



Quail Hunting for Beginners Lesson Plan / Instructor Guide

COURSE TITLE: Quail Hunting for Beginners

INSTRUCTIONAL GOAL:

Students will learn the basics of how to hunt quail, some of the gear and equipment needed, as well as some of the pertinent rules and regulations.

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

Upon completion of this block of instruction, the participant(s) will be able to:

1. Name the four species of quail that can be hunted in New Mexico.
2. Name the species of quail that prefers to run away from danger.
3. Name the daily bag limit for Montezuma quail.
4. Name one of the four types of sporting arms that can be used to hunt quail.
5. Name the term used for a baby quail.
6. Name the term used for a group of quail.
7. Name the legal shooting hours for quail.

INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS: PowerPoint lecture.

HANDOUTS: New Mexico Small Game Hunting Rules & Information Booklet
<http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us/home/publications/>

COURSE DURATION: Approximately 30 minutes.

CURRICULUM REFERENCES:

New Mexico Department of Game and Fish website, Hunting tab, Information by Species, Upland Game, Quail. <http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us/hunting/information-by-animal/upland-game/>

Grand View Outdoors, "The Best Shotguns, Chokes And Loads For Hunting Quail,"
<https://www.grandviewoutdoors.com/bird-hunting/upland/the-best-shotguns-chokes-and-loads-for-hunting-quail>

Biota Information System of New Mexico (BISON-M), <https://bison-m.org/>.

The Cornell Lab website, "All About Birds," <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/>

Project Upland Magazine, "Mearns Quail - An Upland Game Bird Profile," written by Ryan Lisson,
<https://projectupland.com/mearns-quail-hunting/mearns-quail/>

Desert USA website, "Gambel's Quail," <https://www.desertusa.com/birds/gambel-quail.html>

Wikipedia, "Northern bobwhite," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_bobwhite

Partners in Flight, "Population Estimates Database,"
<http://pif.birdconservancy.org/PopEstimates/Database.aspx>

ADDITIONAL READING MATERIAL:

New Mexico Department of Game and Fish's website to purchase New Mexico hunting licenses, stamps and permits, link to the most current rules and information booklet, sunrise and sunset times, plus tons of other exciting features.

SAFETY CONSIDERATION: Don't use loaded firearms in and around the home.

EQUIPMENT, PERSONNEL, AND SUPPLIES NEEDED: Laptop (with presentation uploaded), projector or screen, jump drive with presentation or uploaded to a computer, power cords (if needed), extension cords (if needed) and the New Mexico Small Game Hunting Rules and Information Booklet. <http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us/home/publications/>

NOTE: Please check out additional reading material and check out references for more material to look over.

TARGET AUDIENCE: Beginning and novice level quail hunters.

COURSE PREREQUISITES: None.

EVALUATION STRATEGY: Written Final Test.

AUTHOR & ORIGINATION DATE: John Martsh, August 20, 2020.

REVISION / REVIEW DATE(S): N/A.

REVISED / REVIEWED BY: N/A.

CRITERION TEST:

1. Name the four species of quail that can be hunted in New Mexico.
2. Name the species of quail that prefers to run away from danger.

3. What is the daily bag limit for Montezuma quail?
4. Name one of the four types of sporting arms that can be used to hunt quail.
5. What is the term used for a baby quail?
6. What is the term used for a group of quail?
7. What are the shooting hours for quail?

CRITERION TEST ANSWERS:

1. Gambel's, Montezuma, northern bobwhite and scaled
2. Scaled quail
3. Five
4. Shotguns, muzzleloading shotguns, bows and crossbows
5. Chick
6. Covey
7. ½ hour before sunrise until ½ hour after sunset

COURSE OUTLINE:

- I. Introduction
 - A. Give name and Title
- II. Give Goals and Objectives
- III. Species of Quail
- IV. Definitions
- V. Practice Shooting
- VI. Preseason Scouting
- VII. Hunting Techniques
- VIII. Clothing
- IX. Essential Gear and Equipment
- X. Rules and Regulations
 1. Know all the game laws regarding quail hunting
 2. Remain ethical
- XI. Conclusion

COURSE CONTENT:

Course Introduction and Overview

Why would anyone want to become a quail hunter? Quail offers flavorful, non-gamey, white meat. Every hunter experiences a rush of adrenaline when a covey is flushed and wings whirl into the air. Their aerial acrobatics provide a formidable target for the hunter to hit. A small initial investment is required to purchase the gear to hunt them for many future years. Hiking with or without a dog to locate quail can be a good exercise for a hunter. Lastly, quail are quick and simple to field dress.

