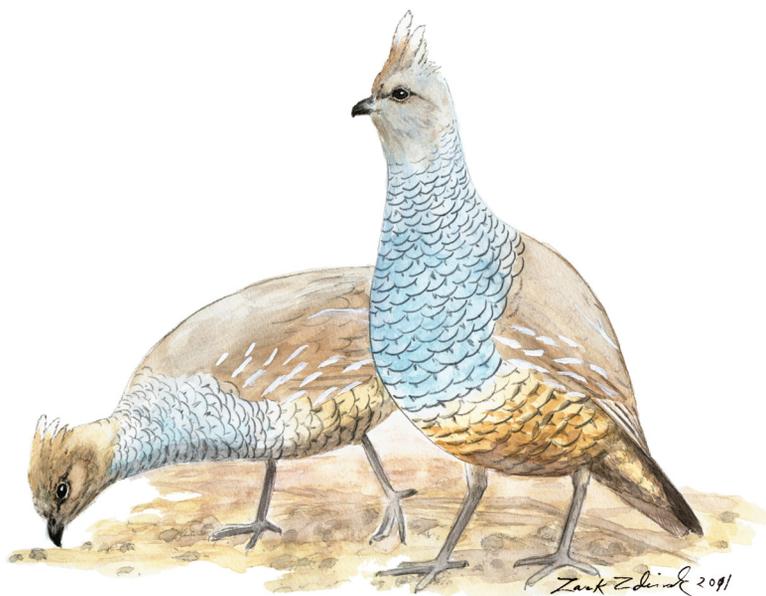


Scaled Quail



... adults lead chicks to foraging areas where they learn to feed by watching the adults.

determines that is winter, spring and summer rainfall. Reproduction for scaled quail appears to be less variable than it is for its close relative, Gambel's quail. Males begin calling in spring and the coveys break into pairs. After breeding, the birds construct nests (usually on the ground). Females typically lay nine to 12 eggs. In about 29 days, the chicks hatch covered with down. They can follow adults within hours.

ILLUSTRATION BY ZACKERY ZIDNAX

SCIENTIFIC NAME: The scientific name *Callipepla squamata* comes from the Greek *kallipeplos*, meaning “beautifully adorned,” and the Latin *squamata*, meaning “scale-like.” Also in the same genus *Callipepla* are Gambel's, California and elegant quail. All four quail species are closely related and occasionally interbreed to form sterile hybrids. The elegant quail occurs primarily in Mexico and is found only rarely in southern Arizona.

DESCRIPTION: Adult scaled quail are 10–12 inches long and range in weight from 5 to 8 ounces. Wingspan for adults is typically 12–15 inches. Feathers on the wings, back and tail are brownish-gray and the head of both males and females is topped with a white crest. Body plumage is bluish with dark edges, which gives the birds a scaled appearance and their common name. The birds also are known as scalies, cotton-tops or blue quail.

DISTRIBUTION: Scaled quail inhabit Chihuahuan Desert grasslands, adjacent scrublands and the shrub-invaded grasslands of the Great Plains. They are naturally found as far south as Hidalgo, Mexico, and as far north as southwestern Kansas and

southeastern Colorado. Scaled quail have been introduced into parts of the states of Washington and Nevada. In Arizona, scaled quail are most common in the southern part of the state within desert grasslands south of Tucson and east to the New Mexico border. They are rare in Arizona's western desert areas.

HABITAT: Scaled quail habitat is rolling grasslands with some shrubs. They reach peak abundance in grassland communities with a mixture of grass species and about a 10 percent shrub component. They are uncommon in pure grasslands, especially grasslands of introduced nonnative species such as Lehmann lovegrass. Numbers decline as grasslands give way to bare ground or the shrub component increases. Scaled quail feed on seeds from forbs and grasses, so plant diversity is important to assure a steady food supply. In spring, birds eat green plant material, and both adults and juveniles consume insects when they are available. Seeds and fruits from cacti are eaten in spring and summer.

BIOLOGY: As with all desert quail, breeding is influenced by the amount of green forbs available to the birds in spring. What

Mortality in the young is high, as young quail are fragile and subject to predation. Both females and males participate in caring for the young, but they do not feed the young as some other birds do. Instead, adults lead chicks to foraging areas where they learn to feed by watching the adults. Family groups join into large coveys in fall and winter, and young are ready to breed the following spring.

STATUS: Although scaled quail are common in southern Arizona, they are not as abundant as in previous decades. Declines in the diversity of southern Arizona grasslands have limited the quantity and quality of scaled quail habitat. These declines are primarily due to drought, introduction of nonnative grasses following fire events, overgrazing of some areas and the replacement of diverse grassland communities with shrubs.

MANAGEMENT NEEDS: Restoration of southern grassland communities by control of invasive shrubs, fire management and moderate grazing prescriptions would most benefit scaled quail. 🦋

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