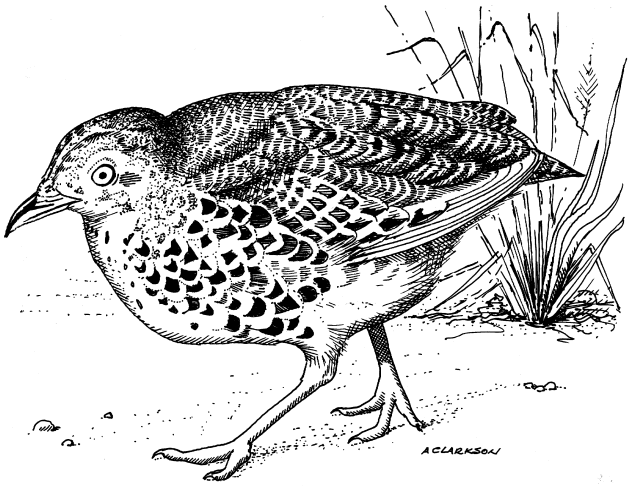


Kurrichane Buttonquail

Bosveldkwarteltjie

Turnix sylvatica

This is the commoner and more widespread of the two buttonquails found in southern Africa, occurring over most of the subcontinent except for the south and southwest. There is an estimated population of 1000 birds in Swaziland (Parker 1994), while in Lesotho, where it was not recorded during the atlas period, it was recently classed as 'very rare', with a population of 1–10 birds (Osborne & Tigar 1992a). Elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa it is quite common and widespread, avoiding only the forested and very arid regions (Urban *et al.* 1986); it marginally enters southern Europe and also occurs in southern Asia and on some of the islands of the southwestern Pacific (Johnsgard 1991).

It is a small, inconspicuous ground bird, usually only seen when flushed from grass or other low vegetation and it flies reluctantly. It occurs singly or in pairs or, in the nonbreeding season, in small groups (Cramp *et al.* 1980). It may at times share its habitat with the two commoner quails, the Common *Coturnix coturnix* and Harlequin *C. delegorguei* Quails , and some misidentification is likely (Cramp *et al.* 1980; Urban *et al.* 1986). Furthermore, although the advertisement calls of females in the breeding season are far-carrying (Cramp *et al.* 1980), its voice is not generally well known. It was probably frequently overlooked, and is likely to be commoner and more evenly distributed than indicated. The high reporting rates in the less well-covered areas west of longitude 26°E should be viewed with some caution, though in Botswana it is reported to be locally very common to abundant when suitable veld conditions prevail (Herremans 1994d; Penry 1994).

Habitat: While open grassland that is neither very tall nor very dense is particularly favoured (Johnsgard 1991), the vegetation analysis indicates a preference for savanna habitat. It is mainly the open grassy component of savannas that it uses (Smithers 1964; Irwin 1981; Penry 1994), while cultivated and fallow lands are also favoured (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Brewster 1993). It periodically retreats to the cover of woodland and thickets, particularly when the grass cover has been affected by overgrazing during drought (M. Herremans pers. comm.).

Movements: There is no evidence for seasonal movements in the models for the eastern Zones, though nomadic movements have been reported there (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). There is an indication of some movement out of the western Zones during the dry season, and, though not evident in the respective models, many of these birds, of the subspecies *T. s. lepurana*, apparently move into Zimbabwe (Irwin 1981), northeastern South Africa and Zambia (Clancey 1980b), where they are distinguishable from the resident *alleni*. The presence of *lepurana* on the breeding grounds in the semi-arid areas shows a typically irruptive character, with many birds concentrating in areas where good rains have fallen (e.g. Herremans 1994d).

Breeding: Although the data are scanty, breeding was recorded throughout its range, and the models follow patterns evident in data previously published (Dean 1971; Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b), with no breeding in the dry season in the southern populations, and breeding throughout the year further north, with a late-summer peak. For example, egglaying in Namibia has been recorded January–July with a February peak (Brown & Clinning in press).

