

# WHERE AND HOW TO HUNT SCALED QUAIL IN COLORADO

## GENERAL INFORMATION

The scaled quail is also known as the "blue quail", "Mexican quail" or "cottontop" in many parts of its range. The back, breast, and abdomen are marked with black lines giving a scaly appearance. The bird is bluish-gray in color and it has a whitish crest or topknot. All of these distinctive characteristics give rise to its vernacular names. Males and females are similar in plumage, except the white markings on the male are more buff-colored in the female. Adults of both sexes weight about 6 ounces.

The naturally high reproductive and death rates each year of scaled quail make them less susceptible to over-hunting. Protected coveys in farmyards and other unhunted areas provide a reservoir of birds that move out to fill any voids in the habitat.

## WHERE TO HUNT

All huntable populations of scaled quail are found in southeastern Colorado in areas having sand sagebrush, dense cholla cactus or pinyon-juniper. They use any tall cover such as abandoned homesites, shelterbelts, machinery and post piles. They prefer shrubby or weedy cover over open grassy areas. Look for quail in the weedy cover on the leeward side of blowouts. Overgrazed areas are poor for quail.

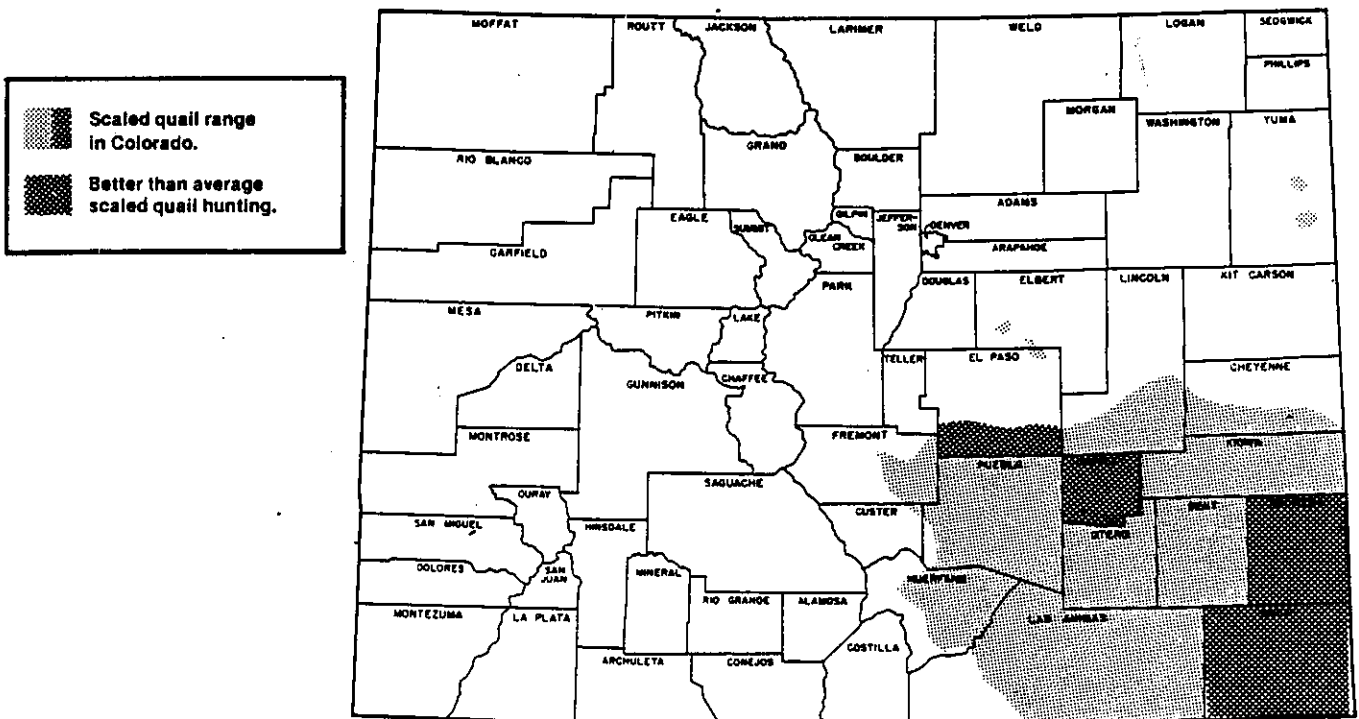
Guzzlers (artificial rain water collection and storage structures) attract quail. Drinking water is not an absolute necessity, but they are attracted to areas where water is available because of the cover associated with the areas. Water is a desirable supplement and quail will use it when available.

Coveys habitually use the same area, even the same brush pile, year after year. If you are successful in locating a covey one year, there is a good chance a covey will be there at about the same time next year. However, as winter approaches, coveys may tend to concentrate around farmyards and old homestead sites if there is inadequate food. Poor, weedy growth from a summer drought can cause this condition.

Most of the scaled quail range is on private property. Permission to hunt is required and is often given to hunters who ask in a courteous manner. The Comanche National Grassland provides a large public hunting area. Maps of this national grassland are available from the U.S. Forest Service.

## HOW TO HUNT

Once you have located an area to hunt and have spotted likely locations of coveys, approach the site quietly and with caution to prevent scaring the birds. Scaled quail are the "runningest" quail of all. A dog or a group of hunters surrounding a covey can help prevent running and force the covey to flush. If a covey is seen running ahead, you must move quickly enough to overtake the covey and break it up. If the covey is not flushed, the birds can easily outdistance a hunter. Once the covey is broken, some singles will hold where they land while others attempt to escape by running.



Some individual birds hold so tight that a hunter can almost step on them and even a good hunting dog may miss them. The original covey you saw, therefore, will decrease rapidly in size if repeatedly flushed even when few or no birds are killed.

Hot, calm, dry weather permits the quail to hear approaching hunters, which increases their tendency to run. They tend to run more in more open cover. Cold, windy, and wet weather tends to make them hold tighter.

Coveys do not usually return to their main resting areas right after being flushed and shot at. They use outlying shrub cover and flush or run much sooner when approached again. Wait until at least the following day to again hunt a covey site.

Crippling loss can be high in the sand sage-yucca-cholla cactus areas where wounded birds can easily hide. A hunting dog is a great help in reducing such losses.

#### EQUIPMENT

Most scaled quail hunters prefer a 12 or 20 gauge shotgun with a short open-bore barrel capable of delivering a wide but dense pattern of number 8 or 9 shot. Quail hunting means

quick shooting, so a good fitting, fast pointing shotgun is an advantage. Later in the season, when the birds become wary, or any time a covey has been subjected to repeated hunting, a modified-choke barrel will help hold a good pattern at the greater flushing distances.

The spiny cactus and yucca of good scaled quail range makes sturdy field boots and trousers a necessity. You cannot chase "scalies" and tiptoe around.

#### HANDLING THE MEAT

Quail should be field dressed (entrails removed) as soon as possible after being shot. The birds may be skinned or plucked in the field or at home, but the meat is best if the intestinal and lung cavities are cleaned as well and as soon as possible so the carcass can cool rapidly. The law requires that at least one feathered wing or feathered head must remain on each bird until it is at the destination where it will be consumed. Quail are most frequently roasted in an oven set at 400° F to brown (5 to 15 minutes), then turned down to 375° F to cook until done, usually about 20 additional minutes. Recipes for partridge and game hens may be used for quail.



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