

## Red Mt. News - 3 May 1984

On April 14 six nearly-new Gambel's quail chicks scrambled after their parents for food and drink in Betty Graffe's yard at the Black Mountain Trailer Park.

An early debut for quail chicks is unusual, but not necessarily rare. Normally, the majority of quail clutches will hatch and become visible in May.

The key to an abundant quail population (as for most wildlife) is an adequate food supply throughout the year. The tender annual plants, rich in vitamin A, serve not only as an early food source, but also contain the highest levels of vitamin A which affect the male's reproductive ability.

After the chicks hatch, a high protein diet is required and is satisfied by the insects that develop in the growing vegetation.

When the young reach maturity, the various seeds from this same growth provide the larger proportion of the high energy food needed until the next winter crop of annual weeds.

This spring, due to the record-breaking 91-day drought (January to April), the number of quail chicks is likely to be less in proportion to the reduced food

supply. The plant annuals (weeds and grasses), dependent upon specifically timed adequate precipitation, germinated sparsely. Many of those that sprouted withered or were eaten before reaching seed producing maturity.

Should this spring and summer continue the trend of below-average rainfall and high temperatures, not just the Gambel's quail, but most of the birds, mammals and reptiles will be stressed from a diminished food and water supply.

Nature's own regulator-population in proportion to food source — to sustain the fittest of the species will be put into motion.

The competition for survival is likely to attract the wildlife to the greener oasis of landscaped and watered yards. This influx can bring residents both pleasure from observing more abundant activity and perhaps some species not commonly seen; and also frustration from off-limits munching of domestic plants, cacti and trees.

Remember, man's disturbance of the desert has contributed to reducing and altering the amount of supportive natural habitat required; wildlife in need of food does not reason or heed property boundaries.

The ideal solution is to co-habitate the land as happily as feasible. First, it is important for one to understand the wildlife's dilemma, then workable alternatives can be applied.

Vulnerable plants can be protected by surrounding chicken wire, trees with netting and vegetable gardens completely enclosed. Allow as much native vegetation as possible to remain undisturbed. Replant with species that are adapted to both the wildlife and the weather.

For birds and small ground animals, the daily responsibility of supplementing food, and especially water, can be assumed.

It is not advisable to supply food for the larger mammals such as deer, coyotes and foxes. However, daily feeding does create an unnatural food source which promotes dependency; therefore, it is important to be consistent.

Chicken scratch or wild bird seed should be made available in the same place at approximately the same time daily, preferably near protective vegetative cover, and not abruptly discontinued.

Water needs to be kept fresh and free of contaminating algae and debris. The ideal water container is both shallow and reasonably large in circumference. If the container is too deep, quail chicks and other small animals can drown.

Don't be surprised if a toad hops into the water for a moisturizing renewal or to lay eggs.

Because this year's prevailing weather conditions seem to have triggered Mother Nature's time clock ahead approximately three weeks, quail chicks, other birds, mammals and flowers will be noticeable earlier than usual.

Also noticeable will be hungry wildlife behavior.