

# Upland Game Bird



The upland game hunting season begins on the first weekend of May and generally lasts until mid-August - providing plenty of action after the duck season closes.

Pheasant and quail hunting is fast and furious, and a successful day with a good dog will remain a highlight for a long time.

## Pheasant - Peihana

Pheasants are one of New Zealand's most sought after game birds. Their bright plumage and superb eating qualities make them popular with all game bird hunters.

### Pheasants in New Zealand

The first English pheasants arrived in Wellington in 1842 and further liberations resulted in the bird being abundant in both islands by 1870. The pheasant population then plunged into a remarkable decline, from which it has never recovered, due to eating poisoned grain used for rabbit eradication followed by the release of stoats and weasels to quell the rabbit plague.

However, there are still enough pheasants for hunting, assisted in some areas by annual releases of hand reared stock. It is only permitted to shoot male birds.

### Where to Hunt Pheasants

The pheasant could almost be called a North Island species with its stronghold in the warmer climate of the far north. In the South Island pheasants are limited to the Nelson area and some coastal riverbeds, plus a few other isolated habitats in Canterbury.

### Habitat

Pheasants have no down and dislike damp conditions. They are found in coastal dune country, exotic forestry, lupin, broom, box-thorn, ink weed and briar patches. Look for patches of inkweed, rough covered gullies and crops such as maize.

## Behaviour

Pheasant feed on a wide range of berries, seeds and other vegetation. Cock pheasants are polygamous and mate with several hens. Nesting usually begins in September and may continue through to January. Six to 14 eggs are laid in a hollow in the ground located in thick cover.

## How to Hunt

In the North Island, pheasant hunting season generally begins on the first weekend of May and generally lasts until mid-August. However, regulations vary between each Fish & Game region and it is important to check local game bird hunting regulations. For example, in some regions the season is a month shorter and in the South Island pheasant shooting may only be permitted for a single day. Please remember, you can only take male birds (roosters). It is illegal to shoot hen pheasants (females); they are protected as the providers of next year's crop.

In some regions exotic forestry blocks are available for pheasant hunting under the control of local Fish & Game Councils. Some forestry blocks are 'open' which means they can be hunted by any number of people. Other blocks operate on a ballot system where hunters require a permit that must be applied for well before the start of the game bird hunting season. Most forestry companies require you to obtain a hunting permit.

Pheasants are vocal birds, particularly towards the end of the season as territorial disputes are settled. As a result they can be easily located. They have good hearing and sight and successful hunting requires elements of silence and surprise.

When pheasants are flushed they often glide for quite a distance before landing and running at high speed. Often they will sit tight in dense vegetation. One trick is to stop frequently, which can unnerve a hiding bird in

thinking that you've seen it, and send it into flight. You can also team up with other hunters to walk in a line through crops and flush pheasants ahead.

The best pheasant hunting occurs on bright days. Sunny spells have the birds moving about from daybreak to mid morning and again from mid afternoon to dusk.

## Gun Dogs

A good dog is almost essential as pheasants can be difficult to flush from cover. While cock birds are easily located and flushed, shot birds can be difficult to find. Breeds like labradors, pointers and spaniels are very useful as they flush and retrieve the birds.

## Equipment

Open choked shotguns used in conjunction with number 6 shot offer hunters a good chance of bagging a pheasant.

Due to the typical terrain and weather, pheasant hunting requires different clothing than waterfowl hunting - lightweight boots and clothing. Because pheasant hunters often hunt in a group through scrubby terrain many hunters use brightly coloured hunting vests or hats as safety items. Vests also have plenty of room for ammunition and retrieved birds.

## More Information

If you would like more information on pheasant hunting in your area, please click on the map above to select your local region. Here you can read all about local regulations and hunting spots and find contact details for your nearest Fish & Game office, who can give you specific local advice.

Alternatively, you can contact the Fish & Game New Zealand Council on **(04) 499 4767**.

# Upland Game Bird

Quail hunting is an exciting and demanding form of game bird hunting. Quail are small, fast flying birds, which means quick and accurate shooting is required.

## Quail in New Zealand

The native New Zealand Quail was uncommon during early European settlement in NZ and considered extinct by about 1870. Californian quail were introduced to Nelson in 1865 and other parts of NZ soon followed. Today quail are the most common upland game bird in both the North and South Islands. New Zealand has three species of quail; californian, brown and bobwhite. Californian quail are spread throughout New Zealand, while brown and bobwhite quail are more prevalent in the North Island. All can be hunted during the annual game bird season with a valid game bird hunting licence.

Please view more information on each species at the bottom of this page.

### Quail Habitat

Habitat Quail are found throughout New Zealand but prefer semi-arid conditions. Coastal dune areas, exotic forests, scrubby shingle river beds and hill country are favoured habitat and quail are likely to roost in briar, broom, boxthorn, matagouri, manuka or gorse.

### Hunting Quail

Quail are a challenge to hunt. They are noisy, 'talkative' birds making it easy to identify where a group or 'covey' may be resting but their rapid speed and small size make the shooting challenging.

