# THE BOBWHITE STORY

## Coming Soon - - A Ne

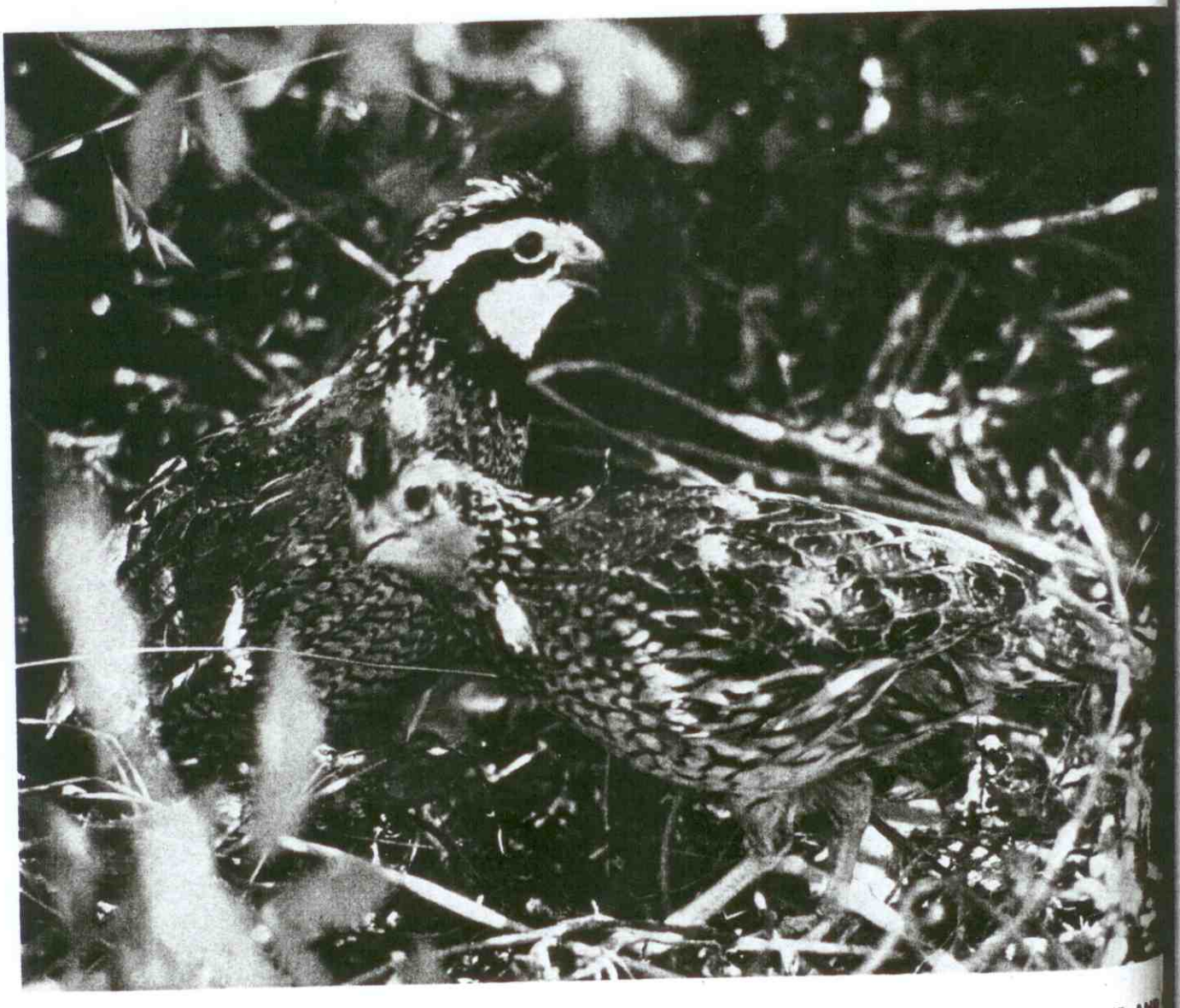
Visit almost any sportsmen's group, and invariabl the discussions turn eventually to bobwhite quail.

"I had a bumper crop of bobwhites on my ranch la year, but this year I haven't seen a single covey," b moans one sportsman-landowner. "Can't understan where they went."

A hunter voices a guess. "It's those blasted armadillo I've never seen so many of the critters. They eat the egg Sure. I wouldn't be surprised if they wouldn't eat th young, too, if they got a chance. What I'd like to kno is why the game department doesn't eradicate all tho varmints."

Another chimes in, "And why doesn't the game d partment release grown quail where there aren't ma anymore. That sure would help!"

Those are just a few of the questions the Texas Gam and Fish Commission must answer about quail and a fe of the problems with which it must deal.



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At present, no game department anywhere has all the answers. But biologists of the Game and Fish Commission have worked for years on bobwhite quail research, and gradually the picture is clearing. Food requirements, protective cover, effects of weather extremes, damage from predators, the effects of ranching and farming, and hunting pressures all have shared the attention of wildlife technicians.

Information concerning their findings has appeared in various bulletins and in TEXAS GAME AND FISH.

Now, after more than a year in the making, a movie entitled "The Bobwhite Story" is nearing completion by the Game and Fish Commission's motion picture unit as an additional source of public information.

Presentation of all the information available about the life of a bobwhite quail and his problems would be an impossibility in any one movie. However, "The Bobwhite Story" should fill a need in illustrating in a general way the overall picture of the difficulties Texas quail face in holding their own against shrinking habitat and increased hunting pressure and the steps that can be taken to insure their survival.