Goals and Objectives

This presentation aims to inform the novice and beginning quail hunter about the hunting method needed to harvest quail. Additionally, students will learn about the necessary gear and equipment and some pertinent rules and regulations.

After this presentation, the student will be able to:

1. Name the four species of quail that can be hunted in New Mexico.
2. Name the species of quail that prefers to run away from danger.
3. Name the daily bag limit for Montezuma quail.
4. Name one of the four types of sporting arms that can be used to hunt quail.
5. Name the term used for a baby quail.
6. Name the term used for a group of quail.
7. Name the legal shooting hours for quail.

Instructor Notes:

Show photographs of the different species of quail.

Species of Quail

Quail are shy, elusive birds that tend to hide and hunker down when danger approaches. They have compact, rounded, squat bodies and short, strong wings. When flushed from cover, quail typically fly a short distance, land and return to hiding. Sometimes a flushed bird will startle a hunter because of its loud whirring wing beats. Quail hiding in or behind vegetation are hard to spot when they are immobile. Male quail are more brightly colored than drab females. Females are slightly heavier than the males, sometimes up to half an ounce more. Quail are social birds, tending to stay in large groups, known as coveys. According to the Partners in Flight population estimates database, the total United States population of Gambel's quail is 5.2 million, Montezuma quail is 300 thousand, northern bobwhite quail is 4.4 million and scaled quail is 2.4 million. New Mexico, Texas, Arizona and California are the only states with four different quail species to hunt. Quail have various predators and that fact, coupled with habitat loss, poor weather and hunting, make their lifespan relatively short.

New Mexico has four species of quail that can legally be hunted. These are Gambel's, Montezuma, northern bobwhite and scaled. Each of these species has different coloration and physical attributes that make them unique. Also, each species has specific habitat requirements.

Gambel's quail (*Callipepla gambelii*) average 11 inches in height and weigh about 6.5 ounces. The male has a gray back, chest and tail, with a black belly surrounded by white. Its sides are chestnut brown with white streaks. The male's head has a black, comma-shaped plume extending from the forehead, with a chestnut crown, black bill, face and eyes bordered by white. The female has the same colored body as the male, except she is missing the black belly. Also, her face is gray-colored and her plume isn't as thick as the males. Sometimes, a bird will have two plumes. Gambel's are typically found near a water source, though their home range is up to a mile in diameter. The adult quail are vegetarians, eating berries, fruits, nuts, cacti seeds, forbs, shrubs and trees. They feed on the ground in the mornings and afternoons. To avoid predators, they typically roost in trees and shrubs overnight, up to several feet above the ground. When danger is nearby, they will hide in thick undergrowth rather than run away. When alarmed, they call "chip-chip-chip," and to locate fellow covey members they whistle, "chi-CA-go-go." Their average life span is 1.5 years. Gambel's prefer habitat in desert foothills, brushy arroyos and washes, river drainages, cultivated fields and suburban desert neighborhoods. They are commonly found in and around vegetation such as acacia, cactus, mesquite and skunk bush. These quail are found in the southwestern portion of the state, all the counties encompassing the Rio Grande river, as well as Lincoln, Otero and San Juan counties.

Montezuma quail (*Cyrtonyx montezumae*) are also called Mearn's quail or harlequin quail because of the male's distinctive black and white facial pattern. They are one of the shortest quail species, averaging 8.75 inches in height and 6 ounces in weight. These quail are the hardest to flush, hiding until the hunter is within feet of them. Montezuma quail eat wood sorrel and chufa bulbs and sedge tubers, which they dig up with their clawed feet. Often, they will feed on seeds, pinon nuts, acorns, juniper berries and fruits. In the summer, they forage mostly on insect adults, pupae and larvae. A short, squat bird, their coloration is remarkable. The chest and belly are dark brown. Their sides are gray with interspersed white spots. Its wings and back are tan with cream-colored streaks running downward and black oblong spots. The face is white with black circular markings with a black upper bill and a blue lower bill on the male. A cinnamon crest sits on top of its head. The female has a dark brown chest, belly and sides and a tan face with no white or black. Their home range is estimated to be 200 yards in radius. They can be found at elevations of 3,500 to 10,000 feet. By far, the largest threat to Montezuma quail is cattle overgrazing of their habitat. They prefer steep slopes, oak and pine-oak scrub habitats and a grassy understory. This quail is found in the southern part of the state, south of I-40.

