

## Taiwanese Lifestyle Through the Eyes of CC

### Chapter 2. Wildlife Habitat for Quail

Ideas lose themselves as quickly as quail, and one must wing them the minute they rise out of the grass, or they are gone.

— Thomas F Kennedy



Fig. 1: Tin basins are set upside-down to serve as a feeding tray, preventing the feed from getting damp from the soil and allowing easy cleaning.



This quote by Thomas F. Kennedy (1858-1917) vividly portrays the nature of quail — easily alerted and quick to run into hiding. The word *quail* is even used as a verb, meaning to feel or show fear, or to want to move away from something out of fear (source: Cambridge online dictionary).

Quail are mid-sized, ground-dwelling birds, with the term covering a wide variety of breeds and species; the most common quail in Taiwan and most East Asian countries is the Japanese quail. An adult quail on average weighs around 10oz ( $\approx 130\text{g}$ , with females slightly heavier than males) and measures around 20cm in length. Chicks mature after about 6 weeks and a female adult quail can lay up to 300 eggs in a year, a profitable and abundant resource for farmers and scientific research.

Generally speaking, quail in the wild inhabit grasslands. Since they easily fall prey to other animals, overhead cover such as high grass, broadleaf, and woody bushes is essential for providing hiding places and reducing the efficiency of their predators. The bare ground under these plants also allows quail to move around freely and to build their nests during the breeding season. Moreover, while younger quail may consume insects, the adult quail diet is primarily plant-based. In a nutshell, a lush, unruly garden is an ideal man-made habitat that mimics the wild in which quail live.

To accommodate quail in a suitably realistic living environment, Dr. Chang had his mind set on creating a garden on his rooftop. By doing so, predation that occurs mostly on ground floor level - not only by pests such as snakes and rats, but also by common household pets such as cats and dogs - can be avoided. A core condition for a rooftop garden that is both sustainable and, more importantly safe, lies in the drainage system.



Fig. 2: Quail enjoy an unruly, lively garden where they can observe the surroundings while knowing there is always somewhere to hide in case of danger.





Fig. 3: A mother Texas A&M quail keeping herself alert while her chicks doze off during their stroll in the garden (Watch this quail family in action: [https://youtu.be/e\\_1PvdfUiC0](https://youtu.be/e_1PvdfUiC0))



Fig. 4: Quail make their nests in bushes or among tall grasses. Around 10-16 eggs would be laid in one clutch, with brown and black speckles on them as disguise.



Fig. 5: The messier, the merrier. The plantation is not set out to fit a specific graphic design as most gardens are. Nature has its own idea of beauty, and the creation is just an eye-brightening ordinary miracle.





Fig. 6: The weight of the different materials making up planting medium has to be taken into consideration during distribution: heavy materials around the edges, and light ones in the center. Stone panels are arranged onto the soil as a walkway after planting is completed.

As Dr. Chang would say in an advocating manner, “No over-retention of water means no leaking!” (不積水・就不漏水!) As long as the garden does not retain excess water, the chances of leakage can be minimized. This also reduces considerably the amount of weight that the building has to bear, ensuring structural stability and residential safety.

The first and foremost barrier at the base of the garden is a waterproof coating, seven layers of it to be exact, to ensure that no water penetrates into the structure of the building. It is crucial that this coating is sloped to guide any excess water to the allocated drainage system. On top of that is a layer of drainage trays, which elevate the planting area, leaving spaces at the bottom not only for excessive water to run through but also to allow air circulation so that any residual water can evaporate. Before loading up the floor with a planting medium, a layer of non-woven cloth is spread all over the drainage trays to prevent soil depletion.

Different materials are required to form the planting medium. *Gravel* - the spaces between which help enhance drainage; *shredded tree bark* - which is light and retains just enough moisture for plants that require more hydration to thrive; and common *garden soil* - to provide the necessary nutrients. In order for the building to hold up to 20 tons of planting medium, these materials are distributed in

relation to their weight and the load-bearing capacity of the rooftop structure. Heavy materials, such as gravel, are paved along the edges of the building, where higher structural stability is ensured with the fortification of the walls. The lighter shredded tree bark is concentrated more in the center, beneath which there is relatively less structural support (Fig. 6).

