



GET TO KNOW THE PLATEAU

Scaled Quail

Callipepla squamata

Habitat & Ecology

Scaled Quail is a year-round resident in the southwestern United States and Northwestern Mexico, primarily following the range of the Chihuahuan Desert and associated grassland ranges. On the Colorado Plateau they can be found at places like Petrified Forest National Park, Petroglyph National Monument, and Chaco Culture National Historical Park.

The Scaled Quail forages as it travels. In winter, large flocks known as coveys, snack on insects, leaves, and seeds. Incredibly versatile, they utilize habitat such as open plains and grasslands with a mixture of shrub cover, as well as pinyon-juniper shrubland. Shrubs such as yucca, saltbush, and cholla provide additional coverage for the ground preferring birds. They steer away from habitats with higher rainfall, and thick shrub cover.

Description

Gregarious bird similar in size to Gambel's and Bobwhite quail, with a typical rounded appearance, short tail, rounded wings, and slightly hunched demeanor as they slink through underbrush. Dusky gray overall, with variations of sand tan across the lower belly, sweeping to chestnut brown across the cheeks and face. Plumages are highly similar between sex, with a clean two-toned, black tipped scale pattern across the breast and a distinct fluffy crest of feathers. Female crests can be smaller.

In the breeding season, males will perch from any position of elevation over rolling grasslands, and call out a rolling "ke-kerr, ke-kerr" that can be heard from over 900 meters away. Bachelor males will advertise for a single female at the beginning of the breeding season and by winter they

will have formed large coveys of males, females, and the new young, and traveling in socialized bands. Soft calls of "pur-whep, pur-whep" are shared when the flock keeps in contact with one another. Predatory alarm calls of quick nasal "cheep cheep cheep" accompany a flush of quail as they scatter and regroup to safety.

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Conservation Status and Threats

Scaled Quail are locally abundant, with populations being of least management concern. Primary threats to population numbers include loss of habitat due to livestock grazing and rangeland establishment. Human disturbance has been known to cause nest failure. Habitat management and conservation for highly sensitive game birds, has been demonstrated to have additional beneficial impact for Scaled Quail.

Of Note

Scaled Quail sleep primarily on the ground under dense cover, described as "loafing" sites. This provides more protection from aerial predators that fly the open plains.

Also, when courting females, males lift the feathers on their flank and neck, bob their head and peck the ground, while walking on the tips of their toes. This display is called "tidbitting", and is common among quail species.

References

Dabbert, C. B., G. Pleasant, and S. D. Schemnitz (2020). Scaled Quail (*Callipepla squamata*), version 1.0. In *Birds of the World* (A. F. Poole, Editor). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA. <https://doi.org/10.2173/bow.scaqua.01>

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