An undisturbed covey will sit tightly on the ground or in bushes. When they are flushed by the hunter or by the hunter's dog the birds explode quickly into the air. Often a rapid whirring of wings and a dark shape flying quickly past are the only indication that you have flushed a covey! When a covey is flushed it is very important that the hunter picks out individual birds to shoot and gives them plenty of lead. It is pointless to raise your shotgun and shoot blindly into the large covey flying quickly away. Quail do not fly long distances and will quickly return to ground where they re-group and sit tight, so exciting hunting can occur in a fairly small area.

Ideal weather conditions for quail hunting differ from that of duck hunting. Bright, warm and sunny days are the most productive as in these conditions the birds will be calling and moving about.

### Gun Dogs

Gun dogs are an important asset when quail hunting. The birds are small and can be difficult to flush and find when they have been shot. Retrievers such as labradors and spaniels will flush coveys and retrieve shot game. Because quail hunters often have to cross harsh terrain it is important that dogs are fit and that their pads are frequently checked for thorns and splitting.

### Equipment

Open choked shotguns are recommended in conjunction with number 7 or 8 shot. Due to the difficult terrain and warmer weather, quail hunting requires different clothing than waterfowl hunting - lightweight boots and clothing.

Because quail hunters often hunt in a group staggered across a line many hunters use a brightly coloured hunting vest or hat as a safety item. The vest also has plenty of room for ammunition and retrieved quail.

### More Information

If you would like more information on quail hunting in your area, please click on the map above to select your local region. Here you can read all about local regulations and hunting spots and find contact details for your nearest Fish & Game office, who will be able to advise you with specific local requirements and recommendations.

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# Upland Game Bird



## Californian Quail - Tikaokao

### History

The native New Zealand quail was uncommon during early European settlement in New Zealand and considered extinct by 1870.

Californian quail were introduced to Nelson in 1865. Other provinces followed and populations expanded so rapidly that, in 1890, thousands of Californian quail were canned or frozen and exported from Nelson to London.

Later, the release of stoats and weasels for rabbit control took its inevitable toll and in some locations where quail were formerly numerous they disappeared completely.

However, quail are still the most common of the introduced upland game birds and are found in both islands.

### Habitat

In much of the North Island quail habitats overlap those of the pheasant. In the South Island, quail are found in all regions but there are fewer in Westland and coastal Southland.

### Identifying Features & Behaviour

Unlike pheasants, quail are gregarious and live together in coveys of between 10 and 100 with exceptional coveys of up to 400 Californian Quail being reported.

Coveys break up into breeding pairs in late winter and the first eggs appear in late September.

Nesting may continue through to February.

The nest is concealed in thick cover on the ground and up to 20 eggs may be laid.

After hatching the chicks are very active and are able to fly at three weeks.

The hunting season in most regions begins in May and continues until the end of August.

# Upland Game Bird



## Bobwhite Quail

### History

The least common of New Zealand upland gamebirds, the bobwhite was released from Auckland to Southland in 1898 and 1899.

### Current Status

Today their range is much reduced but small numbers of birds persist in South Auckland and Northern Hawkes Bay.

The populations of bobwhites are augmented with releases of hand reared birds by enthusiastic aviculturalists.

# Upland Game Bird



## Brown Quail - Kuera

### History

Brown quail were introduced to New Zealand as game birds in the 1860s and 1870s. However, the South Island liberations failed and now they are common only north of Auckland and in parts of the Bay of Plenty.

Their natural range is southern Indonesia, New Guinea, and Australia. It has been mooted that a species of the Australian brown quail was also native to New Zealand but the introduction of stocks of the same species from Australia makes it difficult to confirm.

### Identifying Features & Behaviour

The brown quail are an overall brownish colour, finely patterned with black and when scuttling for cover may be mistaken for a rat.

### Habitat

Rougher country is preferred with places to hide although, if pressed, will fly upwards with a whir of wings before landing in cover and quickly disappearing.

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## Chukar

### History

A late arrival to New Zealand the chukar (*Alectoris chukar*) was first introduced from India in 1926 and later into Marlborough from Iranian stock.

The two forms are now presumably well hybridised. As recently as 1987 chukar have been released in Fish & Game New Zealand's Hawkes Bay region where they are still completely protected.

### Habitat

Primarily a South Island species, the chukar is at home on high, semi arid shale and rocky slopes, interspersed with areas of low tussock and scattered sub alpine vegetation. Found at altitudes of up to 2,000 metres on slopes east of the main divide, chukar populations extend from Marlborough to Otago.

### Current Status

Chukar pair up and begin nesting in September. Clutches are usually large with 10 to 18 eggs produced but despite this the chukar population is in decline.

### How to Hunt

In those districts where Chukar may still be hunted the season begins in May and continues until the end of August. Please make sure you check local regulations before attempting to hunt Chukar.

### More Information

If you want more information on game bird hunting in your area, please select your local region above right. Here you can read all about local regulations and hunting spots and find contact details for your nearest Fish & Game office, who can offer very useful and specific local advice.

Alternatively, you can contact the Fish & Game New Zealand Council on **(04) 499 4767**.