

by Dave  
Campbell

# THE POLKA-DOT MEARNS QUAIL OF SONORA

Emma, the three-legged matriarch of Web Parton's string of English setters and German shorthairs, locked up on point under an oak, about a third of the way up from the arroyo. My hunting companion, Jim Niemiec, happened to be a little closer, albeit higher, to Emma and hustled down toward the point. About the time he reached the south end of the dog, his feet shot out from under him, and perhaps eight Mearns quail erupted from two feet in front of Emma's nose as Jim's butt hit the ground.



Web Parton

Web and I were in convulsions laughing at Jim, but he—not being one to let a little embarrassment cause him to lose his focus—recovered and managed to down a straggler.

“Reload before you take a step!” Parton hollered between guffaws. Jim did so, then took another step and two more birds rose. He dumped the first bird and chipped the second. Emma had already brought the first to her master's hand and was on her way out for the other birds. A couple minutes later, she found the cripple and brought it back, no worse for wear.

We were hunting the Pajarito Mountains of southern Arizona, perhaps nine clicks from the Mexico border. The rolling hill country is home to not only Mearns quail but Coues deer, javelina, AS WITH ALL QUAIL HUNTING, A SAVVY DOG, IN THIS CASE A SETTER, IS A KEY ELEMENT TO MEARNS QUAIL SUCCESS. A GOOD DOG WILL PIN THEM DOWN; MEARNS QUAIL ARE OTHERWISE PRONE TO FLUSHING WILD IN HEAVILY HUNTED AREAS.