Northern Bobwhite (*Colinus virginianus*) are 10 inches in height and weigh about five ounces. The male has a white eyebrow and throat patch bordered by black, while the female has brown ones without the black border. The chest and belly are white with black scallops, the wings, sides and back are mottled brown and the tail is gray. Males and females have pale legs and feet. They have an average lifespan of one year. Their home range is 11 - 37 acres. Deep snow and ice are the worst enemy for bobwhites. Bobwhites feed on plants including cultivated grains, partridge peas, wild berries and seeds and supplement this diet with small invertebrates such as beetles, crickets, grasshoppers, snails, spiders and ticks. The name bobwhite comes from the whistling

call it produces, “bob-WHITE.” At night, the bobwhite covey sleeps on the ground in a circle, with tails pointed inward and heads outward. Their year-round habitat consists of wood lines, open woodlands, grasslands and cultivated fields. This quail is found all along the eastern border of New Mexico.

Scaled quail (*Callipepla squamata*) are named for the resemblance of their neck, breast and belly feathers to fish scales. This bird is also called a “blue quail” due to its blueish back feathers and “cottontop” because of a white crest of feathers on top of its head that looks like a cotton swab. A male has a cream-colored throat while females have a brown throat. Scaled quail are 10 inches in height and weigh 6.5 ounces. The main diet for scaled quail includes mesquite seeds, croton seeds, green vegetation and snout beetles. In the summer, they consume insects such as grasshoppers, cicadas and scarab beetles. Scaled quail feed twice daily, once in the morning and another time right before dusk. Ideal habitat for scaled quail is arid arroyos, washes, canyons, rocky inclines, hills and plateaus with a checkerboard of sandy, open ground, short herbaceous vegetation and scattered brush. They are often found around prickly pear cactus, mesquite, scrubs and grasses. These quail do not need a nearby water source and were found to have home ranges as large as 60 acres. When danger approaches, scaled quail prefer to run rather than hide. They are more apt to hide after running and flushing the first time. Due to habitat loss, malnutrition, hunting and predation, it is estimated that 99.9% of all scaled quail never reach their fifth year of life. Scaled quail are found in every county in the state.

Definitions

Male quail - cock
Female quail - hen
Baby quail - chick
Group of quail - covey

Instructor Notes:

Show photographs of pre-season scouting and two hunting techniques.

Practice Shooting

Since quail can be such an elusive target to hit, it is encouraged for the novice hunter to practice shotgun shooting. This is best done with the same shotgun the hunter will use while hunting. Some of the best practice is shooting a sporting clays course where the clays are thrown to simulate hunting different small game species. Another popular course to reproduce hunting situations with clays thrown from different angles and speeds is called five stand. Should the hunter find neither of these courses close to their locality, they can try shooting either trap or skeet. Trap and skeet contain repeatable target presentations, so they don't imitate a hunting situation like sporting clays or five stand. They are still better than no practice because the hunter can adopt a good stance, practice leading a target and develop a good follow-through. The more practice a new hunter has before the season, the more quail they will hit and frustration can be avoided.

Preseason Scouting

An ideal time to scout would be a week (or less) before quail season opens. Most quail species are home-bodies, so they will probably be found in the same general area during the hunting season. Look for quail around mesquite, cactus, bushes, open grasslands, oak scrub and near cultivated fields. It is beneficial to scout as many areas as possible, so you have backup locations if your “go-to” place has other hunters. When scouting, look for quail footprints on loose dirt or quail running through vegetation in front of you.

When you have found areas to hunt, ascertain the land statuses. The land status will determine what agency or landowner is in charge of the land. The field workers at these agencies could offer hunting tips if asked nicely. Local landowners should be consulted if the land status is private. You never know if a landowner will allow you to hunt on their land unless you ask. Make sure you obtain written and signed permission to hunt on private land. The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish leases quail hunting access to some private lands through a program called Open Gate. Please click on this link: <http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us/hunting/maps/open-gate-program/>, for a list of these properties statewide.

Hunting Methods

There is one hunting method used to hunt quail, and it can be done with or without a dog. This method is known as flushing. Quail tend to hide behind concealment and as stationary as possible. Flushing is when they are forced to fly (or flush) into the air to escape the perceived threat. A dog uses its nose to find birds and can cover ground more quickly than a lone hunter. Once a dog can smell a single bird or a covey, they will wait patiently, pointing at the bird(s) with a front paw and nose. The hunter moves past the dog, scares the bird(s) into the air, and fires. A hunter without a dog either tries to run up on the quail they have spotted or tries to scare unseen birds from vegetation or other cover they are hiding behind or in. The hunter is always moving, either to a spotted quail or through heavy vegetation the birds could be hiding within. When a bird flushes, the hunter mounts the shotgun, follows the quail calmly with the front sight, leads it appropriately and then gently squeezes the trigger.

