

KING QUAIL (*Excalfactoria chinensis*) IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

By H. T. CONDON

Interest in a little-known native species has been aroused by the recent press announcement (*The News*, April 7, 1960) that some local aviculturists proposed liberating 25 pairs of King Quail (*Excalfactoria chinensis*), from their surplus aviary-bred stocks, in a sanctuary somewhere in South Australia. The Director of Fisheries and Game (Mr. A. C. Bogg, B.Ec.) has stated that the matter is to be considered by the Flora and Fauna Advisory Committee.

The King Quail is a common bird in aviaries, where it breeds freely. Those kept by bird fanciers in South Australia are domesticated stocks derived from the nominate race (*chinensis*), which is widespread in India, south-eastern China, Malaya and adjacent parts, Ceylon and Formosa. There are about nine valid subspecies altogether, many of them (including the Celebes race, *minima*) being so different as to have been originally described as separate species.

Australian birds are smaller than the south-eastern Asiatic form. Peters (1934) recognises two Australian forms—*colletti*, Northern Territory, and *australis*, eastern and southern Australia. According to Gould, the latter is "altogether smaller than Indian specimens (race *chinensis*—H.T.C.) . . . has a somewhat more delicate bill, shorter tarsi, a much darker upper surface, and the black blotches on the back are more conspicuous." Mathews described *colletti* as smaller than *australis*, with the dorsal surface "much lighter."

The species has rarely been observed by ornithologists in South Australia, and there is no record of the birds having been taken alive for avicultural purposes. It is believed that they occur in small numbers only in swampy areas in the southern Mt. Lofty Ranges between Willunga Hill, Mount Compass, and Victor Harbour. King Quails are of no importance as game-birds.

Edwin Ashby (*Emu* 19, p. 301) has stated ". . . King Quails, *Excalfactoria australis* (Gould), were very difficult to flush, rising almost at one's feet, flying a short distance and dropping almost like a stone into the swamp. We were astonished at the silence of their flight—not making the whirr so typical of Quails."

Mayr (1944, *Bull. Amer. Mus. Nat. Hist.*, 83, Art. 2, p. 145) says: "It is very doubtful whether *Synoicus* and *Excalfactoria* can be upheld as generically distinct from *Coturnix*. The slight differences in colour pattern, number of tail feathers, and shape of axillaries do not seem to be of more than specific, or at best subgeneric, value. *Synoicus* of current authors is monotypic; *Excalfactoria* has two geographically representative species (the other being *adansonii* from Africa—H.T.C.), while *Coturnix* has five species (including the Australian Stubble Quail—H.T.C.), most of which represent each other."

Extract from "The Conservation of Wildlife," by A. Starker Leopold. (California Academy of Sciences, San Francisco, 1955.)

"ARTIFICIAL PROPAGATION—THE GAME FARM MANIA.

After the program of wildlife protection was well under way, a new approach was devised to give hunters more game to shoot. Various birds and mammals, some native but many exotic, were propagated in pens and liberated in depleted coverts.

The one great success of the restocking program was the introduction of the ring-necked pheasant from China into farmlands of the northern and central United States. Unfortunately, this initial *coup de maitre* inspired great confidence in propagation as a method of increasing game, leading over