

Youth Quail Hunt, Cochise Bird Dog Club

by Dave Higgins

The Cochise Bird Dog Club, located in Sierra Vista, Arizona, sponsored their 6th youth quail hunt on Saturday, 16 Jan on the Empire Ranch, near Sonoita, Arizona as one of several outdoors related camps promoted by the Arizona Game and Fish department. This event received the official title of South East Arizona Youth Quail Camp. There were 25 youngsters ranging from the age of 9 through 19 years of age. Kids came from Tucson and the Sierra Vista area to participate. This event, the brain child of Chris Orndorff and the author has grown and is anxiously anticipated each year by the participants. The underlying principle of the event was to extend our appreciation to the Scholastic Clay Target Program (SCTP) participants by continuing their education effort and expanding their interest in hunting with bird dogs. The safety awareness of the youngsters is outstanding and I am sure that this is due to the instructions they received in the program while they are at the range. The SCTP coaches also provided safety instruction and qualification to youngsters not yet in SCTP. The event has primarily been funded by the club with some sponsorship help in previous years from the Arizona Game and Fish Department. The club's annual shotgun raffle has served as the primary means to finance birds, food and other expenses. This year the club gained full support from the Arizona Game and Fish department as well as the National Shooting Sports Foundation. The foundation provided a substantial grant to fund the bird purchase and to offset other event costs.

Planning for the event began with close coordination with the game and fish officials by attending two of their seminars and then following up with efforts to define the day's activities. Chris Orndorff, Vice President of the Cochise Bird Dog Club has taken on this annual event as his pet project and once again did an outstanding effort in planning, coordination and execution.

The kids are exposed to not only quality quail hunting over club member's dogs but additional stations on Arizona quail species, GPS, map reading and land navigation, quail cleaning and bird dog basics. The hunting courses were defined with two separate fields and the only persons allowed in the field were the dog handler, who served as the mentor, and the two shooters in each brace. All shooters and handlers were required to wear hunter orange safety vests. Observation posts at a distant and adjacent area for both courses were defined for parents to watch their kids through spotting scopes. Advance registration included signatures of hold harmless agreements, certification of fire arms safety and parental permission. All youngsters received a newly designed badge, SE AZ Youth Quail Camp with Club and G&F logos embroidered on the emblem. Post event surveys were also completed to provide feedback to the club, G & F department and the National Shooting Sports Foundation.

The core of the participants is drawn from the nationally organized SCTP which is sponsored in most all of the states across this great country. A quick browse of the internet revealed programs in the following states to include Arizona, Tennessee, California, Iowa, Massachusetts, Oklahoma, New York, Utah, Indiana, Colorado, Kansas and South Carolina. I am sure there are more states that have sponsored programs. Please check with the National Shooting Sports Foundation. The web site is: <http://sssfonline.org>. The boots on the ground instruction and

organization is usually accomplished at the local skeet and trap facilities with assistance from the respective game and fish departments as well as local volunteers that instruct on clay target shooting, firearms safety and overall awareness and courtesy when using a fired arm. During the event, comments and feed back from the adult participants centered on the courteous and safe manner in which the kids handled their shotguns and the cooperative manner in which they interfaced with one another. They brought a "Team Spirit" to the event.

The day's event came to a close with a drawing on a Garmin ETREX GPS system which was donated by the club and was won by one of the youth participants, Michael Bell of the Tucson SCTP club. If there is anyone interested in developing a project similar to this one please feel free to contact me at azbirddog@msn.com or by telephone, 520-378-4114. I would be pleased to help you organize and structure an event of this type. After all, the future of the sport and other related activities lies in the hands of the younger generations. My personal experience with these participants over the past several years has left me encouraged and thrilled with the potential for our country and the long held tradition of hunting in America.