

All gamebirds are introduced, often with great persistence and cost. Small to large plump birds that feed on the ground. Omnivorous but mainly take plant food, scratching and digging at the ground surface with legs and strong claws, and bill. When disturbed, they crouch, run to cover, or burst from cover with whirring wings and alarm notes, flying fast and low to pitch a short distance away. Sexes usually differ: females and immatures have subdued plumage that blends with the surroundings; males are sometimes brightly coloured, but even strongly patterned males blend with their surroundings. Immatures are usually seen with adults, so identity should not be a problem.

CHUKOR *Alectoris chukar*

Locally common Asian introduction

31 cm; ♂ 600 g, ♀ 500 g. Like Red-legged Partridge but has *solid clear-cut black necklace* that crosses *low on the throat; crown, nape and hindneck grey*. Flank bars are more black than chestnut. Sexes alike. In flight, *upperparts plain grey with rusty wash at base of wings* and rusty outer tail feathers. When flushed, a covey usually scatters. Voice a loud 'chuck-chuck-chuck-per-chuck-per-chuck-chuckar-chuckar-chuckar'. **Habitat:** South I hill country, especially rocky hillsides with tussock and sparse scrub. **Breeding:** Sep–Feb. [Sp 149]



GAMEBIRDS

Phasianidae

213 species worldwide. The only native member of this family, the endemic New Zealand Quail *Coturnix novaezelandiae*, became extinct about 1875.

dig at the ground surface with stout legs and strong claws and bill. Most roost in trees.

Some 20 species of gamebirds have been introduced to New Zealand, but about half have failed to establish. All were introduced for domestic or hunting purposes, often with great persistence and at great cost. Some are still supplemented yearly by captive-reared stock raised by Fish and Game Councils (the former acclimatisation societies), paid for from hunters' licence fees.

The sexes often differ; females and immatures have subdued plumage that blends with the surroundings, males are often brightly coloured in the larger species or strongly patterned but cryptic in the smaller ones. Many species are polygamous, the male having a harem of females in the breeding period. Their nest is a shallow hollow scraped in the ground with little or no lining. Clutches are large, but, although most eggs hatch, few chicks reach independence. The chicks leave the nest soon after hatching and feed themselves, attended by the adults. Most young can fly within two or three weeks of hatching.

Most species favour farmland, swamp margins and open ground with plenty of coarse grass or scrub for cover. They feed on the ground and are omnivorous – grain, other seeds, berries, roots, together with whatever invertebrates are revealed as they scratch and

Reading: Delacour, J. 1977. *The Pheasants of the World*. Hindhead, UK: Spur Publications. Johnsgard, P.A. 1988. *The Quails, Partridges and Francolins of the World*. Oxford: OUP.

149. CHUKOR *Alectoris chukar*

Plate 35

Other name: Chukar
Size: 31 cm, males 600 g, females 500 g
Geographical variation: The many subspecies described may be only clinal. Two forms were hybrids, they look like *chukar*.

introduced to New Zealand in the 1920s and 1930s, mostly *chukar* of India, but once (into Marlborough) *koroviakovi* of Iran. Although the resulting birds are presumably

Distribution: Natural range is from south-eastern Europe and Turkey east through central Asia, including the Himalayas, to Mongolia and China. They are well established on the dry, rocky country east of the Southern Alps from Marlborough (Nelson Lakes National Park, Wairau River, Seaward Kaikoura Range) to Central Otago (especially between Lakes Coleridge and Wakatipu). North Island liberations, as recently as 1987, have been largely unsuccessful, although a few persist near Tauranga and in Hawke's Bay.
Breeding: Eggs are laid in September–January. The nest is a scrape on the rocky ground under a sheltering tussock. The female lays 8–13–

18 cream eggs (43 x 31 mm), flecked reddish brown. Eggs are laid daily. The female incubates for c. 24 days. The oldest Chukor recorded in New Zealand lived over 12 years.
Behaviour: After breeding, the family group remains together as a covey of 5–10 birds, but in winter these groups coalesce to form large coveys of 50–150 birds.
Feeding: Diet is mainly seeds, shoots and leaves of grasses and other ground plants such as thistles, clovers and briars; also some insects, found by scratching at and gleaning from the ground.

Reading: Marples, B.J. & Gurr, L. 1953. *Emu* 53: 283–291. Williams, G.R. 1951. *Notornis* 4: 151–157.