

QUAIL...A VALUABLE ADDITION TO ANY AVIARY

5 THE BOBWHITE QUAIL

The Bobwhite or Virginia Quail, *Colinus virginianus*, is a ground-dwelling bird native to the United States, Mexico, and the Caribbean. The name "Bobwhite" derives from its characteristic whistling call. Despite its secretive nature, the Bobwhite is one of the most familiar quail in eastern North America because it is frequently the only quail in a given area. There are twenty-two subspecies of Bobwhite, many of which are hunted as game birds.

The Bobwhite's diet consists of seeds, and insects the species of which vary with the season.

Bobwhites are sedentary and inhabit agricultural fields, grassland, open woodland areas, roadsides and wood edges. Their range covers the southeastern quadrant of the United States from the Great Lakes and southern Minnesota east to Pennsylvania and southern Massachusetts, and extending west to southern Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma and all but westernmost Texas. They are absent from the southern tip of Florida and the highest elevations of the Appalachian Mountains, but occur in eastern Mexico and in Cuba. Isolated populations have been introduced to Oregon and Washington.

The Bobwhite is shy and elusive. When threatened, it will crouch and freeze, relying on the camouflage of its plumage to escape detection, but will flush into low flight if closely disturbed. This quail is usually solitary or in pairs in the early part of the year, family groups are common in the late summer and winter roosts may contain two dozen or more birds.

They are generally monogamous, although polygamy has been noted. Both sexes incubate a clutch of 12-16 eggs for 23-24 days. The precocial young leave the nest shortly after hatching, and both parents care for them for 14-16 days until their first flight.

R.V.C. with help from Wikipedia

BOB WHITE QUAIL

(*Colinus virginianus virginianus*)
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Distribution: Eastern United States of America.

Description: Cock.

White throat and white eye-brow stripe which extends downwards to the neck. There is a Black (*sic*) band running through the eyes and bordering the white of the throat. The back, upper breast and wings are rust-brown



Photo: "BS nThurner Hof"

with yellow and brownish-yellow spots. The breast is brownish-yellow and white with narrow black stripes. The crest is barely visible. **Hen.** Is lighter in colour, has the throat bright buff and the black markings are less defined. Length 9 inches. [23cm]

This is one of three Bobwhite Quail and is one of the most popular in Avicultural (*sic*) circles, in the native state Bobwhite increased for a century or more as they virtually followed the plow¹ west across America. They were well suited to the mixed habitats of the early American small farms, today there are Bobwhites to be found in some city parks and along rivers bordering and meandering through many cities and towns. This quail got its popular name from its call of Bob-white! Ah, Bob-white, Bob-Bob-White.

Nesting requirements are simple and all that is used is a scrape in the ground and a bit of straw or a few leaves to line the nest. In the wild the nest would be very well camouflaged (and) that added to the habit of the hen to sit very tightly, they are extremely difficult to locate, the nests are usually under scrub or in tall grass and a cover dome is constructed and a side entrance which makes it hard to locate. This fact may account for the Bobwhite's reluctance to sit on their own eggs in Australian aviaries as they are usually kept in open flight aviaries, often as terrestrial (*sic*) dwellers in Parrot (*sic*) aviaries devoid of any natural cover. The usual clutch varies between 12 and 20 eggs which are white or cream coloured lightly speckled with brown, incubation takes 23 days. Nest building and incubation are usually carried out by the hen alone but should she die or be killed the cock may take over and carry on with the incubation and rearing of the young. It is usual for this species to be double brooded.

The young quail like their close relative the pheasant are capable of some flight when only one week old but usually hide in the undergrowth when disturbed and remain there until All Clear is sounded. These birds are reluctant to be in areas where it is cold and/or damp and even in the wild will wait until the sun is well up before venturing out into the grass that is now dry of dew. The birds usually sleep on the ground in a group in a circular pattern facing outwards, this is a good defence against being approached by any predator without their having noticed, to ward off or confuse and (*sic*) would be attacker. The quail will all "explode" up and out at the last minute causing confusion as to which one to chase this method of sleeping also means added warmth for each other.

These birds are omnivorous but up to 80% of their diet consists of vegetable matter, they live up to 9 years of age in captivity but in the wild would be lucky to reach 5 years.

¹ American spelling of "plough"