



How to Make Money Raising Bobwhite Quail by Carl G. Kline, MBA



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Raising Bobwhite Quail



How to Begin

The Boy Scout motto “Be Prepared” can never be more strongly recommended than when you are planning to raise Bobwhite Quail. Chicks can and will die while waiting for you to get ready, so get everything ready in advance of their arrival. Test the brooder to make sure it’s holding the right temperature by running it for a day or two before putting chicks in. Check it frequently before and after putting the birds in. It should be set at the proper temperature and be located away from drafts. If the birds are arriving by airfreight, do not let them sit at the airport any longer than necessary. Do not drive them home in the back of an open truck or a car with the windows down or the air vents open.

If you’re planning to raise Bobwhite Quail to sell or eat and want to get a fast and inexpensive start, your best method is to buy day-old chicks. This eliminates the need to obtain breeder quail and incubators. It also shifts the burden of hatching to the farm you are buying the day-old chicks from. Before attempting to hatch your own chicks, read the section in this book on incubation. After you have raised your chicks, select breeders for the following season and set them aside. Keep a few more than you need for breeders in case you did not select all “winners”. Sell or eat the rest. By selling your excess, you should be able to cover most expenses and if you have not had bad luck or kept too many breeders, there may be that elusive thing called profit. If you are raising for release in order to stock your farm or area, your profit will come from seeing the quail population in your area rejuvenated. But do not waste your time releasing quail where there is inadequate cover and food. Predators they can fly away from or elude but little or no food or shelter will either kill them or cause them to abandon the area. If necessary, plant food and cover to carry the birds you plan to release.

It would seem cheaper to buy eggs and hatch your own and this may be if you have a good forced-air incubator and have experience hatching eggs. If you should decide to go this route, make sure the eggs you buy are from a good game farm and not been mishandled by the seller, the transporter, or you. Eggs are extremely sensitive to heat, cold, time, dirt, and jolts. Without a microscope and an expert, only way you can tell if an egg will hatch is to set it. Therefore, buy from an established, reputable game farm. Hatching eggs come with no guarantee because the producing game farm has no control over them once they leave that farm. The shipping agent or the receiver could have mishandled them. The attempts to hatch eggs in a poor incubator at the wrong temperature with no control of humidity is an old and common story heard many times a season by the game farm that has shipped good hatching eggs. Instead of finding the cheap way to get started, the beginning raiser has just found the expensive way and not only blames the game farm but unfortunately gives up and misses the exciting adventure of raising his own Bobwhite Quail. Both parties, the producer and the receiver, are disappointed and are left with a bad taste. Nobody profits, least of all the game farm that lost a good customer.

Beginning with adult breeders can work for you if you can find them in the spring at about 30 weeks old. They will be more expensive at this time because the producer will have fed them over the winter in most cases. The spring is also the time when the bird is in high demand by clubs having dog trials and by dog trainers as well as others. You can buy them in the fall and keep them until the next spring, but this, in turn, increases your investment and the risk of losing a few birds, cutting your profit. The feed you will put in them over the winter and the time spent cleaning and caring for them must be assigned a value.

In order to start right and grow into the business of raising quail, starting with chicks seems to be the most economical and practical way. Eggs can produce a poor hatch and holding adult birds over the winter to start in the spring may turn out to be an expensive misadventure. By raising your own chicks, you can select the best for breeders for the following season and keep

them. Often, a quail raiser keeps no breeders and buys chicks from an established hatchery each season. He raises them and sells or releases them and starts over with a new batch of chicks. There is much to be said for this method, which is widely used in other areas of poultry and animal rearing. However, if you want to have the complete cycle of raising, breeding, and hatching, starting with chicks can be both fun and profitable.

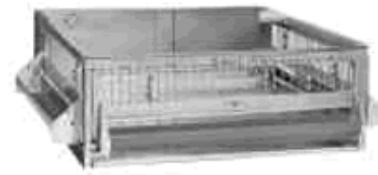
Chick Care

Whether you have bought or hatched your Bobwhite chicks, the disappointment will be extremely great if your efforts to raise them fail. Chick care, especially during the first few weeks, is critical.

There are two basic methods for brooding chicks. Some raisers use battery brooder units with wire floors and heaters built in. Others start the birds on fresh clean litter on the floor of a pen.

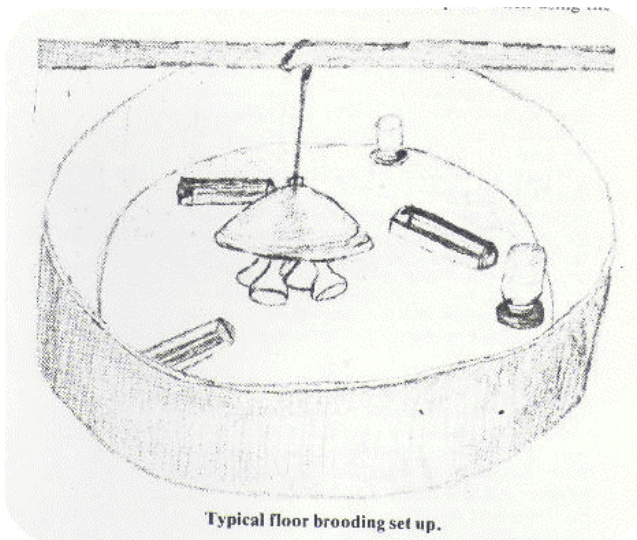


Typical floor brooding setup



Stackable Battery

Brooder



When using the floor you can use the common hover-type brooder or you can use ceramic socket brooder heat lamps. They can be bought or made to hold one to four heat bulbs. Whichever you choose, the hover or the bulb type, a restrictive circle of cardboard or metal sheeting should be placed around the heated area to keep the chicks from getting lost in a corner of the pen away from the life giving heat. There should be enough space between the circle and the heated area to allow the chicks to escape the concentrated heat if they desire, but not enough space for them to get lost. The circle also helps cut drafts, which can be deadly to new chicks. Keep the number in each group

to 350 or less and provide adequate space for each chick as well as sufficient feeders and waterers.

The chart below will help: