



Swainson's Francolin

Bosveldfisant

Francolinus swainsonii

Swainson's Francolin is near-endemic to southern Africa, occurring in Zambia and southwards into northern Namibia, northern and eastern Botswana, Zimbabwe, the Transvaal, Swaziland, KwaZulu-Natal, the Free State and western Lesotho. It is probably the most well-known and widespread francolin in the atlas region.

The distribution shows some interesting patterns of absence in the eastern Transvaal and in Zimbabwe. These do not correspond consistently to zones of vegetation or to altitude and are difficult to explain.

It occurs in pairs and small family parties. Harsh calls render it conspicuous, but it is easily confused with the Rednecked Francolin *F. afer* which has similar calls.

Habitat: It is common in most areas with tall grass, either in open country or in woodland, and often adjacent to cultivation and close to water, except in the arid west. It was reported from the widest variety of habitats of all the francolins, being commonly recorded from most of the woodland and grassland types. It is generally absent from the Kalahari basin, except the Northern Kalahari. In northern Botswana, average densities in natural habitats ranged from 1 bird/9.2 ha in mixed Okavango riparian woodland to 1 bird/25 ha in various types of Mopane woodland, while it was not encountered in 250 ha surveyed in Kalahari woodlands, riparian *Acacia* woodland near Lake Ngami (2022B) or *Baikiaea* woodland (M. Herremans unpubl. data). In optimal habitat, 409 were counted along 37 km of the Chobe riverfront (Herremans 1994b).

Movements: There is no evidence for seasonal movements; it is regarded as sedentary.

Breeding: In the Transvaal, Tarboton *et al.* (1987b) recorded egg-laying in all months with a February–April peak. Irwin (1981) reported a similar pattern in Zimbabwe. Brooke

(1971f) and Hartley & Mundy (1992) confirmed the extended breeding season in Zimbabwe, with peak breeding activity February–May. The atlas data show extended breeding activity but with later peaks caused by a predominance of records of chicks.

Interspecific relationships: Where Swainson's and Rednecked Francolins are apparently sympatric, the latter prefers more dense cover, usually of a moister nature than that favoured by Swainson's Francolin. In the drier savannas of the Transvaal and Zimbabwe, Swainson's Francolin are often sympatric with Coqui *F. coqui*, Crested *F. sephaena*, Shelley's *F. shelleyi*, and Natal *F. natalensis* Francolins. It is also sympatric with the Redbilled Francolin *F. adspersus* in north-central Namibia, northern Botswana, and marginally so in the northern Cape Province.

Historical distribution and conservation: It was historically common and widespread in southern African savannas, with the exception of the Kalahari and woodlands of the eastern Cape Province. It has recently expanded its range extensively into adjacent grassland regions in KwaZulu-Natal, the Transvaal, Lesotho (Clancey 1965c; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Osborne & Tigar 1990), and parts of Zimbabwe (Irwin 1971), where it has capitalized on cultivation for agricultural crops and the introduction of alien trees. There is reliable evidence that at least part of this range expansion, particularly into KwaZulu-Natal, was assisted by translocations (E.A. Zaloumis pers. comm.).

This highly successful species is probably the francolin most tolerant of modified habitats. Along with the Helmeted Guineafowl *Numida meleagris*, it has exploited transformed habitats to the extent of increasing population sizes, probably above levels prior to habitat transformation. In parts of Zimbabwe, the Transvaal, KwaZulu-Natal and the northern Cape Province, it is at population levels which attract commercial gamebird-shooting operations, and land-use practices are often modified to encourage its establishment (e.g. placement of water points, stacking of bush-removal litter, and development of land-edge habitats). Swainson's Francolin is hunted heavily in Botswana and its habitat is much degraded by overgrazing. Its reporting rate here is 9% higher on protected than on unprotected land (M. Herremans unpubl. data).

R.M. Little

Recorded in 1520 grid cells, 33.5%
Total number of records: 26 883
Mean reporting rate for range: 35.7%

Reporting rates for vegetation types



