

Life Cycle of a Bird

Bob White Quail



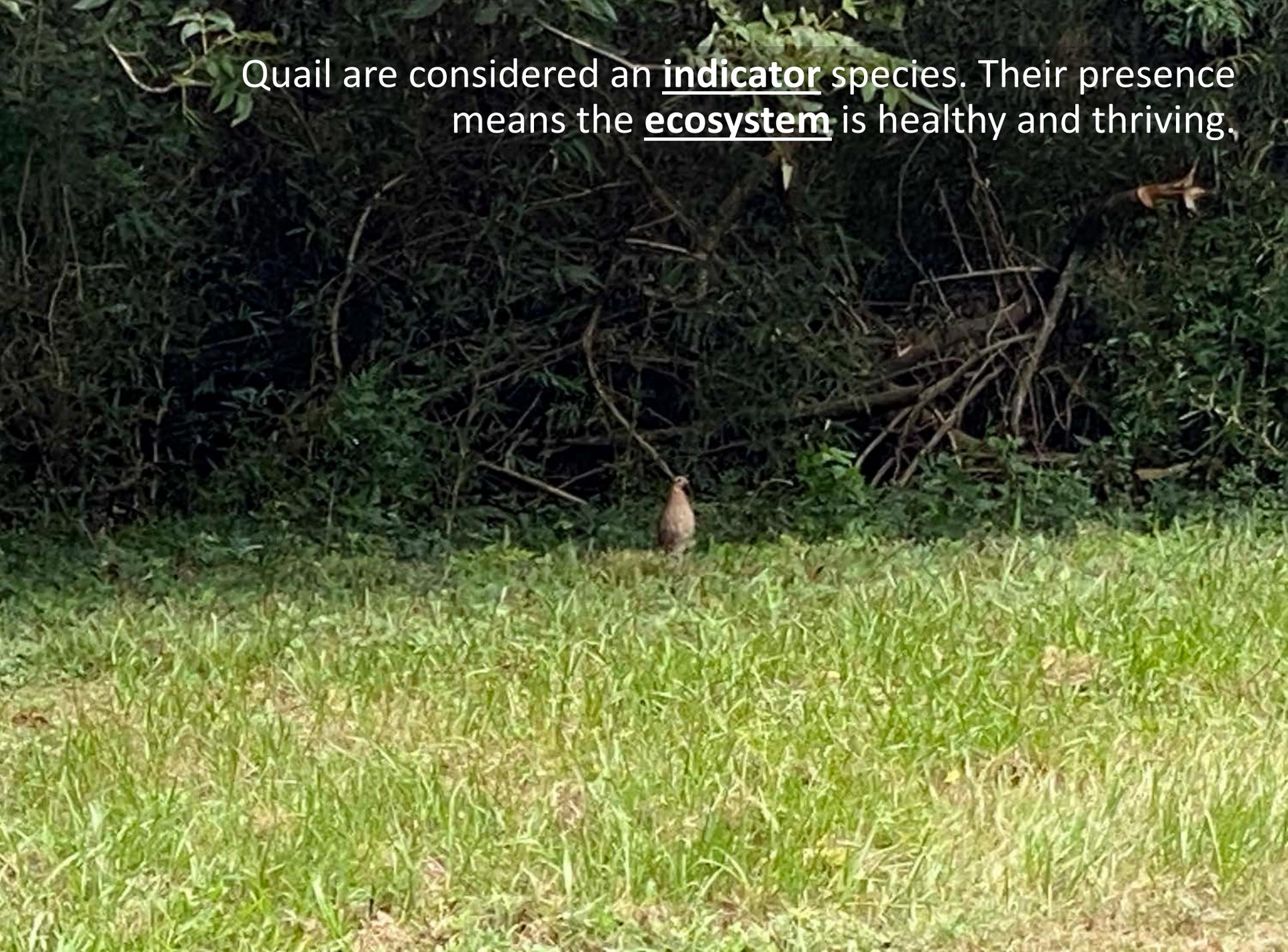
Bob White Quail are birds that were once commonly seen in Texas. The population of these quail has steadily been declining over the last several decades—since the 1960's.



