

# Look quickly, a Chukar won't linger for long

BY BRUCE MCCAMMON

Your word of the month is “gallinaceous.”

An adjective, *gallinaceous* is used to describe a group of heavy-bodied terrestrial birds. Included in the group are pheasants, turkeys, grouse, quail and the subject of this month's feature — the Chukar or Chukar Partridge.



*Bruce McCammon is retired, color-blind and enjoys photographing the birds in north central Washington.*

These are game birds and are widely hunted.

Knowing that, you can safely assume that Chukar are going to be quick to escape once they detect your presence.

Still, you can hear and see them throughout the shrub-steppe communities of central Washington. The backroads on the Waterville plateau and our foothill trails are all good places to watch and listen for Chukar.

They favor steep, rocky terrain and will run away if possible.



**A distinctive black stripe sweeps from the eye to the neck on the light brown Chukar.**

If they can't run into protective cover, they will flush and fly away, usually downhill. Yes, a group of Chukar flushing in front of you will quicken your heartbeat. Hunters and bird photographers know that you must be quick to see these birds.

Chukar are not native to our area. They were imported from Eurasia as a game bird and they have succeeded in establishing

populations in the interior West. Utah, Nevada, Washington and Oregon all have established populations.

Like other shrub-steppe species, Chukar are susceptible to habitat loss and fragmentation. Ecologically though, the status of Chukar is “low concern,” which means they are doing pretty well at the moment.

Chukar are plump, 12 to 14-inch birds. They are seed eaters and forage through shrub-steppe areas in search of food and water.

They have light brown backs and a grey-buff colored belly and front. The red legs and bill stand out for most people.

Being color-blind, for me, the bright head with a distinctive black stripe sweeping from the eye to the neck and the bold stripes on the wings stand out more prominently. Their call is loud and distinctive. You can

sample the call here: ([www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Chukar/sounds](http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Chukar/sounds)).

We live against the base of the foothills in Wenatchee and can hear them calling from the Jacobsen Reserve and the Castle Rock area. Every once in a while one or more of these interesting birds visits our backyard to compete for food with the quail and sparrows.

For a relatively big bird, Chukar seem fairly passive. They do not command the area when in a crowd of mixed species. They simply move about their business, calmly and steadily.

We are fortunate to have Chukar in our area. Your chances of seeing them are higher when it is not hunting season. Listening for their call will help you find them. Be quick with your binoculars or camera — they will be gone in a heartbeat once they are alert to you. Good luck.