

CDFW seeks hunter assistance in Mountain Quail Study

September 10, 2023



The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) is asking hunters to provide mountain quail samples for the California Conservation Genomics Project and for the department's own genetic library.

This work is a continuation of a mountain quail study project initiated in the fall of 2022. CDFW will accept samples from throughout the native mountain quail range but is particularly interested in mountain quail from Southern California, including the following mountain ranges: Santa Lucia, Diablo, San Gabriel, San Bernardino, Santa Ana, Laguna, southern Sierra Nevada, Tehachapi and east toward the Cottonwood Mountains and Panamint Range.

Mountain quail (*Oreortyx pictus*) are challenging birds for bird watchers and hunters alike due to their secretive behavior within their preferred rugged, forested habitat. Despite their flamboyant plumage and popularity, mountain quail are reclusive and are more often heard than seen.

Their shy nature means that biologists need more information to better understand and manage the species, the largest of all quail species in the United States.

CDFW is collecting samples to understand genetic diversity and population structure (how genetically different each subpopulation is from those surrounding it). If a subpopulation becomes isolated, it may be

more susceptible to inbreeding, disease and sudden landscape changes like large-scale wildfires. When upland game bird biologists research a species' population genetics and combine it with research on habitat use, breeding ecology and survival, they can better understand and manage the species.

CDFW is asking mountain quail hunters to submit a whole bird when possible. If this is not possible, CDFW will accept wings or organs (specifically hearts and livers), as the goal is to extract DNA from the tissue. If hunters are lucky enough to harvest multiple mountain quail, be sure to keep the birds separate from each other. Vinyl gloves and Ziploc bags work well to avoid cross-contamination. Please keep samples frozen.

To submit mountain quail samples, ask questions or request more information about this research, please contact CDFW's Upland Game Program by e-mail at uplandgamemgmt@wildlife.ca.gov. CDFW will coordinate with hunters to receive the samples. CDFW will collect the hunter's name, hunt location, date and catalog each sample but will not publish this information.

Quail seasons and a quail hunt zone map are available at CDFW's Upland Game Bird Hunting webpage as well as the 2023-2024 California Waterfowl, Upland Game and Public Use of Department Lands Regulations booklet.