Bob White Quail are one of four types of quail found in Texas. They get their name for the sound they make—it sounds like they are saying “Bob White” when they whistle.



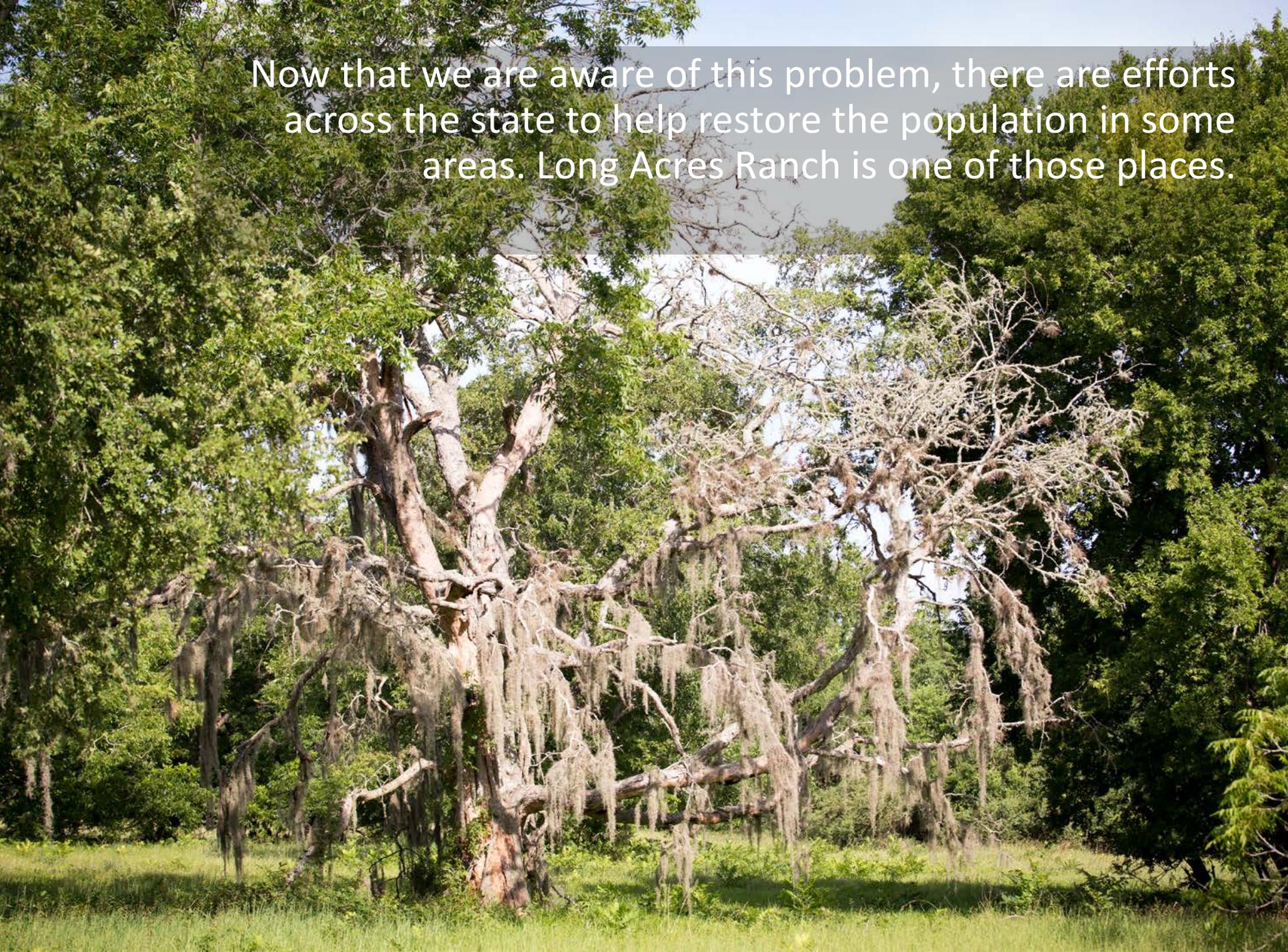
Quail are considered an indicator species. Their presence means the ecosystem is healthy and thriving.



