

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.

BROWN QUAIL *Synoicus ypsilophorus*

Locally common Australian introduction

18 cm, 100 g. *Very small rounded brown quail*. Mottled black and chestnut above; fine wavy bars below. Bill dark, eye reddish, legs yellowish. Sexes alike. Call a plaintive languid 'ker-wee', the second syllable drawn out and with rising inflexion. **Habitat:** Scrub edges in rough farmland; most common in Northland, uncommon further south. **Breeding:** Sep–Feb.



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.

151. BROWN QUAIL *Synoicus ypsilophorus*

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Size: 18 cm, 100 g
Geographical variation: About 10 subspecies have been described, two of which, *australis* from mainland Australia and *ypsilophorus* from Tasmania, were introduced to New Zealand.
Distribution: Natural range is southern Indonesia, New Guinea, and Australia, including Tasmania. They were introduced widely in the North and South Islands in the 1860s and 1870s, but now survive only in the North Island. They are common in Northland and many of its offshore islands, and also on some of the developed islands in the Bay of Plenty. Moderately common in the Waikato

and the Bay of Plenty, but scarce south of a line from Kawhia to Lake Taupo to northern Hawke's Bay. They are mainly seen along the dusty edges of country roads, on rough swamp margins and along the edges of salt marshes, as well as in the usual scrub and open rough grassland well supplied with cover.
Population: Common only in Northland and on some Northland and Bay of Plenty offshore islands.
Breeding: Eggs are laid in September–January. The nest is a slight depression lined with grass and leaves, under thick vegetation such as roadside verges and bracken. The female lays

7–12 white eggs (28 x 23 mm), freckled all over with brown. The female alone incubates for c. 21 days.

Feeding: Diet is mainly fallen seeds from a wide variety of grasses, weeds and shrubs, but supplemented with vegetation, flowers and insects.

Behaviour: Brown Quail form small coveys of 5–10 birds when not breeding.