



Female

lores

Male

Smaller than life

# California Quail

# California Quail

## Coloring Instructions for the male

Light brown - the lores

Black - the eyes, bill, topknot, and throat

Reddish brown - the crown, belly patch and sides (except for the white patches)

Bluish gray - the breast, nape (except for the whitish spots), back, wings, tail, legs, and feet

Brownish yellow - the scaled areas on the belly

White - the band below the crown and the band between the throat and the breast

## Coloring Instructions for the female

Black - the eyes, bill, and topknot

Dark brown - the crown and eyeline

Light brown - the throat and forehead (above the eyeline)

Bluish gray - the breast, nape, and chest (except for the whitish spots)

Brownish yellow - the scaled areas on the belly

# California Quail

**Length:** 8"

**Habitat:** Resident of mixed woodlands and chaparral

**Field marks:** Large black, tear-drop shaped **topknot**

**Field notes:** Usually in flocks called **coveys** on the ground

You've met the Turkey Vulture. This week you meet the California Quail - California's state bird. Both species are quite abundant and easy to identify. But their bodies and lives are quite different.

<b>Turkey Vulture</b>	<b>California Quail</b>
Soars high, rarely seen on ground	Prefers to scurry on ground rather than fly
Soars quietly without flapping	Flies with loud, rapid wingbeat
Often alone	Almost always within a group
Lays 2 eggs a year	Lays 12-16 eggs a year
Eats carrion	Eats seeds
Silent	Loud distinctive call
Large bird	Small bird

# California Quail

Just as many of the characteristics of a vulture can be understood by what it eats, and what it must do to find carrion, many of the characteristics of the quail can be understood once we learn how it finds its food.

Quail eat mainly seeds and sprouting plants which are found on the ground, where quail spend most of their lives. They have powerful legs for running and for scratching and turning up seeds. Powerful legs mean lot of muscle on the legs which means lots of delicious meat for a predator.

If danger pounces, these birds must be able to take off quickly. Short wings help the quail fly through the brushy country they live in. Short wings can also be flapped quickly, creating rapid acceleration. Quail can take off from a standing start. Fast flapping is why their flight is so noisy. But this rapid flying is very exhausting. These birds can fly only short distances. That is one of the reasons that they do not migrate.

Fast flapping requires lots of muscle across the chest. No wonder lots of animals hunt quail and other game birds for the delicious meat on

their chests and legs. When everybody wants to eat you, it's safer staying within a watchful group than being off by yourself.

If everybody is eating you, the survivors must have lots of babies to guarantee that a few of them will survive long enough to become adults. A female California Quail lays 12 to 16 eggs in a very simple nest. It is often just a scrape on the ground lined with grasses and hidden at the base of a shrub or a tree. If there is plenty of food, the female might lay a second batch of 12 to 16 eggs after the first batch has been raised.

California Quail babies are special. They are **precocial**, which means they can walk, follow parents, and peck at the ground the day after they hatch from an egg. Imagine if a human baby was able to walk, talk and feed itself right after it was born!

# California Quail Challenges

Put a check mark in the box when you have completed the challenge.

- Identify a male California Quail. The male has a distinctly banded black and white head.
- Identify a female California Quail. The female is plainer gray-brown body overall and has a shorter topknot.
- Hear the "Chi-**CA**-go" call of the male.
- See a quail, usually a male, standing sentry on a high perch while its covey (flock) forages. He will give an alarm call if he sees danger.
- See quail take a dust bath in a shallow hole in bare, powdery ground. A quail throws dust over its body and rubs its head on the dusty ground, actively working the dust through its feathers. The dust absorbs excess body oils from the feathers. When the birds shake off the dust, they also shake off extra body oils. If quail are not able to do this, their feathers soon become matted with oil.