Most people agree that loss of habitat is the main contributor to the quail decline.



Now that we are aware of this problem, there are efforts across the state to help restore the population in some areas. Long Acres Ranch is one of those places.



Quail are ground birds and hang out in groups called a coveys. They live in areas that mainly open but have sections of bunch grasses to run and hide in.



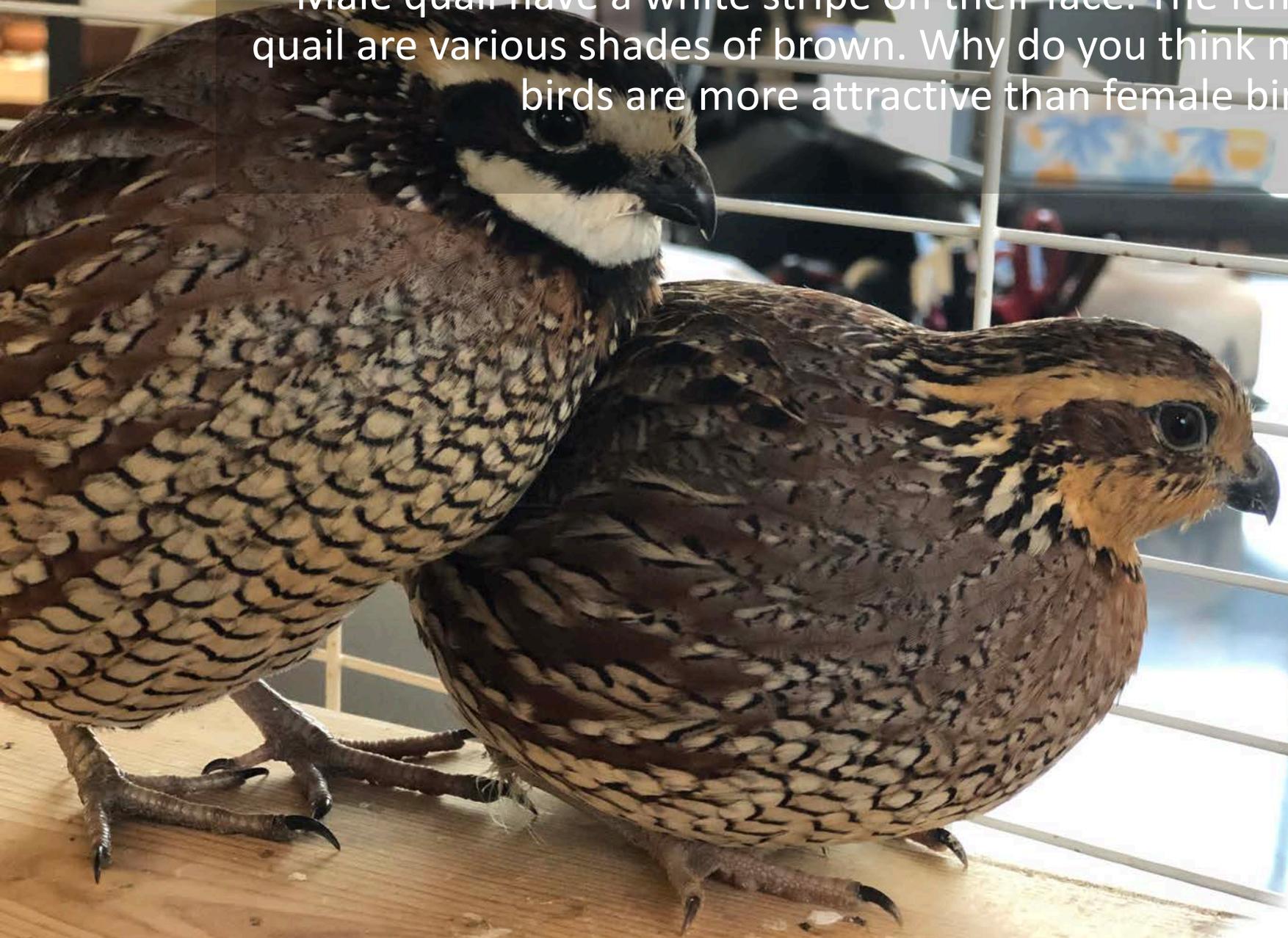
At night, the quail will gather in a circle, with their tail feathers together to sleep. Why do you think they do this?



