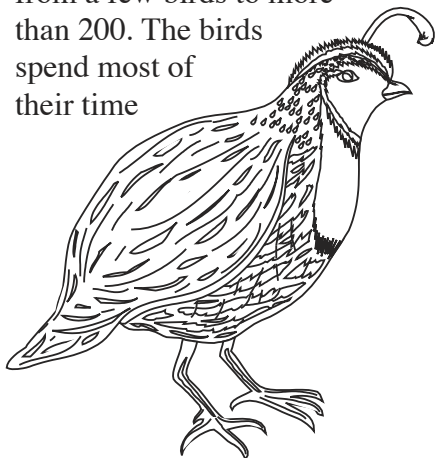


Species description

While its forward-curving, tear-drop-shaped topknot may be its most distinctive feature, the California quail is also recognized by its unique coloration. Males have a dark throat surrounded by a white outline, a gray chest, and a pattern on their bellies that looks a bit like scales on a fish. They have dark brown to gray sides. Females have a grayish brown head and a lighter, more speckled chest than the males. Quail living closer to the coast tend to have a browner coloration throughout their bodies. Quail are about 10 inches long.

Two species of quail are native to Oregon—California quail and mountain quail. They can be easily identified by the straight plume on mountain quail and the forward-curving topknot on California quail. Mountain quail usually are found at higher elevations and sometimes in drier habitats such as clearcuts and shrubby areas.

Quail are very social animals and live in coveys (family groups) in the winter. These groups can range from a few birds to more than 200. The birds spend most of their time



on the ground and fly only when they are alarmed.

They also may run when they

feel they are in danger. Running makes sense because flying out of cover leaves a bird exposed to avian (bird) predators such as hawks and falcons. Quail also can be victims of mammalian predators such as bobcats and coyotes, but they often out-run or out-manuever these predators in dense shrubs.

Since quail are such social animals, they vocalize often. The birds have a sharp cry used to locate one another, which sounds like a high-pitched “cu-ca-cow.” When quail are feeding and socializing, they often can be heard at great distances.

The female generally lays anywhere from 6 to 28 eggs at a time, usually in May to June. The eggs hatch in about 3 weeks. The chicks begin to fledge (leave the nest) after about 10 days, although they can walk just a few hours after hatching.

Quail are most visible in summer when broods (groups of young) have hatched and family groups are searching for food. Females are eager to find food because they have just completed incubating (sitting on eggs) for 3 weeks and have had little to eat.