Once the planting medium is ready, the only job left before moving the quail in is to *plant away*! In less than 6 months, the Changs’ rooftop has been transformed from a construction site into a flourishing green garden with haphazard splashes of colors. However, for Dr. Chang and his family, even the most fully-bloomed, radiantly-colorful flowers cannot steal the spotlight from their new found love, their restless little residents — quail. In addition to the common Japanese quail, the garden is also home to Italian quail, Texas A&M, and the most beautiful of all, Chinese painted quail. While Italian quail are famous for their golden-colored, playfully-speckled coat, and Texas A&M quail catch onlookers’ eyes with their elegant white plumage, Chinese painted quail are relatively low profile but impress onlookers with the navy blue on their back, burgundy-colored chest, and the bold black-and-white pattern on the chin. Being the smallest among the quail family, Chinese painted quail (measuring 2oz, ≈50g, in weight and 14cm in length) are of the least economic value; however, for those with eyes of an artist, they are truly something precious.

“Ideas lose themselves as quickly as quail,” said Mr. Thomas F. Kennedy. However, for Dr. Chang, having quail running about in such close proximity has not only added color and vitality to his garden, but has created a temple of inspiration on his rooftop hideaway.

Desk editor of JDO & a wildlife enthusiast\*

*Annie Chen*

\* Title bestowed by Dr. Chris Chang

Special thanks to the talented artist, Jenny Chang, for the exquisite paintings.