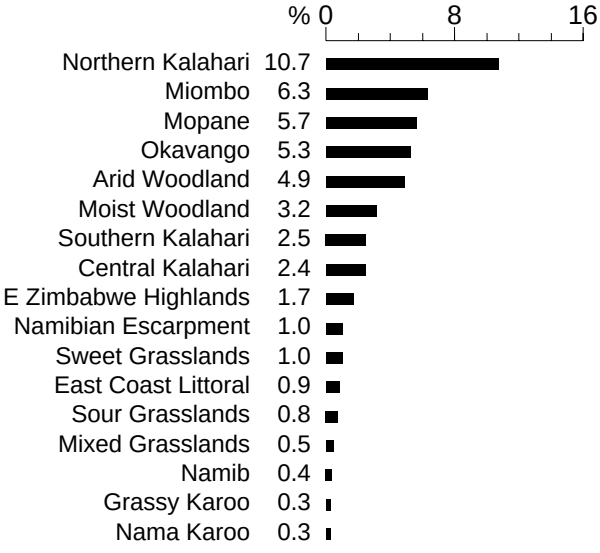
Interspecific relationships: Its range is sympatric with that of the less common Blackrumped Buttonquail *T. hottentotta* in the eastern half of the subcontinent, but that species tends to occupy moister and shorter open grasslands (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b).

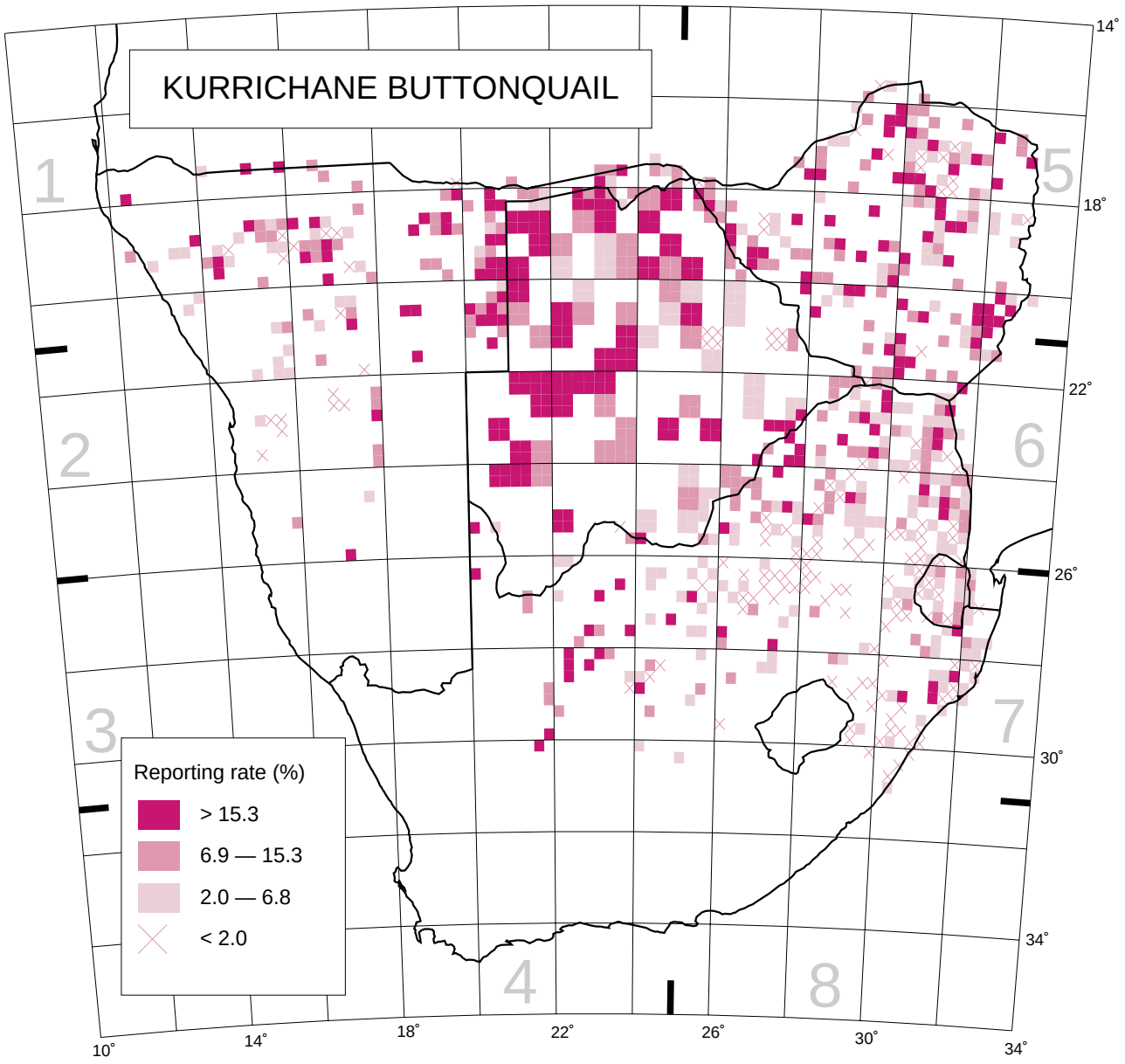
Historical distribution and conservation: Continuous overgrazing of the ground cover is unlikely to be tolerated and is probably the reason for its decline in Lesotho where it seems to have been common previously (Bonde 1993). Although not documented, it is likely to have been similarly affected elsewhere, but its wide distribution, nomadic movements and capacity to utilize fallow and cultivated lands make the Kurrichane Buttonquail less vulnerable than its congener.

