

Telling It Like It Is

Bill Maltsberger

In 1970, with the guidance of Al Brothers, I changed the primary thrust of my ranching operation from cattle to one giving equal consideration to wildlife and cattle. Al shamed me into it.

Experience gained in dealing with large multiple-sire breeding herds of cattle was applied to our wildlife management efforts. Progress was rapid to a point; then it became obvious that nutrition was our most limiting factor left to control.

The old adage that feeding is 80% of breeding stands equally true for wildlife and livestock. We see known white-tail bucks fluctuate 2 inches in outside spread and a half inch in antler circumference from a good year to a bad and make full recovery following the next good antler growth period.

Fawn survival can fluctuate from 7 to 70% in dry years, depending upon available food. Annual forb production is a major indicator of next year's antler quality and may determine how many mature deer will be available for harvest 5 years from now.

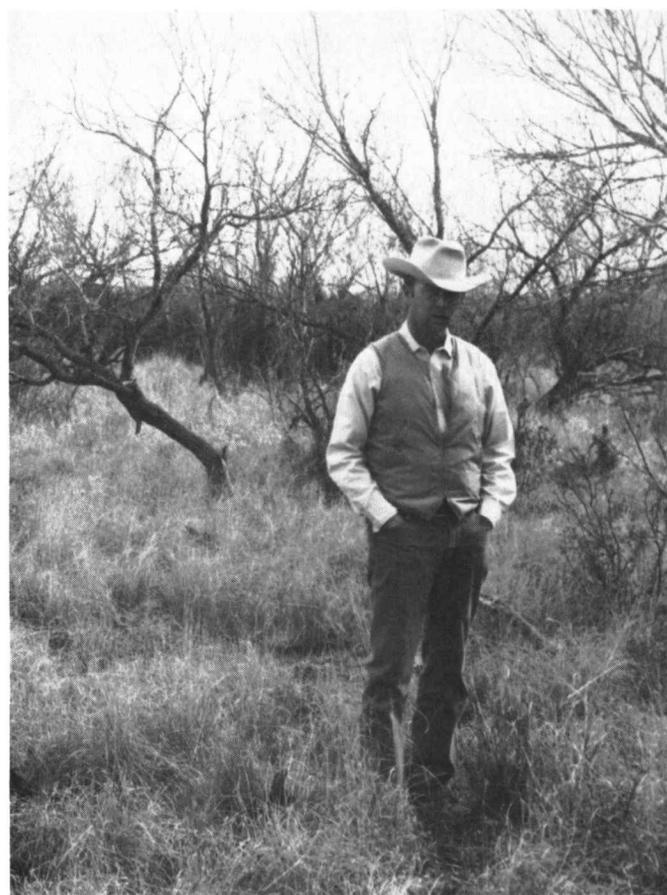
By 1978 it had become increasingly clear that we had to make changes in our ranch operation. Higher feed bills, a shortage of good cowhands, slower progress in our wildlife and livestock breeding programs, and worsening range conditions were staring us in the face.

At this time, in the summer of 1978, Kenneth Sparks, our area range conservationist with the Soil Conservation Service, came by to see me. We had a nice discussion about range and related subjects and within a week after this visit he mailed me most of the information, available at that time, on short duration grazing.

As Al Brothers influenced our wildlife management program, Kenneth Sparks changed our ranch operation. Primary concern is now range management with equal consideration being given wildlife and livestock.

We try to weigh management decisions for impact on every phase of our ranch operation. For example, I rate shelled corn as a prime source of supplemental energy. Not

only is it excellent feed for cattle and horses, but they scatter the grain all over our pastures in their droppings, making it available to birds, insects, and other animal life. The more consumers our range can sustain, the faster our nutrient cycle will move.



Bill Maltsberger observing a pasture on his ranch that has been in cell rotation for over 3 years.

Within a year after initiating short duration grazing, it became evident that our rangeland evolved with the influence of cloven hoofed animals. Hoof action loosens the ground and is nature's way of preparing a seed bed. As cover increases so does water infiltration.

Annual forb production increased from 3 to 5 times in the rotated pastures compared to those lightly stocked on a

The author's family has been ranching and hunting in South Texas since the 1850's. He presently owns and operates a 12,000-acre ranch near Cotulla which was the subject of an article by Elmer Kelton, page 258, *Rangelands*, December 1982.

