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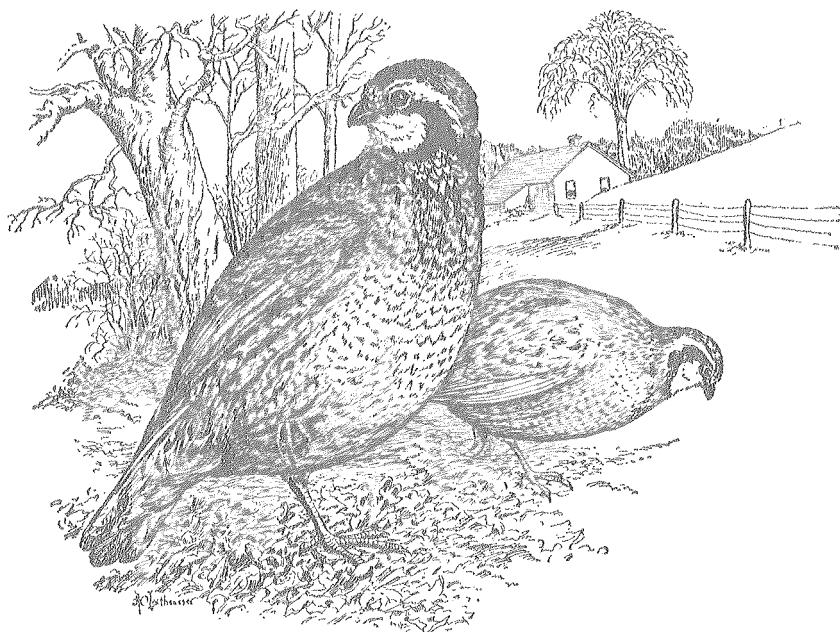
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Chapter One

Perching Birds

The Quail

Did you ever take a walk in the country and suddenly hear a **whirring**, or buzzing, sound? Do you remember how you stood still, too frightened to move, and then you saw a few brown birds sailing away? The noise you heard was made by some quails as they flew up quickly from the ground. They saw you first and lost no time in taking wing.



The quail is about as big as a **bantam** chicken. Its color is brownish like that of dried-up grass; its body is short and plump; and its bill is short and stout like that of a chicken. Its short, round wings help it to fly up quickly from the ground and then it sails away, usually in a curved flight. The quail's wings always make a loud, whirring sound when it begins to fly, and this is what usually frightens people when they are walking along. By the time they recover from their fright, the quails are some distance away, for they can fly very fast.

The quail has short, stout legs like the chicken; and, on each foot, it has three toes toward the front and a short one toward the back. This back toe is like a heel and helps the bird to walk. Its claws are short and strong; with them, it can scratch for bugs.

The quail's nest is on the ground among tall grasses and weeds, and is so cleverly hidden that one could pass by it a hundred times and not see it. The mother quail scratches a little **hollow**, or hole, in the ground and lines it with grass. She will lay as many as fifteen white eggs. They are round at one end and very pointed at the other; and her eggs are smaller than a hen's eggs.

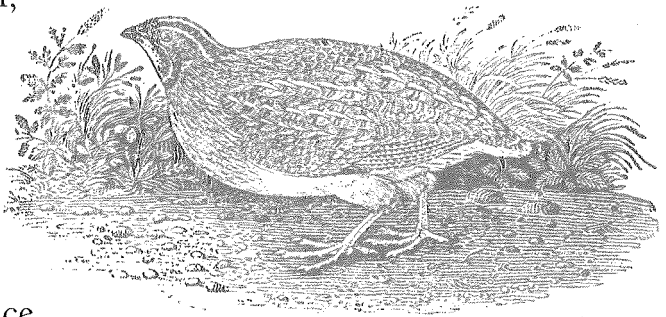
The mother quail is so cautious that she never goes straight to her nest. First she enters a patch

of weeds some distance from the nest and then quietly sneaks along until she reaches it. Her color is so much like that of the grass and leaves about her that one cannot see her on the nest at all. God created her with brownish feathers to protect her from foxes, coyotes, and hawks; her protective color is called **camouflage**.

As soon as the cute baby quails hatch, they are able to run about in the grass. They look like little, fluffy chicks with downy **plumage**; they also have brown, striped backs. The mother quail trains her babies just as a mother hen trains her brood of chicks. She teaches them how to scratch for bugs and how to hide and keep quiet when she gives the alarm. Later, when the danger has past, she clucks to call them together again.

The father quail also helps take care of the babies. His call is a clear whistle, "Bob White! Bob White!" but his mate's call sounds like, "Will you come? Will you come?" If you learn to imitate his mate's call,

he will
answer
you and
even
come to
your
hiding place.



If you are kind to the quails, the whole family may visit your garden to eat bugs, and they will enjoy taking dust baths there, too. Some of them may even have their singing lessons there. How you will laugh to hear them! The father quail himself calls loud and clear, "Bob White! Bob White!" Then the little male quails try to call just as he did. He calls again and they try again, for they seem to have a hard time learning to whistle just right, but they do not get tired and quit. They keep on trying and trying.

Some quails were once heard having their singing lesson in a vegetable garden. The little "Bob" could be heard quite plainly. That did not seem so very hard to whistle, but such a time they had



trying to whistle the “White!” They called, “Bob! Bob!” several times; then they whistled “Bob Wh! Bob Wh!”; and finally a sharp “Bob White!” Don’t you think they were proud and happy to get it exactly right?

Quails eat a great many insects that harm the farmers’ crops and also a great many weed seeds. If these seeds were allowed to grow, they would crowd out the little plants in the fields. The quails are really the farmers’ friends.

Quails do not fly south when winter comes but remain with us throughout the year. In the fall, they go about in flocks called **coveys** (kŭv’•ēs), and we can help them by putting out food where they can find it when the ground is covered with ice and snow.

Review

1. How can you recognize a quail when you see one?
2. How do quails resemble chickens?
3. How do they escape an enemy?
4. Why can we say that the quails are the farmers’ friends?
5. How can we help quails?

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