Quail are shaped like pears with small heads and bigger bodies. Even though they can fly short distances, they spend most of their lives on the ground. What is a disadvantage for them being ground birds?



Male quail have a white stripe on their face. The female quail are various shades of brown. Why do you think male birds are more attractive than female birds?



Adult quail eat mostly forbs but occasionally will find a worm or small bug and that is a treat! Baby quail eat mostly insects. Why do you think chicks eat a lot of insects?



Quail do not rinse off with water, instead they take a “dust bath.” They will find an area with dirt and kick it up under their feathers. This helps keep bugs off of them.



Quail will build a nest hidden in the bunch grass or even under cactus. What is the benefit for building a nest under cactus?



Birds usually lay eggs in the springtime and quail are no exception to this. The hen will often lay a clutch of 6-18 eggs to sit on. Why do you think quail lay so many eggs?



The quail hens must incubate the eggs for 24 days. They usually only get off once or twice during the day to get a quick bite to eat or poop, and then they continue keeping the eggs warm.



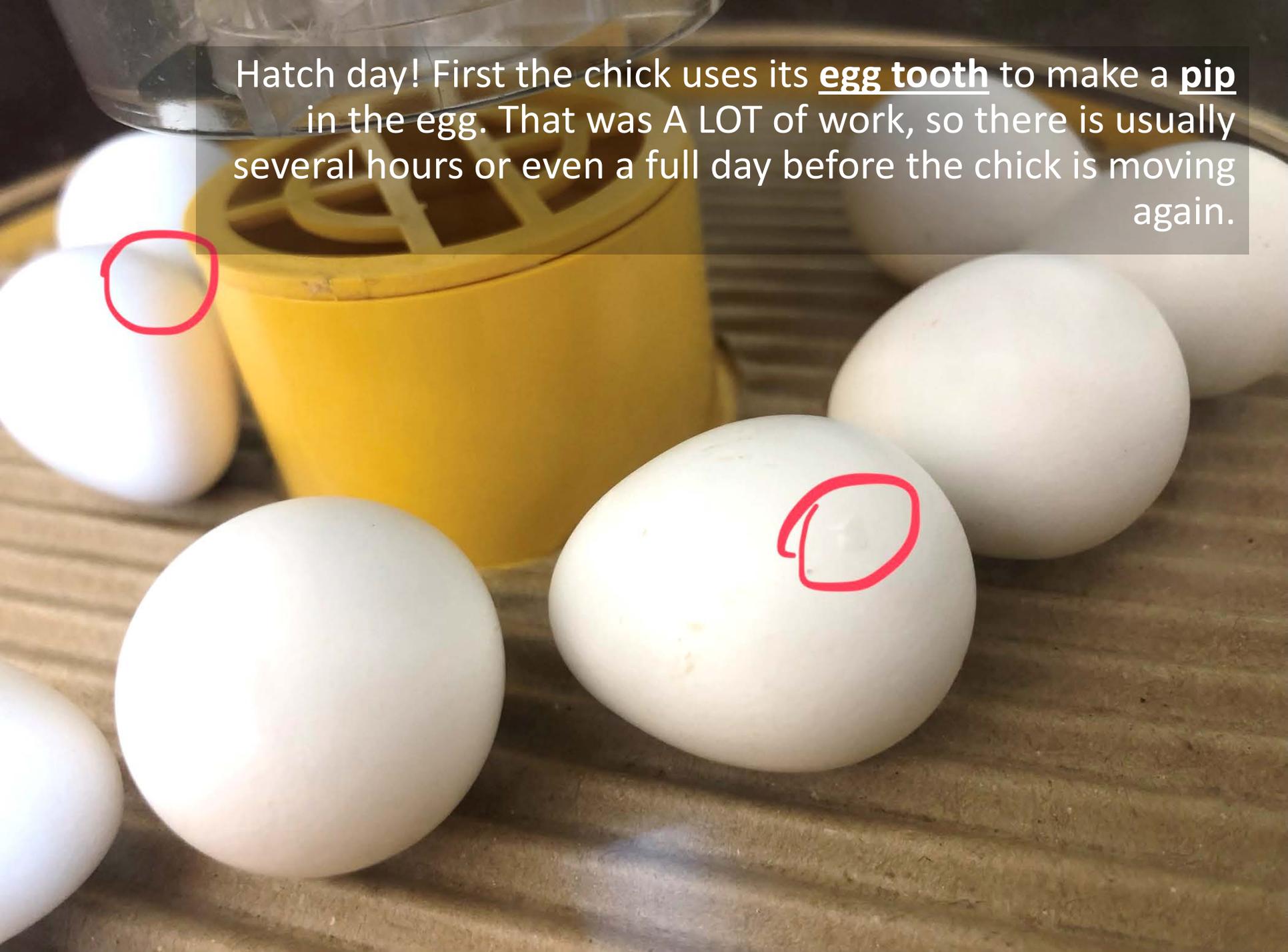
After the hen has been sitting on the eggs for about 20 days, she knows it is getting time for them to hatch. She takes her job very seriously at this point and will often not leave the nest.



