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Knowing Quails' Favored Foods Can Guide Management

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Spend any time afield during a quail hunt and it's inevitable that a hunter will eventually break open a quail crop (crop) to see the food contents inside. That's exactly what Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation (ODWC) biologists did during Oklahoma's 2015-16 quail hunting season when more than 700 quail crops were analyzed throughout the majority of the state. Although a bobwhite's seasonal use of foods can vary, having a general knowledge of food resources, especially high use foods, can be valuable when it comes to making management decisions.

Overall, insects, fruits, weed seeds, and green vegetation (leaves, stems) made up the bulk of the hunting season (Nov. 14-Feb. 15) diet, but the quantities of each varied by region. Of the weed seeds, western ragweed, slickseed fuzzybean, whitemouth dayflower, thin paspalum, croton, sunflower, panic grass, and lespedeza were all readily eaten foods. In addition, woody fruits and nuts including hackberry and oak acorns were important dietary items. Other woody seeds eaten in much lower quantities include poison ivy and ash.

Although weed seeds and fruits generally make up a substantial portion of the fall and winter diet of a bobwhite, the spring and summer diets can be quite different. Green leaves and stems of low growing forbs such as clovers can end up contributing a major portion of the diet. Although this green vegetation is low in overall energy, it does provide