

Notes based on Joe Morlan's Ornithology class lecture April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2010.  
Joe Morlan is not responsible for these notes, any errors or omissions in them are mine.

---

**Bald Eagles** are nesting again at Calaveras Road in Santa Clara County. This is relatively new, ten years ago they were not there. The species nested for the first time in half a century in the Bay Area probably fifteen years ago at De Valle Reservoir. There is relatively little evidence that Bald Eagle ever nested in the Bay Area in numbers.

Both **Olive-sided Flycatcher** and **Western Wood-Pewee** perch on the tops of trees. In general Olive-sided Flycatchers arrive slightly before Western Wood-Pewees. There are not many Western Wood-Pewees here yet. Olive-sided Flycatchers are coming through now. Joe gets nervous about early Wood-Pewees, especially heard-only birds. Hutton's Vireos that are learning to sing can sound a lot like a Wood-Pewee. On Olive-sided Flycatchers the wing tips come more than halfway down the tail. The Wood-Pewee is also a long-winged bird, but the tail isn't quite as stumpy.

---

## **New World Quail**

A separate family from Old World Quail and Partridges.

## **Gambel's Quail**

### **OCCURRENCE**

Gambel's Quail and California Quail are both gregarious species found in scrubland habitat. Gambel's is a desert species while California Quail is more a bird of chaparral that also adapts well to any kind of low dense cover.

Both of them are generally fairly conspicuous in the areas where they occur and their ranges tend not to overlap.

Gambel's gets from time to time claimed in the Bay Area. Those are either misidentified California Quail or they are released birds. Various kinds of quail are released in the Bay Area from time to time, the most commonly released one is the Bobwhite. Occasionally Gambel's have been introduced. They've been introduced successfully in places like Death Valley where they did not occur natively.

A really easy place to see them is around the headquarters of the Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge. You can also find them in Morongo Valley, a very common bird there.

### **FIELD MARKS**

Very similar to California Quail.

Club shaped plume on the head, composed of six to nine different feathers.

If the bird has been bathing or the feathers are out of place it is not unusual to see two or three crests on the top of the bird's head.

A gray bird, California Quail tends to be browner, especially along the immediate coast, but some subspecies are gray. The overall coloration can overlap between the species, but in general Gambel's is a paler, grayer bird.

Rust colored sides with white stripes just under the folded wings. The rusty coloration contrasts with the pale gray of the wings and back and makes the white stripes stand out. California Quail has a similar pattern, but the brown color of the sides is pretty much the same color as the rest of the bird.

The same rusty color on the crown another good field mark. California Quail much browner crown.

Black forehead diagnostic in males. On male California Quail the forehead is whitish or yellowish. On Gambel's black.

Male nice white outline to the black face and a nice white outline to the cap.

Females similar but with a less defined face pattern, including forehead coloration. You need to use other characters.

In general, Gambel's has less scaling on the upper belly and lower chest, instead a more or less unpatterned light tan color. This is an auxiliary character which can be pretty deceiving. There can be scaling on the sides of the lower belly, but it is plain forward of the legs. Both species are scaled on the sides, flanks, undertail coverts.

Both species have rather long tails compared to other quail.

#### **VOCALIZATIONS**

Similar in both species.

Song given by the males Chi-ca-go

Also a variety of clucking sounds that may be given by both species.

## **California Quail**

#### **OCCURRENCE**

The official state bird of CA.

Numerous different subspecies. For some of them Fish and Game has names, like the Valley Quail in the Central Valley.

Does very well in chaparral habitat, particularly areas that are overgrown with Baccharis (Coyote Brush). Does also well in willow thickets, any kind of brushy areas and farmland as long as there is suitable cover. In many places it is found locally in some parklands. It loves blackberry tangles. Often big coveys of them are right along the side of the road to Pt Reyes early in the morning. Likewise Rodeo Lagoon and most of the wilder areas around the Bay Area and in CA.

All of these quail frequently forage on roadsides very early in the morning to get gravel which helps grind up seeds in their gizzard. They also frequently come to water areas before nightfall. They need some source of permanent water.

Used to be quite common locally in SF, for example there used to be a very large covey by Middle Lake. At some point the ecology in SF changed, people are releasing cats that are not adoptable and feeding them. It is an effort to reduce euthanasia of unwanted pets. These cat colonies wiped out almost all of the quail in the city. Being ground nesters makes the quail particularly vulnerable to cats.

Strybing Arboretum which is fenced off has been an oasis for them for a long time. To the east of the Arboretum by the stone circle somebody is feeding seeds to squirrels and the quail go there. It seems they mostly move there in the wintertime when the Arboretum is quite cold (it is one of the lowest places in the city) and then move back to the fenced in Arboretum in the breeding season. Joe is not sure which subspecies in SF or even if the birds in SF are actually native quail. Where they are in GG Park it was historically all sand dunes. The quail are not migratory, have probably

been introduced there. They still get released, for example birds raised at the Randall Museum have been released in the Arboretum not so long ago.

The quail form nurseries for the chicks of a whole group. All of these gallinaceous birds are ground nesting birds with big clutch sizes. They learn to fly early, when they are still downy with little stubby wings.

Very social birds with many interesting social strategies. For example they have lookouts, a male that sits up high in a bush and warns the covey giving alarm notes when a predator approaches. There is a hunting season on quail. Many farmers make extra money by opening up their farms for quail hunting.

Have been introduced in places like eastern Washington where they have become established. Joe believes they have become established on some of the Hawaiian islands. A lot of the private hunting preserves buy quail eggs and raise the quail and then release them for hunting purposes.

#### **FIELD MARKS**

Some subspecies quite brown, others gray.

The brown sides with white stripes do not contrast much with the wings and back.

*Brunescens* type birds are along the immediate coast.

At least on the slides the females show a stumpier crest than female Gambel's.

## **Mountain Quail**

#### **OCCURRENCE**

Mostly found at middle elevations in the Sierra Nevada. Also locally in the coastal mountains.

Very little if any overlap with California Quail. A lot of the mountains along the coast here have California Quail and very few have Mountain Quail.

Basically the range gets down into the mountains of Sonoma County to the north of us and picks up again in the mountains of Monterey County to the south of us, none are in between.

Places like Sugarloaf Ridge in Sonoma County, Chew's Ridge and China Camp in Monterey County at the end of Tassajara Road, spot Old Howell Mountain Road in Napa County on Howell Mountain near Angwin. Also Castle Rock State Park on the county line between Santa Cruz and Santa Clara counties. Mountain Quail have been known there for just a few decades. The rumor is they were introduced to that park.

The Mountain Quail live in the middle of the impenetrable Manzanita thickets from where you can sometimes hear them.

Butterbredt Springs at Jawbone Canyon Road in eastern Kern County is good for them. It is one of a series of places where birdwatchers gather during late May and also during September and October, during the vagrant seasons. These isolated patches of green trees and water are magnets for lost birds. Places like Butterbredt Springs, California City and Galileo Hill are the three big names in eastern Kern County. They just opened up a public BLM camp ground at Butterbredt Springs. The quail come to the spring early in the morning.

#### **FIELD MARKS**

Females have a shorter plume, look otherwise about the same as males.

Lanceolated shaped, very long, spiky plume of tow feathers.

Very dark red on the throat.

Dark rusty color on the flanks in coloration similar to Gambel's but with broad white bars instead of streaks.

Tail quite stumpy compared to Gambel's and California quail.