Inside the eggs, the chicks are getting into a special position before hatching. They rotate so they have their beak pointing up which will make getting out easier.



Hatch day! First the chick uses its egg tooth to make a pip in the egg. That was A LOT of work, so there is usually several hours or even a full day before the chick is moving again.



Now comes the hard part. The chick continues using its egg tooth to carefully tap a zipper cut around the whole egg. Again, this is exhausting work!



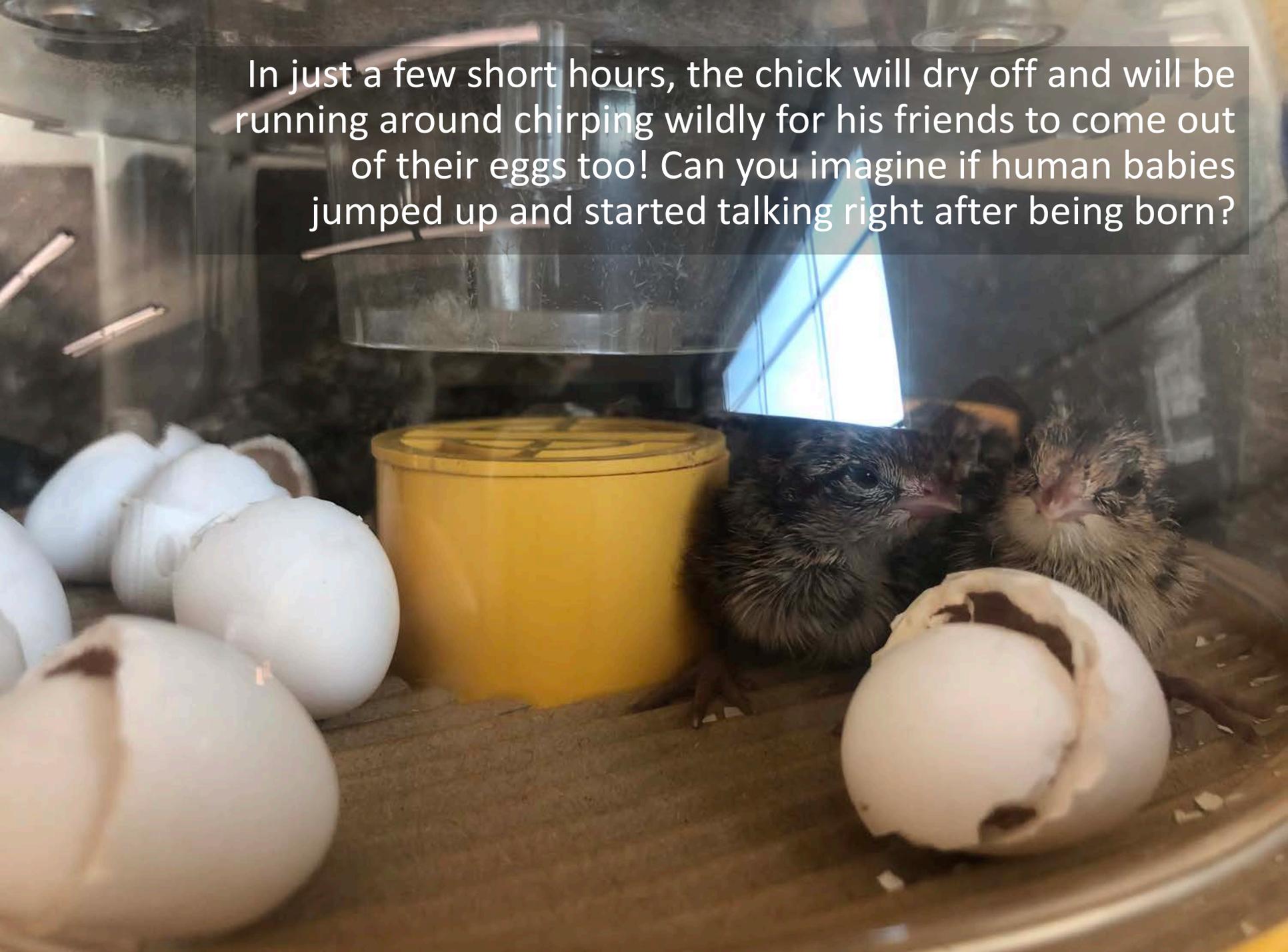
Finally, when the chick is ready, it will PUSH the bottom end of the egg off with its feet. Sometimes the top part of the egg stays on its head like a hat. Pretty soon the chick will roll around enough, the whole egg will be off.



