

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release May 14, 1972

Carroll 343-5634

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE TO RELEASE MASKED BOBWHITES IN MEXICO

The Interior Department's Fish and Wildlife Service announced today that it will release 300 masked bobwhite quail in Sonora, Mexico, in an effort to bolster the population of the species within its historic range.

Similar transplantings of several hundred birds propagated at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center near Laurel, Md., have been made in southern Arizona in the past two years.

Until the Arizona releases, masked bobwhites were extinct in the United States for about 70 years. The species also has become rare in Mexico and is believed to exist naturally only in two small areas of central Sonora, at present.

The upcoming releases, done in cooperation with Mexico's Wildlife Service, will take place in mid May near Carbo, a village in central Sonora, about 225 miles from the U.S. border. The transplantings will be made on agricultural research lands where irrigation practices provide abundant water and succulent green feed to help ease the birds' transition from an artificial to a natural environment. No hunting is permitted on the property, and controlled grazing will assure ample ground cover essential for survival.

All masked bobwhites involved in the transplanting have been young birds raised in captivity at Patuxent from birds captured wild in Mexico in 1968 and 1969. Almost 1,000 masked bobwhites were hatched and reared at Patuxent last year.

"We are returning a courtesy to Mexico," said Assistant Secretary Nathaniel P. Reed, who heads Interior's programs for fish, wildlife and parks. "It is another example of the continuing cooperation of wildlife agencies in Mexico and the United States in behalf of conservation," Reed said. Last March, the two countries amended their 1936 wildlife convention to bring special protection to 32 additional families of birds.

The number of masked bobwhites surviving from earlier transplants is unknown. The bird is secretive and diminutive, about the size of an adult's hand, and is difficult to locate following release.

In 1967, the Service began studying the masked bobwhite to determine its status and to investigate the feasibility of reintroducing the birds into southern Arizona. Three release sites were selected within the species' historical range--one northeast of Arivaca and two in the Altar Valley, a few miles north of Mexico.

Special land management practices protected vegetation and improved habitat. Cooperation in this program came from Interior's Bureau of Land Management, the Agriculture Department's Forest Service, and Arizona's Game and Fish Department.

The initial transplant of 160 quail was made in 1970; in 1971, 250 birds were released. Some of the birds have been found dead--a major proportion of these probably the victims of hawks. There were, however, some survivors of the July 1971 releases as late as November, when a pair was observed with two young.

The chances of successful transplanting in the future are increasing, as biologists learn more about the specific environmental needs of the masked bobwhites. The birds are being given more time to acclimate themselves to the Southwest's desert conditions in pens in Tucson, Arizona, following their rearing at Patuxent.

Originally widespread in northwest Mexico and southern Arizona, the native populations of masked bobwhites were gone from Arizona by 1900 because habitat was destroyed by livestock overgrazing and by drought. Similar problems have caused the species to decline in Sonora.

X X X

MASKED
BOB WHITE

