

MOUNTAIN QUAIL

Oreortyx pictus

Order: Galliformes
Family: Odontophoridae



Distribution Western North America:

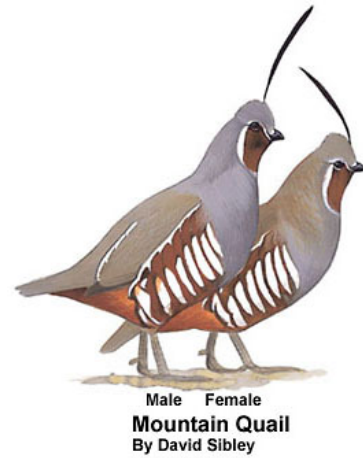
Found in mountain habitats as far north as Vancouver Island, Canada (introduced), southeast Washington and southwest Idaho, the Cascade Range through Washington, Oregon, and northern California, the Coast Range, the Sierra Nevada, the Transverse, and the Peninsular Ranges in California. Desert

populations found in the White, Inyo, Panamint, Grapevine, Coso, and Argus mountains of eastern California. Populations extend as far south as Baja California.

Distribution in Nevada: The Nevada Atlas of Breeding Birds in Nevada shows confirmed breeding populations in the Carson Range. Earlier reports and surveys documented mountain quail in the Toiyabe, Desatoya, Clan Alpine, Stillwater and Santa Rosa Ranges; east to Elko County, and South to Goldfield in Esmeralda County. Some of these outlying populations may have been introduced.

Habitat: Mountain quail occupy a variety of habitats but are almost always found in the dense cover of medium to tall shrub communities including chaparral and desert scrub. Forest and woodland types such as oak hardwood, mixed conifer, redwood, white fire, red fir, pinyon-juniper, aspen stands associated with sagebrush and dense riparian stands are used when a dense shrub understory is present. Birds are reluctant to stray from dense cover and avoid edges and openings, which may make it more vulnerable to shrub habitat fragmentation. In Nevada, habitats in good ecological condition (especially riparian zones) are essential for mountain quail survival.

Migration: Mountain quail differ from other North American quail in their ability to utilize high elevation habitats (up to 10,000 feet) by making long distance seasonal movements. Birds avoid snow cover by seasonally migrating to lower elevations. Ravines



and valleys are reportedly used by small coveys of up to 20 birds for fall migration and ridgeline routes used by singles or pairs during spring migration following the receding snow line.

Identification: Strikingly handsome plumage: long straight black head plume with gray erectile crown crest, chestnut throat patch bordered with black and white bands, gray breast, whitish belly. Head and upper back are gray, grading to olive-brown back, wings, and tail. Conspicuous vertical black and white bars on chestnut sides. Males are slightly larger than females, but not different enough to distinguish sexes.

Breeding and Nesting: Coveys break up in late winter/early spring and form monogamous pairs. Wing and tail fanning displays usually associated with courtship. Nests are typically well concealed under protective cover of pine saplings, pinyon limbs, under shrubs or brush piles, or against logs or rocks on steep hillsides or banks. Clutch size averages 10 eggs, ranging from 6 to 14. Both sexes incubate eggs for approximately 24 days. Young are precocial and leave nest with parents within a few hours of hatching.

Foraging and Feeding: Highly herbivorous and opportunistic. All ages feed almost entirely on plant materials, but young will eat up to 20% animal matter (insects) up to 8 weeks old. Forages in shrub and forest habitats under canopy, rarely venturing far from cover. Concentrates on prevailing available seeds, fruits, and flowers and has the ability to shift feeding habits to exploit temporarily abundant foods. Uses diverse food capturing methods including digging, jumping, and climbing trees and shrubs for fruits and seeds. Drinks water frequently, especially in arid habitats may stay near water up to three hours midday.

Mountain Quail were petitioned for listing as a Distinct Population Segment (DPS) in the northern and western Great Basin and Interior Columbia Basin of Nevada, Oregon, Washington, and Idaho in March 2000. In January 2003, US Fish and Wildlife Service concluded that mountain quail in this area did not meet the criteria for a DPS and could not be considered for federal protection independent of the entire mountain quail population.