Clothing

Quail season takes place from mid-November to mid-February, so dress appropriately for this time of year in New Mexico. Camouflage colored clothing isn't required to hunt quail, but darker, muted clothing tends to work best. Stick to dark blue, dark green, gray, brown and black. Try to avoid wearing t-shirts with bright logos and artwork. Quail hunting can require quite a bit of hiking, so comfortable footwear is a must. Of the four quail species in New Mexico, the Montezuma quail will require the most intense hiking because they are found at higher elevations than the rest and are less numerous. A cap or wide-brimmed hat is helpful to keep the sun out of your eyes.

Instructor Notes:

Show photographs of the different gear used to hunt quail. Also, show the equipment needed to clean and store the meat.

Essential Gear and Equipment

There is some essential gear that the quail hunter needs to take into the field, including a sporting arm, ammunition, an upland game hunting vest, hearing protection, a hunting license and stamps and binoculars with a harness. The equipment that can stay inside the vehicle includes a fillet knife and game shears, an ice chest and a gallon freezer bag.

A hunter can legally use one of four different sporting arms to shoot quail. These include shotguns, muzzleloading shotguns, crossbows and bows. A shotgun is the sporting arm of choice for the vast majority of quail hunters. The other sporting arm types are rarely used for quail and aren't recommended for beginners since they don't offer multiple shots. Using a crossbow or bows can be extremely difficult when trying to hit a flying quail with an arrow or bolt.

A semi-automatic or pump-action shotgun is perfect for the beginner to take multiple, fast shots. You need the ability for numerous shots because quail are quick and can be hard to hit. They can flush from unseen spots, fly quickly and are small targets. Bolt-action and break-action shotguns, either single or double-barreled, would not be recommended for the beginning hunter. This is because they either cycle shells slower or reduce the number of shotgun shells available for the hunter to shoot. A shotgun plug is not necessary to hunt upland game, so the hunter is not limited to only three shells in the shotgun. Quail can be shot with various shotgun gauges, including .410 bore, 28 gauge, 20 gauge, 16 gauge and 12 gauge. By far, the most popular gauges for quail are 20 and 12 gauges. The beginner would be better off purchasing a 12 gauge because it is more versatile. It allows them to hunt all upland and migratory species. The caveat is that if the beginner is diminutive in stature or adverse to recoil, then a twenty gauge would be more suited to the hunter.

Quail are quick, small birds. Most shots will be taken from short yardages, assuming the quail aren't spooky. A majority will flush when the hunter approaches close to them. Depending on a hunter's reaction time, the widest chokes would be preferred. They allow fewer shotgun pellets to penetrate the meat. Skeet and Improved Cylinder chokes are perfect choke sizes for 25- to 35-yard shots. They will also allow enough dispersion for up-close shots to not ruin the meat.

Quail can be hunted with shotgun shells filled with lead shot. These shotgun shells are less expensive than those with non-toxic shot and, on average, have a longer effective range. A 2-3/4" shell is the ideal length in any of the shotgun gauge sizes. Also, 2-3/4" shells are more inexpensive than 3" or 3-1/2".

Always be aware of your shotgun gauge and the ammunition you are putting into it.

Since the shotgun is the most common sporting arm for quail, a hunter can pick from various shot sizes. Shot sizes #5, #6 and #7 will allow the hunter a closer shot than #7.5, #8 or #9. The larger shot paired with a wide choke will distribute a wider pattern and won't ruin all the meat on a small bird. Conversely, the larger shot will travel a farther maximum range than the smaller sized shot. That means the total effective lethal range will be farther with the slightly larger shot sizes and little meat will be wasted. The best overall shot size for quail will be #6.

A lightweight upland hunting vest with lots of pockets is perfect for the hiking quail hunter. This vest allows the hunter's arms to have a free range of mobility. The pockets will enable the hunter to store a hunting license, extra shotgun shells, harvested quail and plastic grocery bags to hold quail before depositing them into a vest pocket. Also, spent shotgun shells should be stashed inside a pocket so they can be thrown away later.

Hearing protection is crucial when shooting firearms in any situation. The two types of hearing protection are ear muffs (fit over the ear) and earplugs (fit inside the ear canal). Earplugs cancel out more noise, are cheaper and more portable than ear muffs. On the other hand, earmuffs are easier and faster to put on than earplugs. They also tend to last longer and are harder to lose than earplugs. Choose the best hearing protection for you.

