

ELEGANT QUAIL IN BARRANCA DEL COBRE, CHIHUAHUA

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At 1100 on 23 May 1977 Mary E. Bush and I observed two Elegant Quail (*Lophortyx douglasii*) near the village of Urique (27° 12'N, 107° 55'W) in southwestern Chihuahua, Mexico, 240 km SW of Chihuahua City. Urique lies along the edge of the Urique River on the floor of Barranca del Cobre in the Sierra Madre Occidental of northwest Mexico. Although the elevation at Urique is only 665 m (2200 ft.), many of the surrounding igneous massifs rise 2100-2300 m (6900-7600 ft.) above sea level. Chihuahuan Desert plants such as Honey Mesquite (*Prosopis juliflora*), Hairbrush Cactus (*Pachycereus pecten-aboriginum*), prickly-pear cactus (*Opuntia* spp.) and *Yucca* sp. were conspicuous on the open arid slopes above the river where they grew alongside scrubby tropical deciduous forest species such as Boat-thorn Acacia (*Acacia cymbispina*), Silk-cotton Tree (*Bombax palmeri*), *Ipomoea* sp., etc. Cottonwood (*Populus* sp.) and willow (*Salix* sp.) dominated the riparian woodlands.

The two quail were first noticed loitering on the ground beneath dense, tangled shrubbery near a dirt road. We observed them through 9x binoculars for perhaps a minute from a distance of about 15 m under excellent light conditions. They were about the size of Scaled Quail (*Callipepla squamata*) and generally nondescript bluish-gray in color. Instead of a topknot, however, an erect, tan-gold crest protruded vertically from the crown. Many small dark spots on the crown, nape and throat were conspicuous. After they disappeared beneath the shrubbery, we heard them call several times: the call was very similar to a Bobwhite's (*Colinus virginianus*) covey call. Two days later, we saw and heard Elegant Quail several times at close range near Los Mochis, Sinaloa, where the species is fairly common.

According to Peterson and Chalif (A field guide to Mexican birds, 1973:45), *L. douglasii* occurs in "W. Mexico from cen. Sonora and W. Chihuahua south on Pacific slope through Sinaloa, Nayarit, Jalisco to Colima." Leopold (Wildlife of Mexico, 1972:240) gives the distribution as the "Pacific slope from central Sonora south to Colima." Based on the range reported by Friedmann et al. (Distributional check-list of the birds of Mexico, Pt. 1, Pac. Coast Avif. 29:74-75, 1950), it inhabits western Mexico from Sonora and Chihuahua south to Nayarit and Jalisco, but they do not indicate which part of Chihuahua. How long the species has been in the Copper Canyon is unknown. Until February 1976 there was no road to the bottom of the canyon. During our visit to Urique of 24 May 1976 we failed to see or hear this species. How it found its way so far inland is likewise unknown. This quail is reported to thrive in cutover forest (Leopold op. cit.:242). Perhaps it has followed tongues of the tropical deciduous forest up the river valleys from the Pacific coastal plain as they have been settled and cleared by man.

The possibility exists, of course, that the birds we saw escaped or were released from captivity. This seems unlikely, however, because 1) we could discern no obvious signs of feather wear indicative of caged birds (such as frayed rectrices or feathers worn from the base of the bill), and 2) the quail were quite wary and retreated at our approach.

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