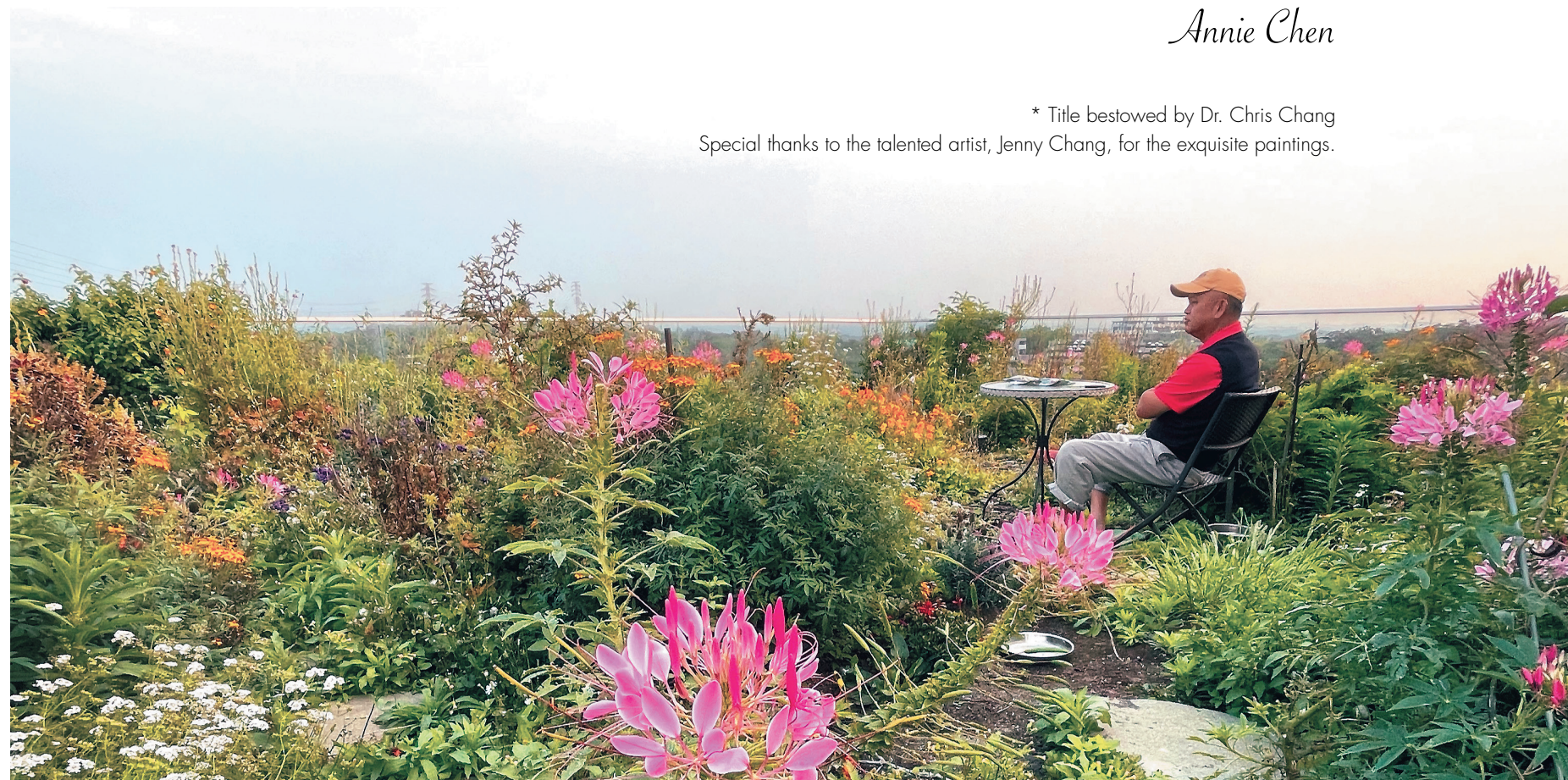


Fig. 7: Dr. Chang finds his mind at ease, and his thoughts the most active, when immersed in nature. Compared to an office or a study room, the rooftop garden is now his favorite place to prepare his lectures and speeches.





Fig. 8: Chinese painted quail plumage: amazing illustrations by the talented young artist, Jenny Chang. From their iconic black-and-white pattern on the chin, Dr. Chang speculates that the doodles on the package of the Ormco quail elastics (2oz, 3/16") are also inspired by this breed.



Fig. 9: A dreamy ombré dusk sky adds a further touch of enchantment to the endearing rooftop garden.

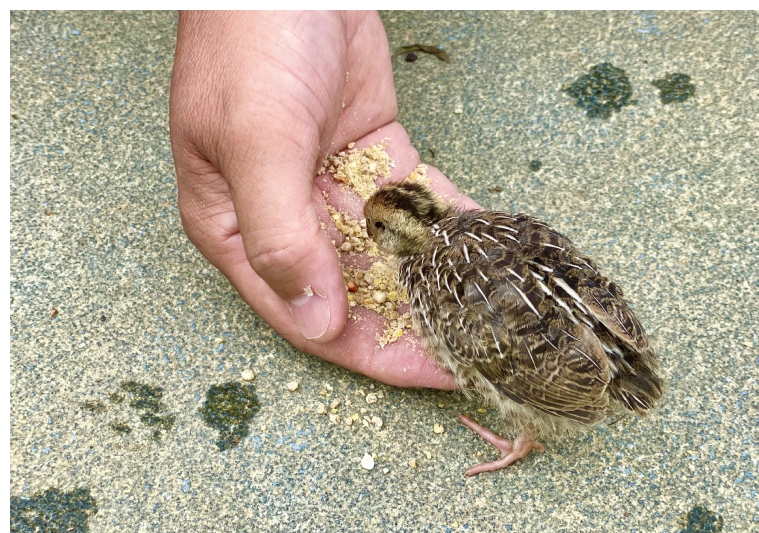


Fig. 10: A juvenile quail feeding on grains held in Dr. Chang's palm is a sure sign that the quail have become accustomed to their surroundings.

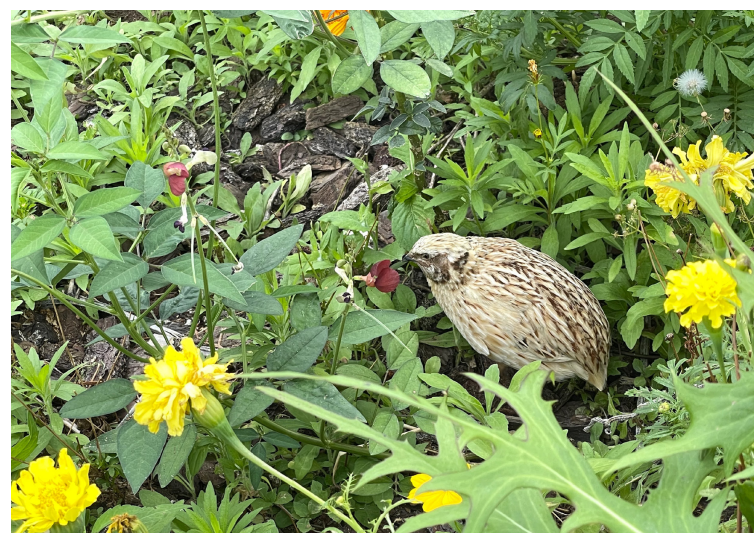


Fig. 11: A fully-fledged, golden-colored Italian quail peeking through some lush vegetation



Fig. 12: Father-daughter bonding time while overlooking a mother Texas A&M quail bonding with her chicks creates an extraordinarily heart-warming scene in the garden.



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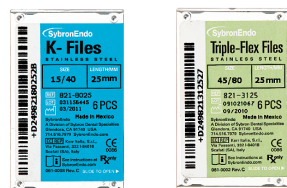
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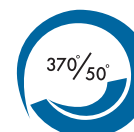
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