

## J. Perry Mikles/Blue Mountain W.D.A Story By Larry McAnally- Mgr.

Our first field trial season began September 1986 with the running of the Southland All-Age Classic, a little over one year after J. Perry Mikles was appointed to the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission for a seven-year term. It's hard to believe that 17 years have past, where did the time go? Along with Perry's help, there were 5 Game and Fish employees, Randy Guthrie, Tommy Knight, Jim Cagle, Clyde Bailey, and myself. That first year, our assignment was to turn 3500 acres of overgrown field systems and hardwood bottom into 3 one hour horseback bird dog field trial courses along the Petit Jean river that flows between the Ozarks and Blue Ouachita Mountain Range of West Central Arkansas and build a headquarters for the user groups to meet and care for their animals.

By 1987, the Southland was now a championship and was running the second Monday in November. The courses were in place with 12 miles of roads and trails, two bridges, six low water crossings, about 90 culverts, bulldozed 400 acres, fields cleared, 800 acres of lespedeza planted, 117 food plots and 4 miles of food strips were planted. Forty or fifty 55 gallon barrels were placed in different locations, to be used as feeders for the 75 or so coveys of wild birds that were seen on the area while the construction work was going on.

Around the same time the headquarters was taking shape, a clubhouse seating 175 people, with a full kitchen, fireplace, central heat and air, horse barn with 60 stalls, 12 outside stalls, 105 dog pens, 12 RV pads, 3 parking lots, including one with 12 additional electric hook ups for RV.

Shortly after completing the headquarters the field trial courses the field trial groups started rolling in. Behind the Southland came the Brittany National, German Shorthaired National Irish Setter National, Red Setter National, Arkansas Shooting Dog Championship 'Razorback Shooting Dog Championship, West-Ark Trial, Blue Mountain 'Field Trial, and several other small trials.

It only took 2 or 3 years of this kind of pressure on the wild birds for them to leave the courses. Flight-conditioned birds were released in the summer of 1988. These 2000 birds were received from the Oklahoma Fish and Game in exchange for Arkansas fish. The birds were 5 weeks old when they arrived, at that time they were placed in flight pens just off the area and released on the field trial course at 10 weeks of age in 20 bird coveys. The release sites were equal in numbers on each course, in likely places that would hold birds with corn and milo scattered on the ground with water provided in tires cut in half. After the release one person was assigned to feed and water daily. This worked very well for a number of years, then in 1990 the Oklahoma Fish and Game stopped their bird program. So at that point, Arkansas Game and Fish started purchasing birds from several different vendors.

By the time Perry Mikles left the commission in June 1992, we were taking on a new look. Randy Guthrie and Tommy Knight were gone. Clarence Rodrigues was now working feeding birds, marshalling trials, along with the other duties. Our Game and Fish division (special use areas) was done away with and we became part of the regular wildlife management district under the supervision of the district manager.

Shortly thereafter the budget was reduced and Clarence Rodrigues was moved to Muddy Creek Management Areas some 30 miles south. So with Jim Cagle, Clyde Bailey, and myself left and a reduced budget to work with there had to be some more changes made. The first was to eliminate the field marshalling for trials. Second was caring for the birds; we had to find a way to reduce labor and cost of feeding. We decided on something similar to the covey release system. There were 80 feed stations set up on the courses with feed and water tubes. They could be serviced in about 4 hours after the initial feeding with milo and water. Feeding cost was reduced because of waste.

We knew at this point, that the field trial groups should be included in the decision making process, and the things they thought were most important to them and how to pay for the extra projects that were under funded or not budgeted. A decision was made to form a committee from each major bird dog group using the area. This group would incorporate in 1996 as the Blue Mountain Conservation Association. On the board of directors was Francis Clasen – Brittany's, John Criswell of the Southland, Peter Kainz – GSP, Ray Marshall and Ken Ruff were looking out for the Irish Setters interest. Over the years this group has contributed many man hours working with these user groups and along with the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission contributed funds for a lot of different projects such as remodeling the horse barn, replaced many of the dog houses, gravel for roads, parking areas, tables and chairs for the club house, last but not least feed and bird. This group has contributed a lot to the area and later on would be asked to do more.

In 1997 Jim Cagle was moved to Fort Chaffee Wildlife Management Area leaving an even smaller staff of Game and Fish employees and even more changes had to be made. The vegetation had to be controlled, more hay was being baled by farmers instead of us bush hogging. Contractors are planting food plots that were previously planted by Game and Fish employees.

The users of the area have changed over the years. Some of the bird dog field trials have moved to different places. We now have beagle and coonhounds using a lot of the old dates. At this time we have 23 days of rabbit dog; 18 coonhounds, 54 bird dog trials, 1 trail ride, and 4 days of permitted modern gun dog hunting scheduled for a total of 100 trial days.

Red and I are still managing with the help of the association to have the area prepared for field trials. Over the years a lot has changed or maybe not. This is our 18<sup>th</sup> season, we have planted 100 food plots, 4 miles of feed strips, maintained 12 miles of roads and trails, bush hogged hundreds of acres of field trial courses and we are removing the old feed stations this year to return to scattering corn and milo on the ground. We are providing tires cut in half for watering, and the birds are being purchased from a new vendor. So maybe it's not so different, just a different way of getting results.

We have been preparing all our lives to manage a field trial area; Red has been playing in the dirt with road graders, bulldozers, and a dump truck from the time he was a year old and I have been tripping over dogs all my life. We feel like this maybe this will be our best year ever.