Sometimes you can see the umbilical cord still attached to the egg. This is how the chick was getting nutrients from the yolk to grow.



In just a few short hours, the chick will dry off and will be running around chirping wildly for his friends to come out of their eggs too! Can you imagine if human babies jumped up and started talking right after being born?



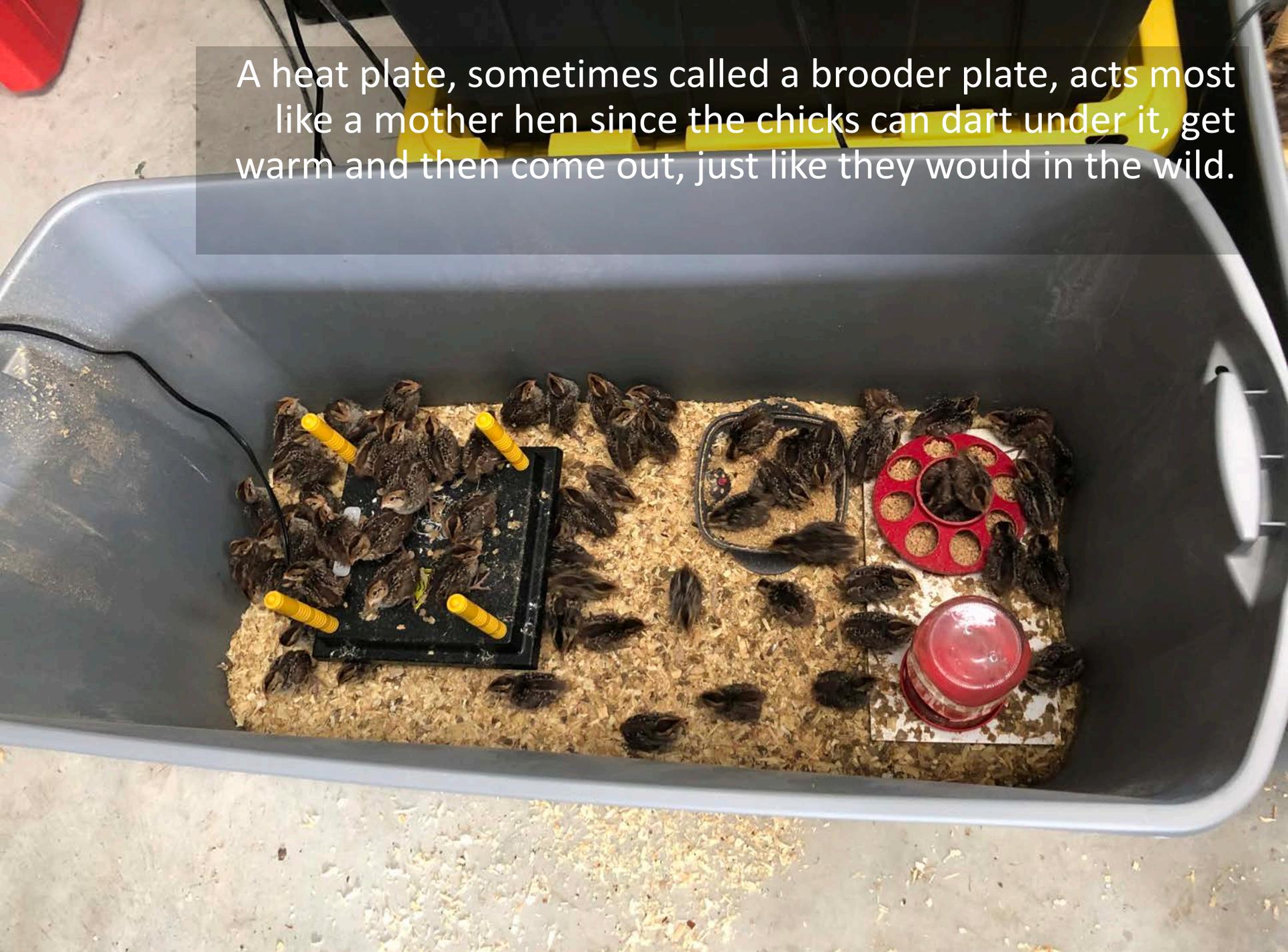
The newly hatched chicks will be covered with soft downy feathers. These feathers are not water resistant, nor can the chicks fly, but they can certainly run and jump high! Quail are precocial, meaning they can almost immediately move around after hatching and feed themselves.