This article by Maltsberger (1983) is based on a talk he gave at a joint meeting of the Range and Wildlife Societies on January 22, 1983.

Al Brothers is manager of the H.B. Zachry Co. Ranches on the Rio Grande Plains in Southwest Texas. His responsibilities entail all aspects of ranch management, but special emphasis was, and is, placed on the management of the deer herds on the ranches under his responsibilities. There have been very few, if any deer herds managed as intensely or with greater success than those on the Zachry ranches. There is an excellent article by Al Brothers, *One Winning Combination*, page 20, *Rangelands*, February 1979.—D. Freeman

year-around basis. Where we can grow weeds, grass will follow.

Today, we have flexibility and the opportunity to manage. In the past I just went for the ride and hoped it rained.

Improvement is not just evident in our pasture conditions. Other animals benefit. The first half of January, 1983, 39 bobcats, 88 coyotes and 41 raccoons trapped on the ranch were rated by hide buyers as the best seen in South Texas; a premium price was paid for the catch. Fur was better, size was larger, and the physical condition of the fur bearers was rated superior.

Last fall I watched my son and two daughters, aged 14, 11, and 6, move 199 grown cows over a mile from one cell to another with no trouble at all. Three years ago I couldn't have moved cattle through the same area with 7 good cowboys.

There are two main reasons why my children were able to move the cattle so easily. First, lanes connect all 9 central cells on the ranch and no pasture is larger than 400 acres. Prior to 1979 they consisted basically of 4 pastures, 1,500 to 2,900 acres in size along with some small pastures or traps. And second, the cattle are easier to handle now because of the frequent rotations—they have become accustomed to the moving and like it.

The joint meeting of the Range and Wildlife Societies recently held in Austin is a step in the right direction. Next, we need to expand it to include the botanist, the entomologist, and the soil scientist.

A lack of understanding caused the misuse of our rangelands and wildlife in the past. What we think we see is not what we are looking at. I have found that the best wildlife habitat is also my best cattle country.

Mesquite and other woody legumes are among our most valued plants. Future grass production in my pastures may depend upon how much good mesquite timber I can grow, not on how much I can kill.

For those of you in the many fields of research and education, I should like for you to consider me as a resource manager, the end consumer of your product. Share with me your findings and we will all gain by their application.

Al Brothers, not too gently, served me the ball 12 years ago. He started a long time before that, but I am a slow learner. It took me about 8 years to get going and lob the ball back over the net. Kenneth Sparks drove it back down my throat. Today, I am putting the ball on your side of the fence and asking you to join the game. [Bill was speaking to those in attendance at the joint meeting.]

I heard of a man once who built a new home out of lumber he had cut from 19 varieties of native trees. He did all the work using a primitive saw mill.

When a young friend, marveling at the care and effort used in construction, remarked the house would be around longer than its builder, the man replied, "Hell, Tommy, I want it to be here when I come back." I feel the same way about our rangelands and wildlife.

With the grace of God, may we continue to make that with which we are entrusted, better.

Management of Whitetail Deer in South Texas

W.A. Maltsberger

Changing times and social patterns greatly influence land use management and priorities. The ability to grasp a weapon in hand, rear up on two hind legs, objectively view the surroundings and follow through after subjectively reaching a decision enables ranchers to control the land, habitat, and wildlife entrusted to them by the Creator.

Ranchers' interest in production of trophy whitetail deer is commendable. Before embarking on a new project of this magnitude, one must set his or her sights, goals, and objec-

tives and rank the priorities. One should be aware of any tradeoffs.

Published in Texas Tech's "Research Highlights—1981," Volume 12, page 67, is the "Life Table Analysis of the Welder Wildlife Refuge Deer Herd."

These tables reflect studies of a dense, stable, un hunted population of whitetail deer on the Rob and Bessie Welder Wildlife Refuge near Sinton, Texas. I have seen no other tables of their kind and feel these can be used for base line projections until better data are available.

My calculations using the Welder tables project a hypothetical herd of 282 deer. This herd would be made up of 186 does (132 adults does and 54 doe yearlings), and 96 bucks

Editor's Note: The author is a recognized successful cattle and deer rancher of South Texas. This article is based on a talk he gave at the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association's Trophy Whitetail Deer Symposium at Austin, Texas on March 22, 1983. For additional information, see the preceding article.