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## BOB-WHITE AND FAMILY

In the North, where the ruffed grouse is known as the partridge, the bob-white is called the quail; in the South, where the ruffed grouse is known as the pheasant, he is called the partridge. He is a gregarious bird, living about three-fourths of the year in flocks, which are broken up in the spring, when each male selects a mate; and the dainty little couples, after their honeymoon, find a suitable nesting-place. The shy wife goes to her housekeeping, while her companion, full of love and joy, spends much of his time whistling his sweet *Ah bob-white! bob-white!* from the top rail of the old worm-fence, or the low, cool branches of the spreading shade tree near by. At no other time, except when pursued by a dog on stormy days, or when driven by hunger from the snowclad earth to the locust for the beans that still remain in the thin pods, does bob-white spend any time among the branches of the trees. His love call, which has given him his truest name, is variously translated by country people,—*More buckwheat! buckwheat!* being one of the most appropriate, for it is the name of one of his favorite foods.

The nests are built principally of dead grass under a tangle of briars by a fence, stump or log, beneath a bush in the grain field, or in a tussock of grass in the meadow; though I knew of a nest two feet above ground in the side of a straw-rick. The model nest is cunningly arched over, and has in some instances a covered entrance several inches in length which completely conceals the white eggs. The majority of nests, however, are not so elaborately built, and the eggs in some of them are much exposed when the female, or the male as the case may be, is not sitting on them. The number of eggs in a nest varies; in cases I have known from five to twenty-three, though some writers state that nests have been found with thirty, and even fifty eggs! Hence they have pronounced bob-white a rank polygamist, accusing him of consorting with two or three wives. Their only "proof" seems to be that these nests contain an abnormally large number of eggs. These observers rightly conclude that one female did not lay them all, but they do bob-white an injustice, I think, by declaring him a Mormon on such meager circumstantial evidence. Even if he had two or three mates, is there any reason why all should lay in the same nest? And if so, do they select one of their own number to do the incubating?

It is well known that during the mating season quail lose much of their native wildness, thereby making it easier to study their habits. The pairs visit the gardens, dust themselves in the sandy road, paying very little attention to the approaching wagon and showing themselves at close range in so many ways that if there were two or three hens with a single cock the fact would be very noticeable and bob-white would indeed lose his reputation as a model husband. It is my opinion, however, that a regularly mated hen-quail possesses cowbird tendencies and is very generally responsible

for any clutch of eggs larger than the normal number. She has the same habit of depositing her eggs in a nest built by another that possesses the cowbird and the European cuckoo. It is a well-known fact, moreover, that domestic fowls lay in one another's nests. It is recorded that pheasants do the same, and I know that hens lay in quails' nests.

A freakish quail not only makes use of a relative's nest but often deposits her eggs in the nest of the guinea or chicken, as almost any observant farm boy living in a district where quail are abundant can testify. Often these females with cowbird tendencies deposit but a single egg in a nest. When laid with those of domestic fowls, these small ones are often mistaken for the abnormally small eggs occasionally laid by hens. If deposited in a quail's nest in which incubation has begun, they of course do not mature, and are considered by the casual observer, when found with the shells in the empty nest, as being addled, when in truth they are the unhatched eggs of freakish quails. Break open the shells, and there are the live immature birds. And now, having observed this weakness on the part of his whimsical wife, I do not intend to accuse bob-white of polyamy until I see him strutting around with a wife on each wing.

Those who have cast reproach on his good name, however, have given him much credit for the assistance which they claim he renders to his mate while sitting on her eggs. My observations do not wholly justify the claim that the work of incubation is shared by the male. Bob-white does sometimes sit on the eggs and rear the brood; but I am of the opinion that he does this chiefly as a widower. When an accident happens to his faithful mate he shows his heroic spirit by taking her place.

Of the several nests I have had under close observation, three were cared for entirely by males. Where the females had charge and came off to feed, the eggs remained uncovered, and at no time did I observe the males on or near the nests, although their cheerful notes were heard on every hand in the neighborhood.

It is not difficult to distinguish the sexes. A white throat and a white line above the eyes are, in brief, the distinguishing marks of the male, while the female has no white line over the eye and her throat is buff.

The contents of a quail's nest are generally well arranged, the white eggs being placed, as a rule, with the small ends down to economize space, but they often become disarranged and sometimes broken, when the frightened bird goes booming off. These, however, should not be touched, for the taint left by the fingers may cause the quail to abandon her nest. Mowing machines are more destructive perhaps than any other agency, though flooding rains may depopulate whole districts. The clatter of the sickle-bar frightens many sitting quails away from their nests for good. An uncle of mine uncovered several nests in his meadow one harvest,—in all, nearle