Always have a hunting license and the required stamps with you in the field. These include a game hunting license, a habitat management and access validation and a habitat stamp if hunting on Bureau of Land Management or Forest Service lands. All youth under 18 need either a hunter education number or a New Mexico Mentored Youth hunter number. Keeping these documents on your person will save you a long walk back to your vehicle if a Conservation Officer checks you in the field while actively hunting.

Binoculars are useful for locating quail that are feeding, drinking or walking on the ground. Quail naturally blend into their environment, so when scouting or hunting, it is best to look for any movement to spot them. If hunting without a dog, once they are spotted, you want to get to them as quickly as possible. This means running or jogging if the terrain allows. That is because they move very quickly and can be far from where you spotted them if you wait too long to close distance. A binoculars harness alleviates neck fatigue, frees your hands and makes them instantly available.

The following equipment can be kept inside the vehicle. Game shears and a fillet knife can make fast work of field cleaning. Quail are simple to clean; the feathers and skin can be pulled off by hand. The head, wings and one leg can be snipped off with the game shears if keeping the bird whole. Remember, you need to keep one leg and foot attached to the bird for identification purposes. Then the bird can be gutted with the fillet knife. If you decide to breast out your quail instead, just use the fillet knife to cut out the breasts after pulling off the skin and feathers. Keep the carcasses until you arrive at your residence for identification purposes.

Be sure to keep a clean gallon freezer bag inside your vehicle. Once you are done cleaning your quail, they can be stored inside this freezer bag. This will go into your cooler with ice packs to keep the meat cool.

Instructor Notes:

Show a slide with a Top Ten list of rules and regulations.

Rules and Regulations

All of the rules and regulations pertinent to quail hunting won't be listed here because there are too many. Each hunters' responsibility is to know all of the laws and rules before hunting any

game species. Studying the current small game rules and information booklet and having a copy of it in the field will allow the hunter to know the rules and follow them. Below are a few of the significant rules and regulations, but make sure you know all of them before going quail hunting.

1. All quail can be hunted ½ hour before sunrise to ½ an hour after sunset.
2. One foot of each quail must remain attached to the bird until it is at a residence, taxidermist, meat processing facility or place of final cold storage.
3. The bag limit for bobwhite, Gambel's and scaled quail is 15 per day (singly or aggregate). The possession limit is 30 quail. ***
4. The bag limit for Montezuma quail is five per day and they can count towards the 15 quail bag limit if hunting multiple species. The possession limit is 10 Montezuma quail. ***
5. The quail season is three months long, from November 15 through February 15. ***

***Bag limits and season dates are subject to change. Please consult the current Small Game Hunting Rules and Information booklet for the most up-to-date information.

It is unlawful to:

6. Shoot at game on, from or across any paved, graded or maintained public road or within the fenced right-of-way of any paved, graded or maintained road.
7. Enter private property without written permission from the landowner, manager or lease.
8. Exceed the daily bag limit or have more than the legal possession limit of any species.
9. Shoot at protected species or artificial wildlife from a motor vehicle.
10. Anyone taking small game must transport the edible portions of the meat from the field for human consumption.

It is encouraged to talk to fellow hunters if you see them attempting to violate any game laws. This includes asking them to pick up any litter they might have accumulated while hunting. Most hunters aren't intentionally trying to break game laws but instead are unaware of specific ones.

Please always adhere to ethics in addition to following state game laws. Just because something is legal doesn't mean it is necessarily ethical. For instance, it is the ethical responsibility of the hunter to pay attention to game numbers. If the hunter observes the local quail population is low due to any number of environmental factors, the hunter could choose to only harvest two or three quail for a meal and not shoot a limit of fifteen.

Conclusion

Even though it isn't mandatory for individuals 18 and older, a hunter education class is strongly encouraged for everyone to take. This class will teach the new hunter how to handle different types of firearms safely, hunt legally and ethically, cross fences and other barriers alone and with a friend while carrying a firearm. These are just a few of the many essential topics covered in a hunter education class.

A good mentor is fundamental for a new hunter. They can teach all the rules and regulations, lend encouragement if frustration sets in, answer any questions a newbie might have and give advice on where to hunt. They can also let you borrow their gear while learning the ropes. Remember to have fun whenever hunting and also to respect your quarry.

After you have hunted quail a few times, please take the time to share this knowledge with someone else. Quail hunting is easy for an experienced hunter to teach an interested, patient person. Hunting will only survive as a tradition if we are willing to share our knowledge and experience with new people. Comparatively, hunting quail requires a minimal amount of inexpensive gear and can be hunted during mild weather.

Post Test

1. Name the four species of quail that can be hunted in New Mexico.
2. Name the species of quail that prefers to run from danger.
3. What is the daily bag limit for Montezuma quail?
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