



Habitat: The vegetation analysis shows an association with a wide range of woodland types, and its absence from the Kalahari where it is replaced by the Redbilled Francolin *F. adspersus*. Its habitat ranges from savanna with a scrub understorey, especially along watercourses, to thickets and coastal forest. Favoured habitats are dry riparian vegetation and wooded hills, and even the edges of montane forest. Tarboton *et al.* (1987b) stressed its association with densely wooded areas but that it is independent of any grass cover. Natal Francolins are also tolerant of human-modified habitats and regularly exploit the edges of agricultural fields where these are adjacent to dense cover. Although more secretive than Swainson's Francolin *F. swainsonii*, they are often encountered alongside the latter species, particularly along the verges of roads and the edges of fields.

Movements: The Natal Francolin is thought to be sedentary (e.g. Tarboton *et al.* 1987b) and the models do not suggest any seasonal movements.

Breeding: Egg-laying in the Transvaal occurs December–September, with a peak April–May (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). In Zimbabwe, egg-laying occurs in virtually all months with a March–May peak (Irwin 1981). Brooke (1971f) and Hartley & Mundy (1992) confirmed this pattern for Zimbabwe, with most breeding recorded March–May. The atlas data corroborate this late-summer pattern of breeding, but the peaks are skewed to later months, presumably as a result of a bias towards records of chicks.

Interspecific relationships: It is reported to hybridize occasionally in the wild with both Swainson's and Red-necked *F. afer* Francolins (Wolff & Milstein 1977). In the area of contact with the Redbilled Francolin, hybridization may also occur (Randall 1994f).

Historical distribution and conservation: There is no evidence that the distribution of the Natal Francolin has changed significantly in recent times. It has increased in some parts of the Transvaal through bush encroachment (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). A threat to some local populations is habitat modification and fragmentation by woodland removal and frequent burning.

R.M. Little

Natal Francolin

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Francolinus natalensis

The Natal Francolin is near-endemic to southern Africa, with a range extending from southern Zambia southwards through Zimbabwe, eastern Botswana, the Transvaal, Swaziland, Free State and KwaZulu-Natal. There is an interesting gap in the South African distribution between populations found in the northern Transvaal woodland region and those occurring further to the south in the grassland biome, where they apparently inhabit wooded watercourses in open grassland (R.J. Nuttall pers. comm.).

It is a member of the 'vermiculated group' of francolins (Urban *et al.* 1986), with its closest relative being the Cape Francolin *F. capensis* (Crowe *et al.* 1992).

It is found in pairs or, after breeding, in family parties. Although it inhabits dense vegetation, its loud calls render it conspicuous.

Recorded in 909 grid cells, 20.0%

Total number of records: 14 214

Mean reporting rate for range: 25.0%

Reporting rates for vegetation types



