

# Blackrumped Buttonquail

Kaapse Kwarteltjie

*Turnix hottentotta*

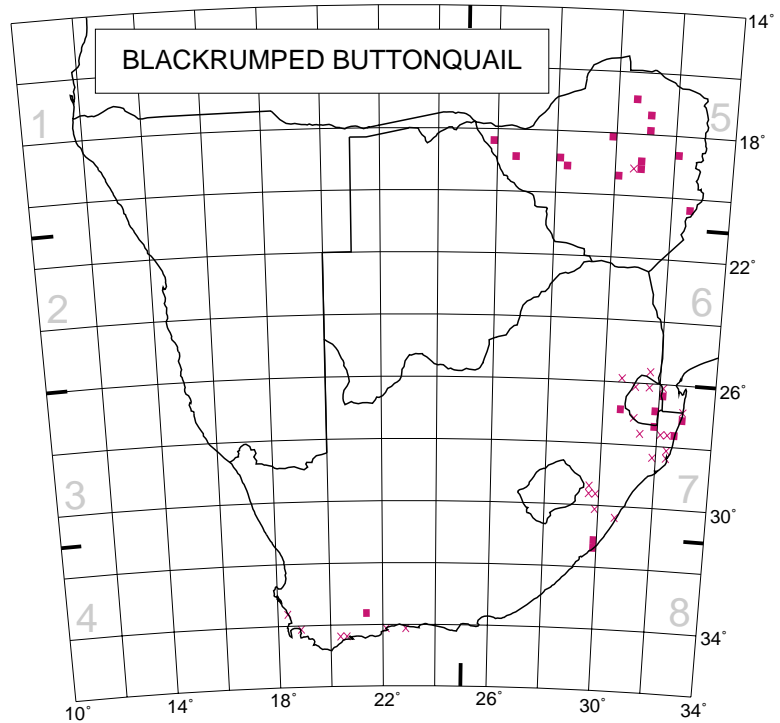
The Blackrumped Buttonquail is secretive and poorly known. It is sparsely recorded in the east and extreme south of southern Africa, in Zimbabwe, Swaziland, the Transvaal (eastern escarpment region), KwaZulu-Natal, Transkei, and the southern and southwestern parts of the Cape Province. There were no atlas records from the eastern Cape Province and its alleged occurrence in Botswana was not confirmed (Borello 1992b). Further north it occurs in central, eastern and western Africa (Urban *et al.* 1986).

The nominate race occurs in the southern and southwestern Cape Province, as far east as Port Elizabeth (3325DC); the race *T. h. nana* is found elsewhere in Africa (Clancey 1980b; Urban *et al.* 1986). The nominate race may be a separate species (Sibley & Monroe 1990), but this remains controversial (Dowsett & Dowsett-Lemaire 1993). It is easily overlooked and can readily be confused with the Kurri-chane Buttonquail *T. sylvatica* (Ginn *et al.* 1989). All atlas records were authenticated.

Its habitat comprises short vegetation with a clumped structure, i.e. neither sparse and open nor continuously dense (Masterson 1973b). It occupies damp ground and is therefore often associated with wetlands and watercourses, but it avoids standing water. The nominate race is found in fynbos, both montane and coastal, often characterized by restionaceous vegetation, and occasionally in strandveld (Ryan & Hockey 1995). Race *nana* is associated with high-rainfall, damp grasslands on clay soils, either in open or lightly wooded country, as in South Africa, or with open marshy areas ('dambos') in woodland, as in Zimbabwe (Masterson 1973b). It is occasionally found in fallow croplands and sugar-cane fields (Masterson 1973b; Ryan & Hockey 1995).

The nominate race is thought to be sedentary but *nana* is allegedly a summer migrant to its breeding areas, at least in Zimbabwe; Masterson (1973b) suggested that it may move to coastal regions during the winter. The models show that most records from Zimbabwe (Zone 5) came from the summer months, especially January–March, with no clear pattern in Zones further south.

Egg-laying occurs in summer: in Zimbabwe, September–February, mainly December–January (Irwin 1981); in KwaZulu-Natal, September–March (Clancey 1964b; Dean 1971; Marchant 1988; Mendelsohn *et al.* 1988). All records for the nominate race are October–December (Winterbottom 1968a; Ryan & Hockey 1995).



Recorded in 47 grid cells, 1.0%  
 Total number of records: 85  
 Mean reporting rate for range: 1.3%

Brooke (1984b) classed this as one of the five most threatened species in South Africa, with the nominate race on the verge of extinction. Recently it has been 'rediscovered' and found to be more common and widespread than previously appreciated (Ryan & Hockey 1995); for example, c. 310 birds are estimated to occur in 25 km<sup>2</sup> of suitable habitat in the Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve (3418AD). The race *nana*, however, may be severely threatened through loss of habitat to commercial afforestation, crop farming, overgrazing, trampling, too-frequent burning and human settlement (Brooke 1984b; Clancey 1985c; Ryan & Hockey 1995). The conservation status of the Blackrumped Buttonquail urgently requires further investigation, but its secretive nature makes this challenging.

D.G. Allan and B.D. Colahan

