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Where and how to hunt bobwhite quail in
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WHERE AND HOW TO HUNT BOBWHITE QUAIL IN COLORADO

GENERAL INFORMATION

Bobwhite quail are small, plump, game birds, weighing 6-7 ounces each. Male and female bobwhites are similar in size but have subtle differences in coloration. Males have a conspicuous white throat and stripe over the eye to the base of the neck. The white markings are buff-colored on the females. The body of the male is a relatively uniform brown to brownish black while females are more mottled with brown and buff barring. Males call with a distinctive "whistle" that resembles their name, "bobwhite".

Coveys usually have 10 to 20 birds early in the hunting season. A typical covey is comprised of an adult pair with their

young (8-15) plus 1 to 3 adults that were unsuccessful breeders. Individuals in coveys may interchange among other coveys. Small coveys may combine into one covey for an efficient number for forming a circular pattern for roosting on the ground. The roosting posture of tail to the center and head to the outside conserves body heat and maximizes observation of approaching danger.

At peak densities bobwhites rarely exceed an average of 6 birds per acre of good habitat. About 80 percent of the quail present in the fall will die from a variety of natural causes, without hunting, before the next breeding season. Hunting replaces some of the natural mortality. Quail populations are one of the least affected by hunting of all game birds. Even under heavy hunting pressure there is little chance of overshooting bobwhites.


WHERE TO HUNT


The bobwhite in Colorado are on the northwest edge of their continental range. Suitable habitat exists only in the major river and stream flood plains and sand-sage areas in good condition in eastern Colorado where brushy protective cover is adequate to protect the bobwhite. Areas heavily grazed by livestock lack brushy cover essential to bobwhites.

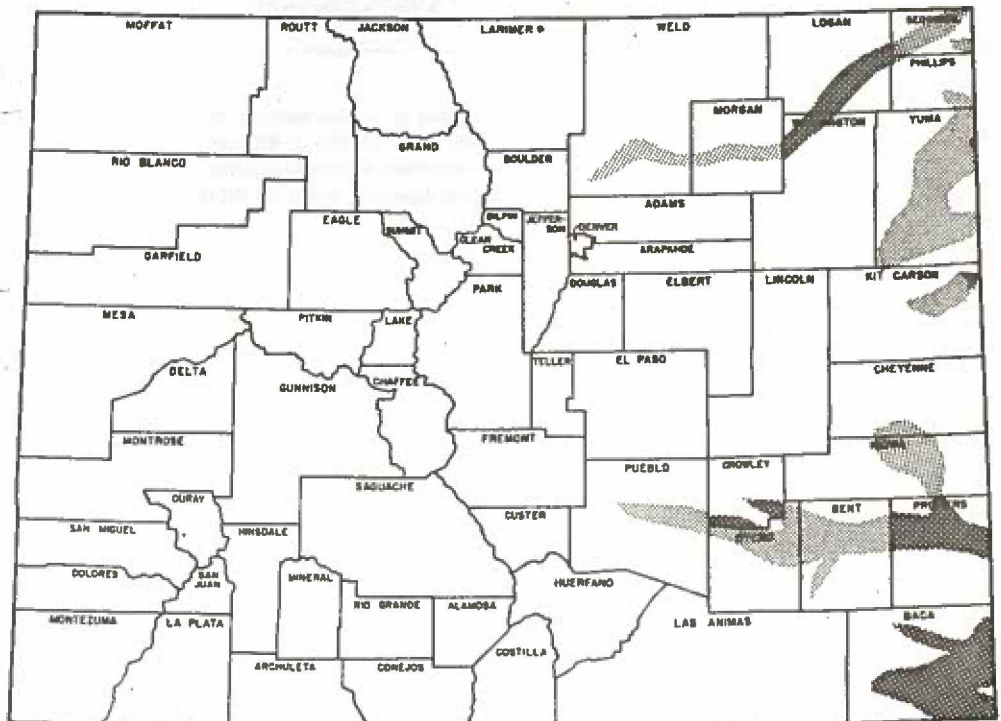
Most bobwhites are on private property where you must have permission to hunt. On public lands they are found on some state wildlife areas along the South Platte and Arkansas Rivers and portions of the Comanche National Grassland in southeastern Colorado.

HOW TO HUNT

Quail hunting is often referred to as a "gentleman's" sport because they can be effectively hunted during mid-day, in moderate to easy vegetation and terrain conditions for walking, and in mild weather. You can improve your chances of locating coveys, however, by getting out at daylight to listen for quail calling. Hunt those areas in the evening (2 hours before sundown) when the birds return to roost. In mid-day

 Bobwhite quail range in Colorado.

 Better than average bobwhite quail hunting.



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look for quail loafing in the heavier cover available.

Bobwhites spend their lives in a relatively small area. The closer feeding, resting, escape, and roosting sites are together, the smaller the area quail will use.

Coveys use cover adjacent to grain fields or edges of disturbed soil (e.g., dikes in river flood plains) where wild foods are available. In the fall, quail feed primarily on corn, millet, wild mustard, smartweed, ragweeds and sunflowers. Open the crop of the first few birds killed and try to determine what has been eaten; they may help you locate feeding areas.

Bobwhites usually try to fly to brushy cover when they are flushed. Attempt to place yourself between that cover and the birds to force them to hold longer, double back your way after flushing, or fly to more open cover than the brush so they will be easier to locate and reflush.

When a quail is separated from a covey or is the sole survivor, it will attempt to join a covey. Singles from a scattered covey tend to hide near where they land, whereas when a number of birds alight as a group they are more likely to run. The single will call, "who-wit-cha-who-wit-cha". Listening for this call, or something similar, can help you locate singles.

Bobwhites, especially in the later portion of the hunting season, "spook" from excessive noise or commotion which will cause them to run or flush out of range. Keep talking to a minimum and work a hunting dog close and not too fast. Use of a well-trained hunting dog has been shown to almost double the number of birds bagged. The recovery of wounded birds may be increased by 30 percent.

EQUIPMENT

The firearms most commonly used are 12 or 20 gauge shotguns with short, open-bore barrels capable of quick pointing. A small shot, 8's or 9's, is most often used, especially early in the season (November) when the birds tend to flush closer and the young are not yet heavily feathered. A change to 7½ shot in a modified-choke barrel can improve success in a late season (December) when the birds flush at greater ranges and are more fully feathered.

Good fitting field boots are needed because most quail hunting in Colorado requires a lot of walking. Pants and jacket should be sturdy enough to protect you from thick brush.

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 to season quail.



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