

New World Quail

California Quail *Callipepla californica*

Ornithological History: Not recorded by Mailliard (1932) or Munro (1950, 1958).

Butler et al. (1986) reported several introductions of California Quail. Most sightings were from the vicinity of Creston and Lister. Nesting probably occurred in mid-May. During cold winters the population appeared to crash.

Creston Valley Status: An introduced game bird that remains a *rare* resident; breeds.

Occurrence: California Quail was recorded sporadically during the 1970s and 1980s. There are no known records for the 1990s and early 2000s. The species has been documented most years since 2006 through 2018 in places such as Wynndel, Alice Siding, West Creston, Erickson, Lister, Kitchener, and the Goat River bottomlands. Sightings of 1 or 2 birds account for 60% of all records.

The majority of spring sightings occur in May (76%) from widely scattered locations. On 15 and 16 May 2012, Marcia Long and Gary Breault observed five birds near thickets at the Duck Lake outhouse for the highest spring count.

The majority of summer sightings are from Alice Siding. A mated pair was present near the home of Mel and Catherine Prowse from 1 June to 31 July 2009 and from 1 to 27 June 2010. In Lister, Hardy and Anita Delafield observed five birds (one male and four females) on 13 July 2018.

Almost all autumn records are from Lister. On 2 September 2018, Hardy Delafield photographed a flock of 26 birds (males and females) along a weedy roadside; this is the highest count ever recorded in the area. Another notable occurrence was a covey of eight birds which frequented the Delafield's property on 27 October 2013. The group remained intact until late November, then decreased to six birds throughout December. In January 2014, six birds were seen and periodically in February and March five birds were counted. Only a single bird was recorded in early April.

As one travels across the International border into Idaho, California Quail is frequently encountered south of Porthill along the Farm to Market Road, in coveys numbering up to 65 birds. It's quite possible some of these birds wander north into the Creston valley.



There is no predicting when or where a California Quail might be spotted in the Creston valley. This lone male was at the edge of Channel Road on 31 March 2015. *Photo by Marcia Long.*

Seasonal Occurrence Records

Spring – 63 records from 10 March to 31 May (1 to 5 birds)

Summer – 103 records from 1 June to 12 August (1 to 5 birds)

Autumn – 40 records from 2 September to 30 November (1 to 26 birds)

Winter – 67 records from 1 December to 25 February (1 to 6 birds)

California Quail was reported on 4 of 21 Creston Christmas Bird counts from 1998 to 2018.

Breeding: California Quail is seldom seen during the breeding season. One ground nest and three broods were recorded between 15 May and 14 July. Brood size ranged from 2 to 9 young.

In British Columbia, clutch size is typically 10 to 15 eggs and brood size 7 to 12 young.

Notable breeding activity:

A nest with 8 eggs was discovered on 15 May 1977 on Summit Creek road in West Creston by Brian Keating. No other details were provided.

On 27 June 1980, R.A. Lisson observed a male and female, with 9 young, feeding in a rural residential area of Lister. The entire family was still together on 14 July.

Sid Roberts recorded a male and female on 24 June 1981. The pair, with their 4 downy chicks, scampered off Reclamation Road into nearby shrubs.

On 10 July 2009, Catherine Prowse observed a pair with at least 2 and possibly 3 chicks on her property in Alice Siding. This rural acreage has mixed coniferous forest with shrub understory, open fields, shrub thickets, gardens, and is adjacent to the brushy border of the railway right-of-way.

Databases: Occurrence records (273) and breeding records (4)

Habitat: California Quail frequents shrubby roadside edges, brushy gullies, shrub-dominated dykes, dry brushy slopes, weedy fields, willow thickets, residential gardens, and occasionally agricultural fields.

Comments: This species was introduced into British Columbia in the early 1860s and has become a common resident in the Okanagan valley and on southern Vancouver Island where it also breeds.



The roadsides in Lister have a variety of shrubs such as chokecherry, snowberry, and saskatoon which provide food and protective cover for members of the quail family. *Photo by Laure W. Neish.*

Field Notes: *Marcia Long photographed an unusual incident in late May 2016. In the vicinity of Crackerjack Creek Forest Service Road at 719 m (2,359 ft) elevation, she spotted a Ruffed Grouse with her brood in a regenerating clearcut. As her vehicle approached, the chicks scattered into the bushes and the hen flew to a tree on the opposite side of the road. Marcia stopped and waited. Sensing no danger, the hen grouse flew down and called to her chicks. Then a male California Quail flew from a pine tree and landed nearby. This didn't seem to be a threat, so the hen again tried to assemble her chicks. One raced across the roadway, then another, and a third. The quail saw this and chased two of the chicks, nipping one in the rear. After regrouping, the grouse and her family moved on. The quail disappeared into vegetation and began to call. Marcia wondered if it too had chicks, but she saw none.*