

# WILDLIFE TRENDS

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## Coach Pat Dye's Newest Game Plan

by Wallace Whatley



**Coach Pat Dye, former head coach at Auburn, newest interest is Crooked Oaks, a hunting preserve located in Macon County, Alabama.**

Good quail properties have those identifiable land improvements, the careful plantings and opened woods that let you know what it is at once. It's like walking into a schoolhouse or football stadium; you may not know exactly where you are, but you sure know what it is. That's the feeling I got visiting Coach Pat Dye's new property last month. I knew I was on a quail place. Coach Dye's place is primarily a released-bird operation now, but it's got all the signs of any carefully-managed quail plantation where wild birds are hunted.

The pine trees are planted on wide centers, and a half-dozen rows of Egyptian wheat are planted in the middles every so often. Every field edge and corner is a little brushy and very interesting, but none of the brush is more than

waist high. Add to all this, there's plenty of visibility out through the pines, and the trunks of the young trees are black to about head high where a controlled burn took out the undergrowth. This is the way quail country is supposed to look.

But it is not the way the place looked fifteen years ago when Coach Dye found it. And that is the remarkable story here - how Coach Pat Dye took a cut-over, eroded, marginal property and turned it into the green and lush preserve he has today.

This is the third hunting property Coach Dye has been involved with since he came to Auburn University to coach back in the 80's. When he found this place it was a cattle farm - a little over 600 acres - and it had seen better days. Yet this was a situation the coach was already acquainted with. Each property he'd developed before had also been a cattle farm. Each one, this one included, was laid out in open areas, cross-fenced, and criss-crossed with creeks and branches grown up in hardwoods and thickets. Only this property had been heavily thinned, in fact, almost clear cut. And this gave it its name - Crooked Oaks. Dye says all that was left when the place came on the market was crooked oaks and catface pines. So - welcome to Crooked Oaks.

Pat Dye is a man who can see end results somewhere out in the future when the rest of us only see what is right before us. So the Coach saw that the loggers had done him a favor. He had a clean slate to work with - a place that was already open to plant in timber producing trees, wildlife hedgerows and food plots with roads and shooting houses exactly where he wanted them. "You can have a plan, or you can have a grown-over, trashy looking place," is the way he put it.

For this master plan, Coach Dye went to his old friend, Dr. Harry Lee Stribling, wildlife biologist at Auburn University who has been closely involved with the successful Albany

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