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Birds of New Zealand - Locality Guide. 3rd edn.

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California quail: pp 124-125.



CALIFORNIA QUAIL

Family Phasianidae

Species *Lophortyx californicus*

Common name California Quail

Status Introduced

Abundance Common

Size 250mm (cf sparrow 145 mm)

Habitat A bird of rough scrubland, and pastureland which contains sufficient wilderness to provide nesting areas. It is a regular roadside species in areas of dense verges.

Worldwide range This is an imported game bird from North America which has established well.

New Zealand range Found in both islands away from forest and away from closely settled pastoral land. Absent from Fiordland and parts of Westland.

Description – male (above)

Forehead Grey to the eye. **Crown** Black, with a white edge band and a black crest feather which leans forward. **Face and chin** Black, edged with a white-curved throat collar. **Neck** Black and white spotting. **Wings** Dark grey. **Breast** Grey. **Underparts** Buff, feathers edged with black to give a horizontal scaly effect. Chestnut hue to middle abdomen. **Bill** Black. **Legs and feet** Grey.

Description – female (below)

Head, breast and upperparts Duller than the male and tending to brown. **Crest feather** Shorter than male. **Underparts** Similar to male.

Conspicuous features

- Black and white on the head of the male bird.
- Top-knot feather which separates it from the Brown Quail.
- Scaly pattern on abdomen.

Conspicuous characteristics

- Usually to be found in pairs or coveys.
- When disturbed birds run and then fly off with whirr of wings.
- Male birds will call for lengthy periods from a conspicuous perch.

Call A noisy tri-syllabic “ki kuu kuu”.

Nest A hollow in grasses. Up to 13 cream, brown-blotched eggs are laid. Usually a late breeder with chicks being hatched from mid-December onwards.

Where to find – North and South Islands

North Island – Common in areas of scrubland and wilderness.

South Island – Common in open countryside with sufficient cover. Absent from Southland, Fiordland and southern parts of Westland.

