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A RECENT ATTEMPT TO INTRODUCE VIRGINIAN QUAIL INTO NEW ZEALAND.

By L. Gurr, Nelson.

Virginian quail or "Bob-White" (*Colinus virginianus*) were first introduced into New Zealand in 1898 when the Wellington Acclimatisation Society imported about 400 birds. These and another 756 birds imported by the same society in 1899 were distributed throughout the country from Auckland to Southland. They failed to establish themselves and disappeared in most districts within about ten years (Thomson, 1922). Nothing more was heard of them until 1923 when, according to the annual report of the Auckland Acclimatisation Society for 1923, a number of Virginian quail were caught during the winter between Waingaro and the sea coast and these were liberated at the Cambridge Game Farm. Thomson (1926) states: "... the local Acclimatisation Society is now distributing them through the Waikato country." Apparently they managed to maintain a small population in the Auckland district, and the secretary of the Auckland Acclimatisation Society (in litt.) states that they still do in some areas, especially where the bush or scrub has recently been burnt off.

No more attempts, to the author's knowledge, were made to establish the bird until 1947, when the Otago Acclimatisation Society obtained a permit to import 1000 eggs from the United States of America. Two separate consignments each of 200 eggs were forwarded by air freight from Oakland, California. They arrived at Dunedin on 19 June, 1947 and 3 July, 1947, respectively, the journey taking five days in each case. The eggs were allowed to stand for 48 hours, then placed in the incubator at the society's Game Farm at Waitati. Many of the eggs were infertile and others, although they began to develop, died before hatching. From the first consignment 33 and from the next consignment 31 chicks were hatched. Only 40 of these birds survived the difficult stage of the first fortnight. Thereafter, the numbers dwindled until early December, when the six remaining birds died, all within three days of one another. Three of these dead birds were sent to the Animal Research Station, Department of Agriculture, Wallaceville, for examination. Although the birds showed certain pathological conditions of the gut no obvious signs of a recognisable disease were present. The society has not made any further attempt at importation.

I am indebted to Mr. Leonard Millar, the manager-secretary of the Otago Acclimatisation Society, for placing the records of the society at my disposal and permission to publish this account of their attempt to introduce the bird into New Zealand.

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