fall and the big white-barked sycamore trees are beautiful in the winter. I like it out here. Hopefully, I'll be able to do even more for the land in the future." □

Photo by Ron Spomer



The Corbet Farm

Combine the solitude of a rural home with the privilege of participating in daily wildlife activities and you have found a perfect setting for a growing family. The Ken Corbets in western Shawnee County are lucky to have just that combination.

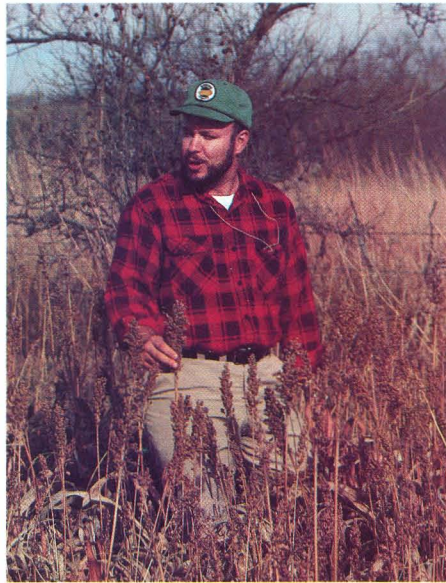
WHIP cooperators Kenneth and Beverly Corbet live on a 100-acre farm with their two-year-old son, Justin. The Corbet property has been in family ownership since the early 1930's, although Ken's parents didn't acquire the farm until 1954. Ken moved from the property in 1974, but it wasn't long before he returned. Beverly and Ken built their present home on the farm in 1978.

The Corbet farm is made up of about thirty acres of timber, thirty acres of native pasture, seven acres of native hay meadow and over thirty acres of brome hayland. During the Thirties and Forties, the farm was a registered shorthorn operation. The property is now used to keep a few head of livestock while the hay ground is rented out.

Ken and Beverly enrolled in the Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program (WHIP) in 1980, mainly through the encouragement of one of Ken's boyhood friends. This friend happened to be a wildlife biologist for the Kansas Fish and Game Commission.

Habitat evaluations of the Corbet

Ken Corbet



property revealed several limiting factors to the wildlife populations on and near the farm. Overgrazing and brush invasion of the native pasture had nearly eliminated its value to wildlife. The pasture had such low forage value that livestock production was very limited as well.

The riparian woodlands along the intermittent stream had become very dense, as had most of the other small scattered woodlots found on the farm. This condition limited wildlife benefits in the timber as well as decreasing the potential for commercial timber harvest.

Since the former cropland areas of the Corbet property had been converted to brome hayfields, there was an obvious need for dependable winter food supplies. The lack of high-energy winter food was compounded by the fact that all row crop areas in the rest of the section are generally not available for wildlife to use as winter food.

Because the stream running through the farm is intermittent, water is unavailable for wildlife and livestock use during extended periods of drought and during some winter months when the creek freezes solid. These are the periods when water is the most critical for livestock and wildlife.

After the problems were pinpointed, it was time to try to solve them. First, Ken embarked on a

three-year pasture improvement plan. During this period, no livestock grazing will be permitted while other improvements are being implemented. Even though this means no livestock income for three years, Ken is confident he will more than recover this loss once the self-imposed grazing restriction is lifted.

Besides the banning of livestock from the pasture, a prescribed burning program was initiated in the spring of 1981. Even after only one burn, the results were very encouraging. The native grasses such as big bluestem, Indiangrass, and switchgrass which had been almost invisible for years produced excellent growth following last spring's burn. This will mean more and better grazing conditions for livestock in the future. This will also mean that there will be more and better places for deer, quail, and other wildlife to live and raise their young.

The burning program is also doing its part in reducing the amount of brush that had invaded the pasture. Between the second and third years of the grazing ban, Ken is planning to cut out any remaining undesirable trees by hand.

Both Beverly and Ken feel that they have experienced immediate results with one particular wildlife management technique. This is the establishment of food plots. Five milo food plots ranging in size from one-fourth acre up to one acre were planted in the spring of 1981. The Corbets have seen a dramatic increase in deer visits to their property. In most cases, the deer seem to be associated with food plot sites. Many other species of animals use the feeding areas as well.

The food plots did not take any land out of production that was providing income. All the food plots were located in out-of-the-way areas that were not used for pasture or hay. Therefore, the only cost of the food plots was for materials and tillage.

Although the Corbets had too much woody cover in some areas, others didn't have enough. To rem-

edy this, Ken planted three thicket areas with shrubs provided by the Kansas Fish and Game Commission. The thickets mainly consist of American plum, Nanking cherry, autumn olive and several other kinds of shrubs that provide wildlife food and cover.

These thickets are part of Ken's plan to manage his interior fencerows, providing brushy cover for winter use by quail, rabbits and other ground dwelling species of wildlife. Ken is also building brush-piles and half-cutting trees along the interior fencelines to provide additional short-term ground cover while the shrub thickets are maturing. By concentrating on interior fencelines, Ken can control the activities that might decrease the value of the fencelines for wildlife. Any fence-line grazing or chemical application on boundary fences by neighbors wipes out many wildlife benefits.

Ken has more ideas that he is considering for future implementation. These plans include establishing more food plot areas, fencing out existing food plots from livestock, and fencing of selected thicket and wooded areas. Plans also include providing a year-round water system for wildlife. The watering system will probably involve the building of several small ponds. Livestock watering may also be part of the ponds' duty. Fencing of the ponds will be a high priority.

Corbet is an avid hunter and invites friends and relatives to his property to hunt. However, his main interest in wildlife on the farm is not improving hunting. Ken feels that ninety percent of the wildlife use on his property comes from non-game animals. The Corbets agree that if their goal were only to improve hunting, they wouldn't make the wildlife habitat improvements. Ken has plenty of hunting places available to him besides his own.

The real benefit that Ken and Beverly enjoy from their wildlife work is the opportunity to observe many kinds of wildlife on the farm and to somehow participate in the

animals' daily activities. Through their wildlife work, the Corbets are helping to provide for the well-being of many different species of wildlife.

Ken attributes most of his interest in fish and wildlife to his father. Corbet's fondest childhood memories are times that he spent hunting, fishing, or just being outdoors with his dad. Because of this, Ken wishes all kids could participate in similar outdoor activities. He believes that much of life and living is directly related to the way things go on in nature and that a person's character can be greatly benefited through outdoor experiences.

Beverly, like Ken, was raised on a farm. Beverly's mother still lives on her farm which is near the Corbet farm. Beverly's interest in wildlife is mainly non-hunting. She does, however, participate in some hunting trips by being a vehicle driver, cook, and girl Friday because she likes the outdoor exposure. Even though Justin is only two, he will join the family on some hunting excursions this year.

Beverly and Ken both work at jobs away from their home. They must
Chickadee

each drive about forty miles round trip to get to their individual jobs. Since they work different hours, they have little opportunity to car-pool with each other. They both concede that this driving consumes much time and money, but they wouldn't have it any other way. Even when given the chance to live somewhere besides on a farm, they decided that the solitude of rural living was well worth the sacrifices they have to make.

The Corbets believe the WHIP program has fit well into their farm operation. It has not caused them any added problems, though they have a few people trespassing. They had this problem before becoming WHIP cooperators. Being involved in wildlife management just as much or as little as they wanted is the aspect of WHIP the Corbets like best. They feel the program is not narrow-minded and can be designed to fit into the way they want to use their farm. For the Corbets, the WHIP program has provided benefits that far outweigh the small amounts of effort and dollars they invest in wildlife. □

Ron Spomer

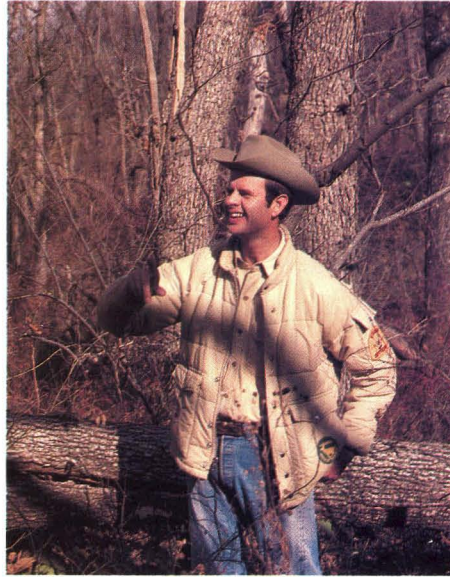


Southeast

Bob Culbertson

The Sayers Farm

Loren Sayers



Wildlife habitat on private land and the continuing loss of it have deeply concerned professional wildlife managers for years. Fortunately, there are many landowners who share this concern. Loren Sayers is one such man. His philosophy and concern for wildlife is not only apparent when discussing the topic but extends to the management of his land.

Loren manages 480 acres of family-owned land in Anderson County near Bush City. The 270 acres of native grass, 126 acres of cropland, forty acres of cool-season pasture, and forty-four acres of timber and brush, are the basis for his diversi-

Cottontail in cover



Ron Spomer



fied farm operation. The varied land use also sustains plentiful wildlife populations.

Loren moved with his family to the present "homeplace" from Kansas City, Kansas in 1952, when he was eleven years old. The eighty-acre farm offered Loren and his brothers an opportunity to sharpen their hunting and fishing skills. Before moving to the farm, these outdoor sports were limited to special weekends. However, through the remainder of his youth, hunting and wildlife watching became a fundamental part of Loren's life, along with chores and other farm activities.

In 1970, Loren took over the farming duties and also began expanding the land holding. There are not big eye-catching differences in the property since he has run it, but subtle changes have occurred.

"It takes time to develop good wildlife habitat," states Loren. "It doesn't happen overnight.