With only downy feathers, the chicks lose body heat so they must huddle under their mom to stay warm. If chicks are hatched with an incubator, they need a heat plat or heat lamp for warmth.



A heat plate, sometimes called a brooder plate, acts most like a mother hen since the chicks can dart under it, get warm and then come out, just like they would in the wild.



The chicks are fun to watch! They play, eat, poop, and often will just fall asleep right where they are. When they get too far from their friends, they will chirp loudly to find out where they went.



When the chicks are about two weeks old, they will be combined with the same aged quail in larger brooder boxes. They will spend time in these growing out their adult feathers.



Between 6-8 weeks old, the new quail will be old enough to fend for themselves in their natural environment and will be released.



Being a ground bird is not easy! Hopefully with some human effort, we can help bring back the quail population in some areas!



Answers to questions

- P8- Quail sleep in a circle to keep a watchful eye out for predators. By sleeping in a circle, they can see all the way around them.
- P9- Ground birds are more susceptible to predators. Not only from things on the ground like coyotes and bobcats, but also from the sky by hawks.
- P10- Male birds are prettier so they can attract a mate.
- P11- Chicks eat a lot of insects because their growing bodies need more protein. Once they are adults, they can feed on seeds and grasses.
- P13- Building a nest under a cactus will help keep away the predators (except for snakes...snakes can still crawl under the cactus).

- P14- Because quail are ground birds, they lay a bunch of eggs in hopes that some will survive. There are a lot of animals that like to eat eggs including opossums, racoons, bobcats, etc...

Vocabulary

- Indicator species- plants or animals that are used to monitor the changes in the environment. These can be used to tell such things like an increase in pollution, or if management/restoration is being successful.
- Ecosystem- a community of interacting organisms and the environment in which they live
- Habitat- the home or environment of an organism- plant or animal
- Covey- small group of birds
- Forbs- flowering plants that produce seeds to eat
- Clutch- grouping of eggs
- Incubate- to keep warm and moist
- Egg tooth- a special tip of a bird's beak that is used to help break out of the shell; this point will eventually wear down or fall off after hatching
- Pip- make a small hole in the shell just before hatching
- Precocial- an animal that can eat on their own and move around immediately after being born or hatched