Of particular interest to the hunter will be a sequence showing some of the best quail dogs in the state at work in the field.

A habitat sequence will show coveys in winter, in spring during the mating season, and through the summer as the young hatch, grow, and mature. Included is a rare scene showing quail chicks as they break out of their shells to begin the first minutes of their lives.

Other scenes, including raids by a skunk and a snake on quail nests, point up the many enemies of the bobwhite.

In piecing the story together, hours and days often were required to photograph the exact climactic moment in a single scene lasting only seconds or minutes on the screen.

Special recording equipment was used to synchronize on-the-scenes sounds with the moving picture.

For instance, one beautiful shot shows an unmated cock, sitting on a fence post and whistling the familiar "bob white" call. His actual call is faithfully reproduced in sound for the scene.

The filming of that particular portion of the picture is typical of the difficulties encountered in presenting a complete story, part by part.

The sight of a bobwhite cock whistling atop a fence post is a familiar one to farmers and hunters. Getting close enough to record it on film and sound was another matter.

The camera was mounted on the side of Game Warden Joe Brower's car near Greenville. Riding slowly through some of the best quail country in Hunt County, Joe would whistle the call of an unmated cock as accurately as possible. Cameraman Lon Fitzgerald sat ready behind the camera.

Many attempts were made. Several quail were called within camera range, but attempts to photograph them failed because of obstructions such as high weeds, brush, or fences.

Late in the afternoon, a final try was made. The car pulled to a stop at the side of a dusty road, lined on both sides by fence posts.

"It's only a long shot," remarked Brower, "but I have seen quite a few quail along this line."

Fitzgerald agreed, observing that even if a quail could be lured to the call, he would have a choice of a hundred fence posts f m whence to answer. The camera must be focused properly in advance on just one.

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Photos by Lon Fitzgerald
From "The Bobwhite Story"

## The Mockingbird

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A similar report has come from A. V. Goodpasture of Nashville, Tennessee, who recorded one bird that changed his song 137 times in ten minutes and repeated each from one to twelve times.

There seems to be no recognizable limit as to the number or the species of birds that a mocker may learn to imitate. Among a few of the more startling imitations that our Texas birds render are calls of the roadrunner, the nighthawk, the chuck-will's-widow, and even the chachalaca. Of course these imitations are less frequently heard than those of such birds as the scissor-tailed flycatcher, orioles, gnatcatchers, titmice, sparrows and other common birds.

There is a story of mockers learning the song of caged nightingales and repeating it so well that the nightingales became silent and thereafter refused to sing.

Not only are mockers able to imitate other birds, but they also show definite ability to remember calls and songs from one season to the next. In fact it is most disconcerting to hear the clarion call of some summer resident bursting forth in the middle of winter—until you look outside and see the mocker who is responsible for it. His cheerful singing at night and in the winter months when most birds are entirely silent are other characteristics that make the mocker beloved by Texans everywhere.

Young mockers begin their vocal training when only a few months old, some starting by the end of their first month, but most of them indulge only in calls for the first few months. Their earliest musical attempts are very soft low "whisper" songs (without imitations) which tend to go unobserved by the amateur birder. Adult mockers also give "whisper" songs which are among the loveliest of all their renditions being appealingly soft and evanescent.

Although the mockingbird does sing throughout the year, it is only natural that the climax of his singing occurs in the spring and summer during the nesting season. It is this time of the year that he seems too filled with song to contain himself, and as you watch and listen to his pouring forth melody upon melody and weaving together the varied songs of his associates with his own musical arrangements, he seems literally to be swept from his perch by his exuberance and carried high into the air singing all the while.

Even nightfall fails to dampen his ardor. From the top of an orange tree flooded with moonlight, the veritable symphony of a mockingbird mingled with the fragrance of orange blossoms leaves a memory unparalleled in the ornithological world—and one of which any Texan may well be proud.

## The Bobwhite Story

• Continued From Page 1

There was nothing to do but gamble.

"Joe, do you see that post third from the left on my side of the car? I'm going to focus on the top of that one and hope," was Fitzgerald's decision.

Brower, remarking that his lips already were sore from the long day of repeated whistles, made like a quail.

From a distance came a weak, faintly audible answer. Brower repeated the call. Again came the answer, a little louder, a little closer.

"There he is, coming down the fencerow—in back of you," Brower whispered.

The bobwhite darted through the grass along the fencerow, then nervously crossed the road in front of the car.

"Get ready," Brower breathed. "He's getting ready to fly!"

Without hesitation and as if rehearsed a hundred times, the bobwhite took off—and landed on the exact fence post upon which the photographer had focused his camera.

The scene was filmed.

Brower moved the car a little closer. A second scene was made.

Photographer Fitzgerald, anxious to get the best shot possible, urged Brower to "drive just a little closer."

The car inched forward. Brower whistled softly—bob . . . white . . . bob . . . white. The quail, now so close he looked big as a buzzard in the camera sights, answered again and again as the camera purred.

That scene, complete with sound, now is part of the new movie.

It is only one small part of the entire production and presents just a single instance of the time, patience and persistence necessary to make up the whole of "The Bobwhite Story."

This latest Texas Game and Fish Commission motion picture production, filmed in color and sound, will take its place with "Master Whitetail," "Outlaw of the Cameron," and others in the Commission's educational film library.

Date of its release will be announced soon in TEXAS GAME AND FISH. No applications for booking of the new film can be accepted by the Commission until that time.


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