"I use a combination of practices which help produce good crops, conserve soil and water, make quality grass available for grazing and benefit wildlife as much as possible. Crop residues are left standing in cropfields each winter. I rotate crops of milo, beans and wheat each year or so to help prevent weed problems.

I've added sweetclover to my rotation plan in the last couple of years to improve soil conditions, water retention, and nitrogen levels. Rabbits and quail will also use the clover for nesting and winter cover. I also use minimum tillage to some degree. All of the cropfields are now terraced to minimize loss of precious soil."

Sayers' soil conservation efforts are beginning to show. Recent soil tests indicate improvement in organic levels and soil fertility. As a result, he was awarded a soil conservation award in 1980.

All of these practices have an effect on wildlife, but one of Loren's greatest contributions to wildlife

Ron Spomer



habitat has been the establishment of weedy borders along cropfields. This additional permanent cover is already helping to support more quail, according to Loren. He was also quick to point out the reduced wind erosion on fields that already have hedgerows or timber nearby.

Two years ago, Loren, his wife Catherine, and their two sons, Erich and Kurt, planted over 600 shrubs and trees around their new pond and along the edge of an open cropfield. The pond is completely fenced and will be an attractive recreational and wildlife area. The cattle water below the pond.

Loren also discussed the things he does not do which greatly affect wildlife. "Bulldozing hedgerows, cleaning up woody draws, and pushing timber in the creek are not part of my plans." There is enough marginal land being farmed, according to Loren, and the deer and quail which rely on these areas are very valuable to him. Even a large brushpile pushed up by a bulldozer when the area was under other ownership remains unburned. Loren felt this last remnant of the hedgerow was better than nothing.

Another effective and economical management practice Loren has introduced is related to his native grass. Much of the rangeland he purchased in past years was not in top condition for livestock or wildlife. Overgrazing and lack of fire were both problems. He began by adding forty acres of fescue and brome pasture to the homeplace for fall and winter grazing. In itself, brome or fescue are not sufficient habitat for wildlife, but as a tool to relieve the pressure on native grasses during the late fall and winter, they do serve a purpose. This moderate summer grazing program has played an important role in improving the range condition. Equally important, Loren began a prescribed burning program two years ago. He saw first-hand the effectiveness of fire in helping improve the prairie.

"We will be trying to burn our

native grass pastures every three years on the average," says Loren. "The fire was on the verge of being scary the first time, but it did tons more good than spraying had done in the past."

This spring, he plans to burn a 160-acre tract of native grass which has not seen fire for several years. It is becoming choked with cedar trees, buckbrush, and other woody plants.

"I don't want to kill all the cedar trees and brush," explains Sayers, "but we do need to get them under control and give the native grasses a chance to grow." A controlled burn is the best tool for the job.

Not only will the 160-acre range produce more grass for summer grazing, but upland game such as quail and cottontails will get a shot in the arm from the improved nesting habitat. And there will still be brush left in the draws for winter cover and timber on one hillside for the deer after the burning program is initiated.

Controlled burning is not confined to the native grass pasture on Loren's farm. He is using fire to improve wildlife habitat conditions along the edges of his timber where small trees and brush were becoming very dense. The first burn opened up a few areas and native grasses and forbs are more evident. The diversity of vegetation created by this type of management is what wildlife thrives upon.

"This is where I harvest my deer each fall," Sayers explains. "I want to provide them some open areas along with the heavy brush and timber along the creek."

It is evident that Sayers already is doing a commendable job of maintaining and creating wildlife habitat in addition to his crop and livestock production. However, he also has future plans for improvements. Native prairie grass will be seeded on pond dams and in odd areas which are no longer producing good fescue. A new pond will be fenced to control cattle access and oak trees are being planted for future genera-

tions (and wildlife) to use.

When I asked Loren how WHIP had helped him the most, he indicated, "the advice and recommendations were most helpful." For other landowners, he feels manpower and money, either through tax breaks or direct assistance might provide more motivation to improve wildlife habitat.

Sayers has also been involved in and concerned about habitat development on a statewide basis. He assisted in getting the Kansas Banker's Wildlife Habitat Conservation Award Program under way. This is an award available in each county to recognize a landowner who has maintained or developed wildlife habitat on the farm.

As far as Loren is concerned, the arguments in favor of wildlife management on his land are fairly straightforward. "Wildlife, hunting and fishing were all very important sports while I was growing up. They were a source of food, good exercise, and always interesting. There is no end to what can be learned while in the field. You learn very quickly about the interdependence of the whole natural system. I want my boys to have the same opportunity to learn and experience. There are also esthetic values to having wildlife on the property. We have an interest in all the wildlife and wild foods found here. Mushrooms are a delicacy and we make use of them whenever time allows."

However, hunting, fishing, and wildlife esthetics only partly explain his efforts.

"My management is part of being a good steward of the land," says Sayers. When the "good stewardship of the land" translates into good native grass management, permanent cover on critical areas, hedgerows and timber to help control wind erosion, terracing cropfields, maintaining cover on these fields through the winter and rotating crops, our natural resources including wildlife are beneficiaries. □