Crops and Soils News Column

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Wildcat Extension Ag Report

**Being Wildlife Minded During Haying Season**

Any producer that has put up hay before knows of the vast amount of wildlife that can be hiding in the tall grass or alfalfa. Summer hay meadows and alfalfa fields provide wonderful habitat to a wide variety of wildlife. Songbirds, quail, turkey, deer and rabbits all use these fields throughout the growing season. These areas provide cover, food and nesting areas to rear young. For any producer who enjoys wildlife, it can be disheartening to ruin a nest of turkey eggs or, even worse, hit a fawn. In order to reduce the number of abandoned nests, wounds or deaths of local wildlife, there are a few strategies a producer can take.

One harvesting techniques that can help ensure the survival of ground-nesting birds and other wildlife species is to change the typical hay cutting pattern. Avoid beginning at the perimeter and mowing in a circle towards the center. This practice forces the birds into a continually smaller space as they attempt to avoid the harvester, while still maintaining cover from predators. Mow “back and forth” across a field allowing the wildlife to make their way to a field end and exit. One could also harvest the field from the inside outward rather than from the outside inward. Another strategy if there are several fields to mow, save the fields closest to wetlands and CRP acreage for last. These fields will likely have a high wildlife density, and a few additional days may make a considerable difference in reducing mortality.

Another option for conserving wildlife in the hay fields is to reduce speeds in areas where wildlife have been observed or are suspected of nesting or brood-rearing activity. Birds sitting on nests and young wildlife often do not have time to react to and avoid high-speed harvesters. Flushing bars can be mounted on the front of a tractor to move wildlife from the path of dangerous wheels and cutters. Numerous designs are available. In general, flushing bars are mounted offset on the front of the tractor, at least 10 feet in length, with hanging one-inch chains about 2 feet apart. Also consider cutting five to six inches above the ground to avoid impact with smaller wildlife.

Hay production is a fundamental and vital part of many Kansas farms and ranches. Learning to live with wildlife can help to alleviate some of the negative aspects of haying to wildlife habitat and can support wildlife production on agricultural lands.

If you have questions or would like more information, please call me at the office (620) 331-2690 or email me at jlsigle@ksu.edu. To view this or any past articles or radio recordings from the Wildcat District Ag Agents, please visit the Wildcat Extension District website at [www.wildcatdistrict.ksu.edu](http://www.wildcatdistrict.ksu.edu).

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