

ABOUT THE COVER: NORTHERN BOBWHITE

The Northern Bobwhite (*Colinus virginianus*) is resident throughout virtually the entire eastern United States from the southern portions of Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont south to the Gulf of Mexico. It is most abundant in the south and central states.

Bobwhites prefer unforested land with plenty of briar tangles and brushy thickets where they feed on a variety of seeds, berries, and waste grains. This bird loves insects too. In 1910 the renowned American ornithologist Margaret Nice took the trouble to document a captive bobwhite's appetite. She recorded 568 mosquitoes taken in two hours, 5000 plant lice (aphids) in a day, and 1000 grasshoppers in a day.

Pairs form in the spring and become territorial during the nesting season. During autumn and winter they form coveys or flocks of ten to fifteen birds. At roosting time, these birds assemble close to each other on the ground in a circle with heads pointed outward and tails toward the sky. Their bodies are packed together to conserve heat. If disturbed when grouped like this, they explode upward and outward like a small bomb, scattering in all directions and then reassembling when the intruder has passed. The bobwhite's practice of holding still until the last second and then flushing with a whirl of wings has made it a challenging game bird, much sought after by hunters. In the deep and solid South, there is a long, nearly legendary history of quail-shooting as a grand and classic sport.

Most people recognize bobwhites by the male's rising whistled song - "bob-white" or "bob-bob-white" - heard chiefly in the spring and summer. The image conveyed by that song was probably best expressed by Edward Howe Forbush in his book *A History of the Game Birds, Wild-Fowl and Shore Birds of Massachusetts and Adjacent States*:

What other sound in nature is so heartening? And now, as ever, in the grassy fields of New England, in the wide rolling lands of the west, or under a burning southern sky, wherever that call is heard it gladdens the hearts of men. Psychologists may tell us that the bird is merely wound up like a clock and set to run for a certain time, or until the sexual impulse runs down, but there is in his call the gladness of spring days, a quality unmistakable and unquenchable, and "all the world" loves it.

J. B. Hallett, Jr.