

QUAIL...A VALUABLE ADDITION TO ANY AVIARY

For most of the fifty-two years I have been an aviculturist various quail species, both native and foreign, have featured in most bird collections. However, recent years have seen a dramatic drop off in the number of quail species readily available. No matter if they are kept for their own intrinsic interest, or just as small organic “vacuum cleaners” for the aviary floor, they deserve a place in most collections.

In an effort to revive interest in these fascinating little birds I will be publishing a series of quail articles from back issues of the magazine over the next few editions. The publishing format will consist of both field notes on the species in question and the back issue article. R.V.C.

1 THE KING QUAIL

Coturnix chinensis



Wild male
Samsonvale, SE Queensland
Photo: “Aviceda”

The King Quail, also known as Chinese Painted Quail, Asian Blue Quail or Blue-breasted Quail is in the same family as the pheasants Phasianidae of the order Galliformes, gallinaceous birds.

This species is the smallest “true quail” and is quite common in aviculture worldwide. It sometimes goes by the name “Button Quail”, especially in the USA, but this name properly refers to the similar-looking but distantly related members of the genus *Turnix*. The natural range of the King Quail is from south-eastern Asia to Oceania. There are ten recognised subspecies:

- ***chinensis*** (Linnaeus, 1766) - India and Sri Lanka East through Indochina to SE China and Taiwan, and South to the Malay Peninsula
- ***trinkutensis*** (Richmond, 1902) - Nicobar Island; also said to occur on Andaman Island (race unspecified).
- ***palmeri*** (Riley, 1919) - Sumatra and Java.
- ***lineata*** (Scopoli, 1786) - Philippines, Borneo and Sulawesi.
- ***lineatula*** (Rensch, 1931) - Lombok East to Timor and Lesser Sundas.
- ***novaeguineae*** (Rand, 1942) - mountains of New Guinea.
- ***papuensis*** (Mayr & Rand, 1937) - SE New Guinea.
- ***lepida*** (Hartlaub, 1879) - Bismarck Archipelago.



- *colletti* (Mathews, 1912) - Northern Territory, Australia.
- *victoriae* (Mathews, 1912) - Eastern Australia.

King Quail are not listed as threatened on the Australian Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999.

R.V.C. with help from Wikipedia



KING QUAIL

By Eric Baxter

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Of all the species of Quail that have been held in collections there is little doubt that the prolific little King Quail tops the list. It has been, and for that matter, still is, the popular choice of many fanciers and accordingly many are still being bred. A pair of this species can be very prolific although, on the other hand, a pair can be a complete flop—laying eggs all over the aviary floor (in some cases as many as thirty or forty), then suddenly deciding to drag a few into a nest or endeavouring to do the impossible and fill the nest with more than they can cover—consequently hatching none.

Others will not even attempt to incubate any of the eggs. This becomes a problem and is frustrating, particularly if the same pair continually resorts to uphold its egg-laying habits.

In an endeavour to break this habit the pair should be separated and, if possible, after a short break, the hen introduced to another mate and transferred to another aviary. This is an experience many fanciers have had to deal with and as yet there has been no definite solution to the problem of overcoming the continuous egg laying habit and the failure of the hen failing to go broody after having laid a reasonable clutch. Generally it should not be allowed to continue and in most instances the breaking up of the pair is effectual.

Factors contributing to the adversity of excessive egg laying can be associated with a condition of domestication which is assisted by the general first class condition of the birds. Being in such a condition they simply keep going until they have laid their quota for the season without the break which is usually taken up with incubation of a normal clutch and the rearing of the young. Fortunately not all King Quail hens are subject to this habit, but when it does happen it is most annoying and very often means no chicks for the season. It is not unusual for a pair to lay anything up to a dozen eggs and incubate them, which is possible providing the nest is well constructed to accommodate the eggs.

Their food requirements are quite simple and they will thrive quite well on a seed diet as supplied to finches and will also appreciate crushed grain similar in quality to that supplies to poultry chicks. They also like greens, seeding grasses, and live food in the form of white ants and mealworms. They love to forage around in freshly turned soil and out of this will get quite a lot of insects and grubs. They also partake of a little plain cake if this is made available.

There are a number of points which, if observed, will serve to lighten the task when they are rearing young. Firstly, if the first four or five eggs are taken away and again returned to the nest when the hen is observed settling down to incubation, it is possible to prevent incubation taking place after the second or third egg has been laid. This will ensure a better proportion of young chicks being hatched around the same time instead of being spread over a lengthy period—which very often is responsible for the loss of chicks in the shell because as soon as the early arrivals are able to move around all remaining eggs are deserted—regardless of whether they contain chicks or may be added. Incubation takes approximately sixteen days. Soon after being hatched the young chicks start to move around and this is where further care will pay off. If the aviary is of large dimensions the possibility of losses is increased as the tiny chicks are unable to keep up with their parents and consequently, during the first few days, quickly succumb if they are not frequently brooded and kept warm. The little King Quail chicks do not appear to be as strong as some of the other species when first hatched. To overcome this problem every endeavour should be made to confine the whole family to a smaller area for approximately one week—an area approximately 1.2m square will suit them excellently. For that period they will be content to brood them most of the time and gradually teach them to pick up food. Even under these circumstances it is possible to have chicks stray and miss out on being brooded and consequently they succumb very quickly if the weather is cold. However, if detected in time it is very often possible to revive them by holding them in the hand, the warmth of which will be sufficient, or they can be revived in a hospital cage. After about a week or so and providing the weather is reasonable, they can be given a little more area to roam around in and from then on little difficulty should be experienced rearing them.

A little care taken in supplying their food requirements will pay off handsomely. For the first few days they will seek little food—being more content to be brooded and apparently they leave the egg with still sufficient nourishment in their body to carry them over the first few hours. A little plain cake finely crumbled will be sufficient for the first two days—this when fed will be bill-fed by the parents.

After the second day a small quantity of white ants fed morning and late afternoon¹ will be appreciated. This of course should be supplemented during the day with seed. At first, when white ants are fed, the parent birds will again bill-feed, but it is remarkable how quickly the chicks will ignore this method of feeding and hop into the dish and help themselves. As a matter of fact, after a few days, they simply rush the dish each time a fresh supply is made available and keep going until the last ant has disappeared. A shallow dish should be supplied for this purpose.

After about a week a few mealworms² can be added to their diet and supplied several times during the day. As they progress, seeding grasses and greens can be added and with this food diet maintained the result should be healthy and strong progeny.

A little over three weeks after incubation the young chicks will be advanced sufficiently to transfer them to a holding cage.

With some of the other species of quail it is necessary to remove either the hen or the male as soon as the eggs have been laid. However, with the King Quail, this is not necessary and both can be left in the aviary at all times and usually the male and hen will share in the brooding of the young chicks.

¹ very small mealworms, gents or fly pupae may be substituted if white ants are not available.

² full sized.