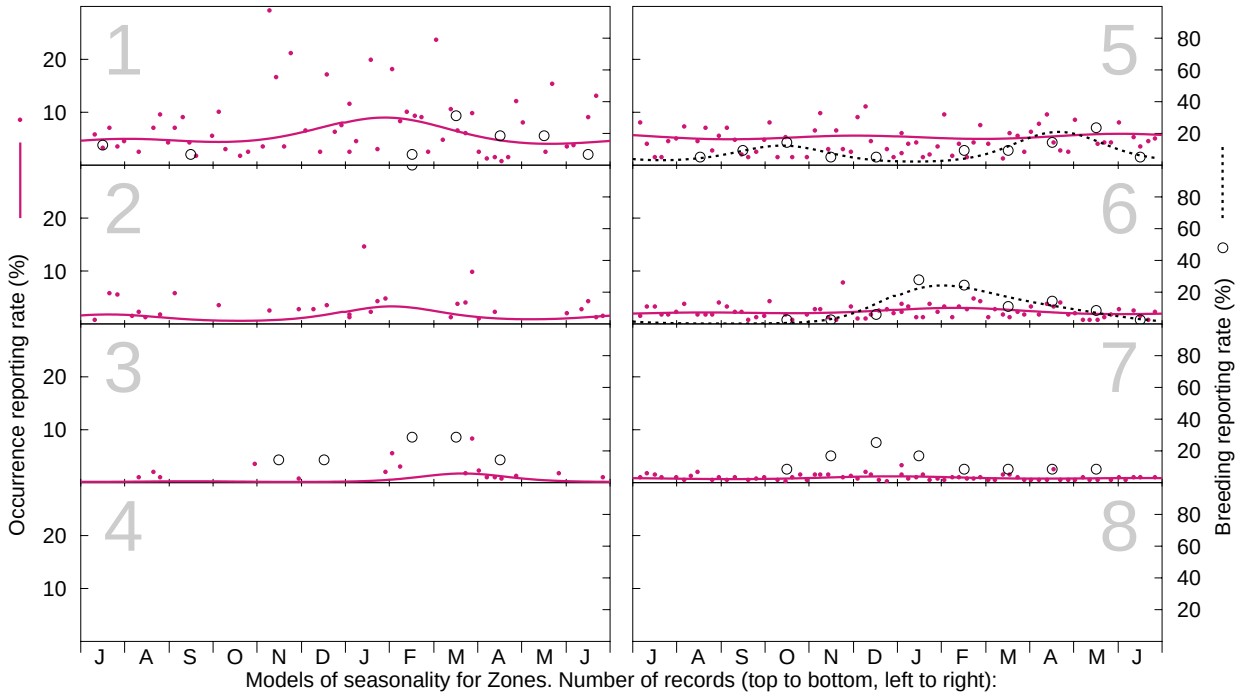
B.D. Colahan

Recorded in 968 grid cells, 21.3%
Total number of records: 2912
Mean reporting rate for range: 5.1%

Reporting rates for vegetation types







Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
Occurrence: 178, 55, 30, 0, 465, 261, 172, 0; Breeding: 16, 1, 7, 0, 21, 36, 12, 0.