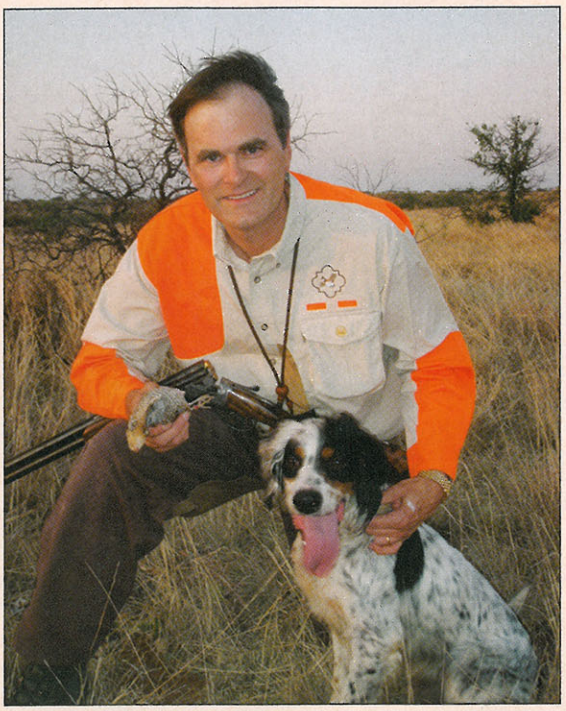
The Bobwhite Genome Project

At its annual dinner in early March, Dallas-based Park Cities Quail, the fundraising "engine" for the Rolling Plains Quail Research Ranch (RPQRR), bestowed its T. Boone Pickens Lifetime Sportsman Award on one of the few people who might cast a longer shadow than Pickens: Ted Turner, the legendary businessman, landowner and conservationist.

The evening's biggest news, though, was the announcement of a first-of-its-kind research initiative that promises to break new ground in our understanding of the bobwhite quail. The genetic research may provide important clues to reversing the species' decline—a decline that continues to vex biologists and sportsmen alike. Work started last summer, when a bobwhite hen harvested from the RPQRR, in Roby, Texas, was earmarked as the "prototype specimen."



Park Cities Quail Chairman Joe Crafton has helped fund the research and is hopeful that the results will be used to reverse the loss of quail in Texas.

COURTESY OF JOE CRAFTON

Called the Bobwhite Genome Project (BGP), its objective is to "map" the bobwhite quail genome—essentially, the sum total of the bird's hereditary information—establishing the sequence and location of the 20,000 to 35,000 genes known to exist in the species. Once this map has been established, it will be used as a baseline against which to compare wild quail from other locations throughout the state. This, in turn, will enable scientists to get a handle on the level of genetic diversity within the overall population. A critical measure of a species' ability to survive, genetic diversity is often likened to a "biological insurance policy."

Scientists also hope that the genome project will help them identify quail "lineages" with higher resistance to disease and the ability to thrive in environments where other populations have dwindled. In this respect, the BGP fits hand-in-glove with Operation Idiopathic Decline (OID), the project initiated in 2011 that seeks to determine the role parasites and disease may be playing in the reduction of quail numbers. OID already has documented record-high levels of a parasitic eyeworm in West Texas bobwhites, and while the impact of this is yet to be quantified, it's believed to be a major factor in the decline of quail even where habitat appears ideal.

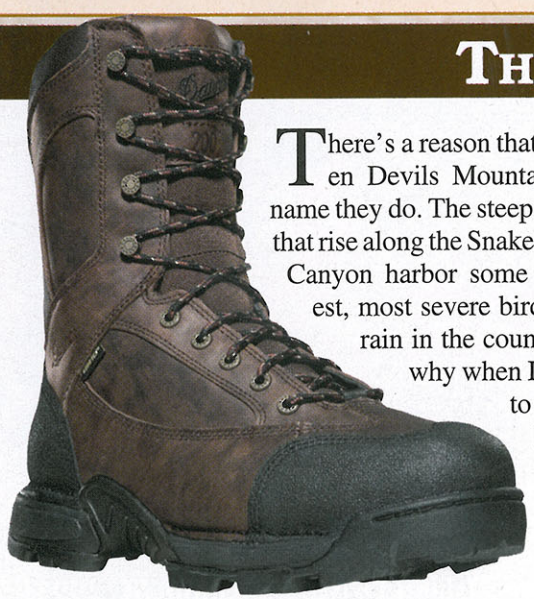
Although the genome project falls under the supervisory umbrella of Rolling Plains Executive Director Dr. Dale Rollins, the actual genetic analysis is being conducted by the Texas A&M Dept. of Veterinary Pathology, College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences. Funding for the project is in the form of a grant from Park Cities Quail and Joe Crafton, PCQ's dynamic chairman.

According to Crafton: "We are very excited about the potential created by the Bobwhite Genome Project. Later this year we plan to openly share the genome with all research organizations. Future generations will likely benefit from the research derived from this important project.

"When [Park Cities Quail] started six years ago, we were determined to reverse the loss of quail throughout the region. Recently, we've seen true return on our investment in the findings of excessive parasitism from Operation Idiopathic Decline, and we're hopeful that the Bobwhite Genome Project will position us for more breakthroughs and successes."

For more information on the Bobwhite Genome Project, visit www.quailresearch.org. —*Tom Davis*

The Devil Is in the Danners



COURTESY OF DANNER

There's a reason that Idaho's Seven Devils Mountains have the name they do. The steep, rocky slopes that rise along the Snake River's Hells Canyon harbor some of the nastiest, most severe bird hunting terrain in the country. Which is why when I had a chance to hunt chukar there this past fall I opted for footwear with a reputation for not only providing support and protection but also withstanding tremendous abuse.

Danner's Pronghorn boots are well known for their comfort and durability. The latest version, the GTX, continues Danner's tradition of building lightweight boots that provide the support needed for walking in difficult terrain. Pronghorns are available in a wide variety of configurations that include features like full-grain leather, 1,000-denier nylon uppers, Thinsulate insulation, Gore-Tex liners, and abrasion-resistant Tech-Tuff toe and heel coverings. Different styles, heights (six- or eight-inch) and levels of insulation are designed for hunting in varying environments and climates. The Pronghorns I chose had 400 grams of Thinsulate to provide enough warmth for the early season in the mountains. I also opted for eight-inch boots