



Chapter 1

TAXONOMY, DESCRIPTION AND DISTRIBUTION

Colinus virginianus, the northern bobwhite, belongs to the order *Galliformes*, which is from the Latin *gallinaceus* meaning “of poultry.” They are in the same order of birds as domestic fowl, which also includes turkeys, pheasants, grouse, partridges and other quail. It is part of the family *Odontophoridae*, the New World quails, which have a serrated lower mandible. The next time you are lucky enough to hold a bobwhite in hand, you can observe this characteristic. The genus name *Colinus* derives from an Aztec word meaning “quail.” There are four species of *Colinus* (bobwhites) in North, Central, and South America. Only the north-

ern bobwhite, *Colinus virginianus*, occurs in the United States.

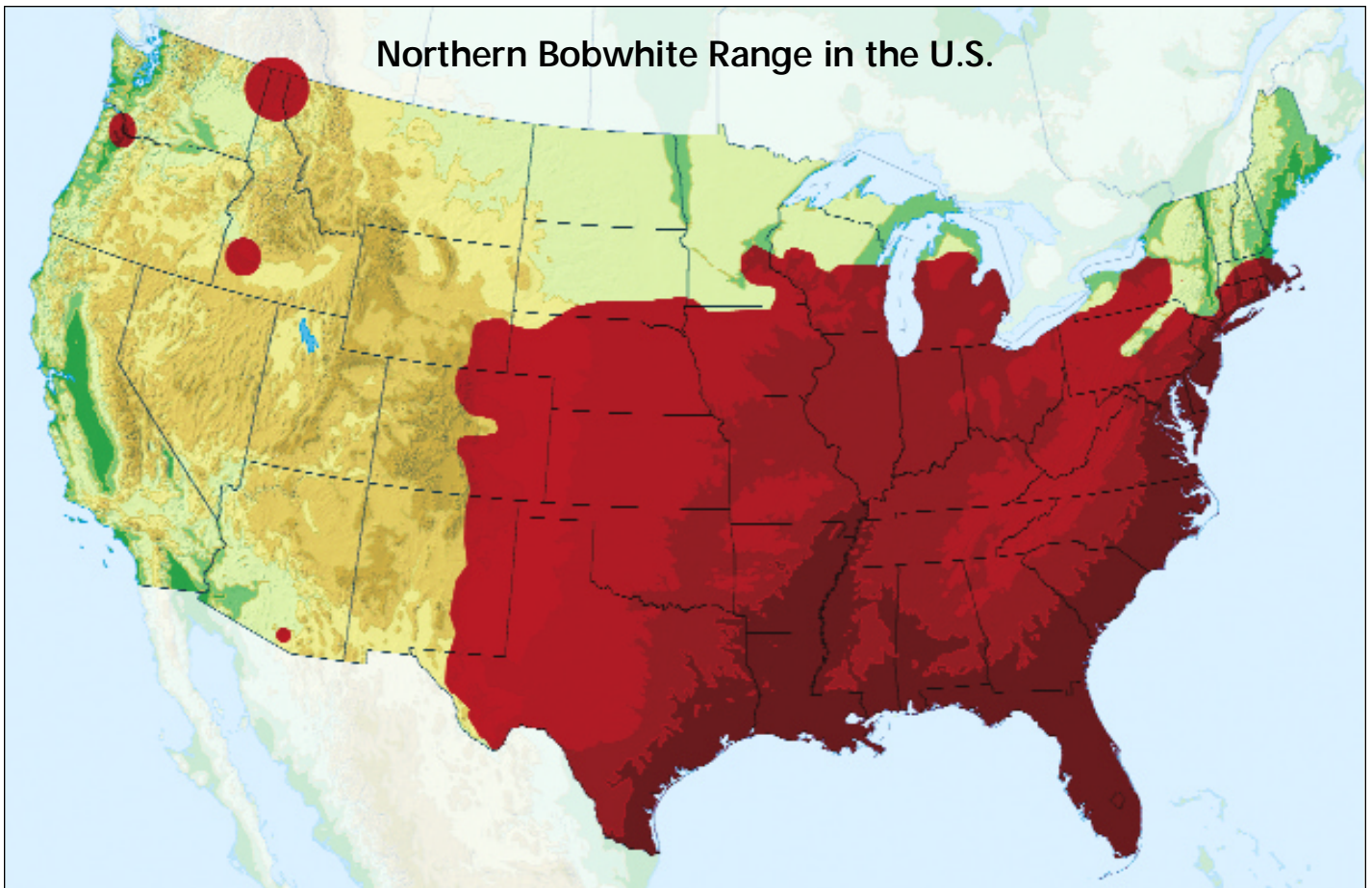
The bobwhite’s common name derives from the sound of the male’s breeding call, a two- or three-note whistle that sounds like “bob-white” or “ah-bob-white;” the first syllables are low monotonous followed by the final resounding, rising note.

Male bobwhites have a white feathered throat patch and eye stripe bordered with black. In females, these areas are a deep buff color. The crown of the head, neck, upper breast, upper back and wing coverts are russet, many feathers barred on the edge with black or gray. The nape and upper breast are streaked with white.



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The tail is gray. The abdomen is white or buffy white with black barring and tawny striping on the flanks. The beak is black and legs are tannish gray. Adult bobwhites are about eight inches in length. Average weights vary from a little less than six ounces for birds from warm southern climates to slightly more than seven ounces for birds from the cold northern portions of its range.³⁷ Alabama bobwhites average about six ounces.⁴¹

The northern bobwhite has an extensive range, from south-eastern New York to southern Ontario, west to south central South Dakota, eastern Wyoming, eastern Colorado, eastern New Mexico, and south through the Gulf States and most of Mexico and Central America. They were introduced to the Pacific Northwest, and scattered populations still exist in valleys along tributaries of the Snake and Columbia rivers in Idaho, Oregon, Washington, Montana, and British Columbia. Also, the masked bobwhite (*Colinus virginianus ridgwayi*), an endangered subspecies, has been reintroduced to southern Arizona. Introduced populations of bobwhites also occur in Cuba, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and New Zealand.



A female bobwhite.
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