

## Mountain Quail Report

### A Tale of two Quail

One of the pleasures of living in the Wenatchee Valley is watching the California Quail in their daily activities. They are ubiquitous. It is amazing to think that they aren't even native to Washington state. In reading about the California Quail, one occasionally finds mention of the Mountain Quail, which is a species native to this state. Some of the species distribution maps even appear to show Mountain Quail living in Chelan and Douglas Counties. Never having seen a Mountain Quail, I decided to find out more about them.

First of all, though they look quite similar to California Quail. They are easily identified by their barred wings, vertical double black head plumes, larger size, and lack of sexual differentiation. The females do have slightly shorter head plumes.

The Mountain Quail has not been studied a great deal. Anything more than short descriptions of them especially in recent literature. The most complete one on the Mountain Quail in Washington and Idaho I could find was done for the U S Forest Service in 1995. This report was not very optimistic about the future of this species in Eastern Washington. The Mountain Quail population on this side of the Cascades was greatly diminished by 1995, and this trend is still in place. If there were once populations of these Quail in Central Washington they have long since died out.

What are the reasons for the loss of Mountain Quail in Eastern Washington? In the drier climate on the east side of the mountains, this bird seems only to be able to survive in riparian areas. The degradation of these riparian areas by livestock grazing, housing encroachment, dam flooding, agricultural monoculture close to streams and recent prolonged drought conditions have severely restricted potential habitat for these birds. This species is now restricted to parts of the blue mountains areas along the Oregon border. The Mountain Quail has gone from being a game bird with a yearly season to an uncommon protected species east of the Cascades.

Somewhat ironically, the Mountain Quail seems to be increasing in range and population on the west side of the Cascades. The quail seem to find clear cut areas with shrub regrowth and burned over areas in the west to provide suitable habitat for their needs.

There does seem to be some interest in plans to revive Quail populations in Idaho by translocating birds from western Oregon. But I didn't find any information about similar plans in Eastern Washington. It would seem that the present pattern of climate conditions and degradation of streams and rivers makes the survival of the Mountain Quail in much of Eastern Washington problematic at best.

I find it interesting that two quail species that appear quite similar have such different abilities to adapt to the environmental changes occurring presently. The California Quail seem to thrive in a variety of urban, agricultural and undeveloped areas while the Mountain Quail seem unable to adapt.

How do these two species differ? First of all, the Mountain Quail seem to require heavy ground cover to live in. This makes them difficult to study. Some reports say hunting dogs are required to find them. Instead of flushing into the air when approached, they stay in the heavy brush or walk away through the vegetation. This makes them hard to find and even if their location is known, their behavior is hard to observe. Mountain Quail have a sort of migratory lifestyle staying in the mountains during the non snow covered times and walking to the lowlands in the winter months.

This would seem to imply that the two species would be in competition during the winter months. The general feeling is the competition is not significant. Predators such as hawks, owls, coyotes, cats wild and domestic, foxes etc would seem to be the same for both species.

Mountain Quail just seem to be more adversely affected by drought and changes of habitat. Perhaps one must be satisfied to enjoy the California Quail here or travel west of the Cascades to see Mountain Quail.

References:

Mountain Quail status report

A preliminary document to conservation assessment for Mountain Quail

Prepared for:

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[birdsna.org/Species-Account/bna/species/mouqua/intro](http://birdsna.org/Species-Account/bna/species/mouqua/intro)

Bringing back the elusive Mountain Quail to Idaho and Eastern Washington

[idfg.idaho.gov/pres/bringing-back-elusive-mountain-quail-idaho-and-eastern-washington](http://idfg.idaho.gov/pres/bringing-back-elusive-mountain-quail-idaho-and-eastern-washington)

<http://maps.iucnredlist.org/map.html?id=22679591>