

Stubble Quail

FAMILY: *Phasianidae*
GENUS: *Coturnix*
SPECIES: *pectoralis*
OTHER NAMES: None.

Description:

Medium to large quail. Unobtrusive in its plumage and behaviour, the Stubble Quail is nomadic and abundant. They follow the seasonally available seeds of annual pasture crops and weeds.

Stubble Quail live exclusively on the ground and will hide in dense undergrowth rather than fly up when disturbed. Like so many other quail, it will burst suddenly into flight when almost trodden on.

The body plumage of the male is a fawn-brown above with dark blotches and cream coloured stripes along the midrib of each feather. The head and nape are dusky, with a white line running down the centre of the head and one over each eye extending to well behind the ear. The throat and face are a light chestnut colour, the eyes a reddish brown and the bill grey and the legs and feet creamy yellow.

The female differs from the male in that the face and neck are buff coloured, the throat and chest are off white and the chest lacks a black centre. Juveniles resemble females and downy young are buff with black stripes running from head to tail and a pair of lateral stripes running down the length of the sides of the back.

Length: 180-200mm.

Subspecies:

None.

Status:

In the wild: common to abundant

In aviculture: common

Threats:

There are no formally recognised threatening processes for this species, but its abundance has been affected by human activities. For example, the clearing of forests and woodland to create pastures and cropping lands have greatly increased its habitat. On the other hand, the introduction of pastoralism in the inland savannah regions has exposed it to competition with sheep and rabbits.

Distribution:

Found in most of South Australia north to the Pilbara, Alice Springs and Central Queensland. Stubble Quail have on occasion been recorded in the far north of the Northern Territory and elsewhere outside their normal range.

Stubble Quail were once found in Tasmania but are now extinct there.

Habitat:

Open grasslands and crops.

Diet:

Seeds of grasses and herbs and occasionally some insects and caterpillars.

Breeding:

Mainly August to February. However in the north of its distribution this species may breed all year round if rains are favourable.

The nest is a shallow scrape in the ground and is prepared by the female.

Incubation is solely by the female and pairs are thought to form for life.

In captivity Stubble Quail will readily nest on the ground. Thick shrubbery or (preferably) tussock grasses will help to provide the shelter and security they require.

Sexual Maturity:

Courtship Display:

This begins with the female preparing the nest and is followed by the male crowing to advertise their territory. Crowing is usually done for long periods at dawn and dusk, but may also continue during the day.

Clutch:

7 to 14 pale creamy oval eggs (22mm x 30mm). Incubation period: 21 days. The young leave the nest almost immediately after hatching. Parents force the young to leave the breeding territory at about 6 weeks. At this point the young are fully feathered and about two-thirds grown.

Mutations and Hybrids:

None.