

BLUE QUAIL MANAGEMENT

Not nearly as popular, plentiful, or endeared, the Scaled, or blue, quail inhabits the western third of Texas rangelands and extends south and westward to our neighboring states and country. Cursed by bobwhite hunters and many a bird dog, the blue quail prefers to outrun danger than to hide and then flush from it like the bobwhite. Considered the secondary quail species in Texas, let's take a look at what the bird's requirements are and how we can best manage for such.

Distribution: The average home range of blues is approximately 40-100 acres; radio-collared blue quail have been known to travel as far as fifty linear miles in one study! Blues are much more "rangier" than bobs and have a much larger home and core area; where blues and bobs coexist, they will cross-breed to produce what is referred to as a Blob quail. Such crosses are true hybrids and the offspring are sterile.

Rainfall: Blue quail populations do not "boom or bust" like those of the bobs. Their numbers grow more slowly and controlled and they decline much in the same manner; they prefer the drier conditions with more bare ground and prickly pear cactus, so blues don't need the level of rainfall that bobs require.

Food: Food supplies are very similar to that of the bobwhites; however, blues consume more green matter than do bobs; grass and woody browse plant seeds are important year around just as is mast and insects when seasonally available; blues tend to eat more than do bobs and it is rare to find a blue without something in its crop when harvested; blues feed more often and more aggressively than do bobs; bobwhites range in weight from 160-170 grams while blues are larger at 175-190 grams.

Brush amounts and distribution: Blues require more open and bare ground than do bobs; overgrazed pastures, low growing and sporadic brush and grass clumps are ideal habitat; blackbrush thickets and shallow gravelly soils are ideal for blues; they need the bare ground to run and improved visibility to escape danger; tall and thick stands of herbaceous cover (grass) make running difficult and discourage blue quail utilization; prickly pear cactus is very important for the blues both as nesting cover, food and water and loafing areas; shade is not nearly as important to blues and avian predators do not appear to be as effective on blues as they are on bobs; intense hunting pressure does not have nearly the adverse effect on blue populations as they can on bob populations.

Supplemental Feeding: Blues will be attracted to supplemental feeding sites; they readily eat at deer corn and protein feeders and milo or corn spread on a road or sendero; planted food plots are not as important as they are to bobs, but the edges and loose seeds will be readily consumed.

Water: Blues readily accept standing water and will use any available sources; if standing water is not available, they will utilize insects, prickly pear, and the morning dew.

Natural Mortality: Blues are much more hearty and resilient than bobs, they are simply much tougher and inhabit much harsher environments, and therefore blues suffer much less natural mortality than that of bobs.

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