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QUAIL NETTING

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Interview with Mr. Robert Meigs
By Elizabeth Ross, Interviewer
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Quail Netting.

In years of the past many quail were caught in nets. The birds were very numerous until comparatively recent times, the country being thinly settled and hunters relatively few in number. Occasionally a man or woman was found who was able to manufacture the nets which were used in catching the quail, but usually those desiring nets ordered them from the manufacturers or dealers in sportsmen's supplies.

The quail hunters rode forth horseback, usually two persons, but sometimes there were several in a party. When a covey of the birds, often called partridges, was found; the net was placed with the mouth facing the birds; on either side of the mouth entrance wings, twenty or more feet in length, were stretched and secured in upright position. When the net was in position the horsemen rode circuitously and got in rear of the covey or flock and made slight noises, such as whistling or rapping upon the saddle pommel with small sticks. Whereupon the birds started in the direction of the open net. There were times when the birds would halt and remain immovable

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for many minutes. At such times the drivers reined in their horses and waited patiently for the quail to go forward. Attempts to hurry the birds usually resulted in their taking flight. Consequently the drivers remained at some distance in the rear, continuing to whistle or rap on the saddle horns, and at length the leading bird started forward again, followed in single file by the remainder of the flock. After starting, the birds rarely paused again but made their way into the net, inside of which was generally a smaller net. Having once gotten into the inner net the birds could not escape and the entire number was captured.

More than one hundred quail were often caught in the course of a few hours. It is recalled that on one occasion one hundred and twenty birds were netted at one setting of the net, in the Rock Hill, (Oklahoma) vicinity, by two residents of that place. Many quail were sold in the towns or shipped to distant cities. Upon being confined in pens or coops, the birds soon lost their shyness and ate the same variety of grain as was fed the domestic fowls.

Instances have been related in which two coveys or flocks of quail were caught at the same

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time, a second covey being found while the first was being driven. And occasionally those endeavoring to capture a good-sized covey experienced disappointment when the birds suddenly took flight at the entrance of the net, but usually the birds entered the net.

The users of the net preferred calm and not overly cold weather, still and cloudy days with drizzling rainfall especially, as the birds were not then inclined to take flight as readily as under other conditions.

As population increased and more firearms were utilized in quail shooting the birds began decreasing in number and also became quite wild, to the extent that they could hardly be netted. Many years have now elapsed since the quail nets were discarded.

It is recalled that a number of years ago when quail were numerous as well as quite tame young boys constructed "dead-falls", (a flat square of plank supported by "a trigger") and placed them in the yard, "baiting" them with corn meal, or small grain sprinkled beneath the dead-fall. A mere touch against the trigger caused the trap to fall and sometimes several quail were captured in this way.

On a number of occasions, during protracted cold and freezing weather, men under supervision of the State Agricultural Department have gone through the rural districts dropping small grain in the vicinity of the quail, thereby protecting them from starvation.

Authority Mr. Robert Meigs, Park Hill, Oklahoma.

Personal recollection.