

Burchell's Sandgrouse

Gevlekte Sandpatrys

Pterocles burchelli

Burchell's Sandgrouse is almost endemic to the southern African region, extending only marginally into southeastern Angola. Its distribution is centred on the sandy soils of the Kalahari basin, from the northern Cape Province, extreme western Transvaal and extreme northwestern Zimbabwe, across Botswana, northern and eastern Namibia, avoiding the driest southern and western regions of Namibia.

There are two subspecies, *P. b. burchelli* in the south-east and *makarikari* to the northwest (Clancey 1980b), with a gap apparent between the two from the northern Cape Province through central and northeastern Botswana along the division between hardveld in the southeast and sandveld to the northwest. Water availability may be a limiting factor on the sandveld.

It is an abundant breeding species in the Kalahari Gemsbok National Park (2520) (Maclean 1970d), and widespread and common in Botswana (Smithers 1964; Penry 1994). In northwestern Zimbabwe it is more local in distribution and has not been shown to breed (Irwin 1981). In the Transvaal it is confined to the semi-arid extreme northwestern region where it has also not been found breeding to date, but is assumed to do so (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). It is common in the eastern half of Namibia.

Although highly cryptic when foraging in its usual habitat, it becomes conspicuous at waterholes where it comes to drink in the mornings 2–3 hours after sunrise, usually in flocks of up to 50 birds at a time.

Habitat: The association with Kalahari vegetation types is characteristic of the range: Kalahari sand with dry savanna or scattered scrub or shrub and grass tufts up to 50 cm tall (Maclean 1993b), mostly in what Acocks (1988) referred to as Arid Sweet Bushveld and Kalahari Thornveld.

Movements: The patterns of occurrence do not indicate any consistent, regular, large-scale movements. It is resident within its range, but particularly in the drier areas with

less reliable food and water supply it undertakes local nomadic movements, most noticeably during prolonged drought.

Breeding: The season is April–October (Maclean 1993b; Skinner 1996a). Its breeding habits are poorly known because its nest is difficult to find and to monitor. Evidence from the presence of young birds confirms a largely winter breeding season throughout the range.

Interspecific relationships: At waterholes in the southern part of its range, it is often accompanied by flocks of Namaqua Sandgrouse *P. namaqua*, and sometimes also Yellowthroated Sandgrouse *P. gutturalis*, but it usually arrives at the watering site up to an hour later than Namaqua Sandgrouse (Maclean 1968) and forms separate feeding groups away from the water.

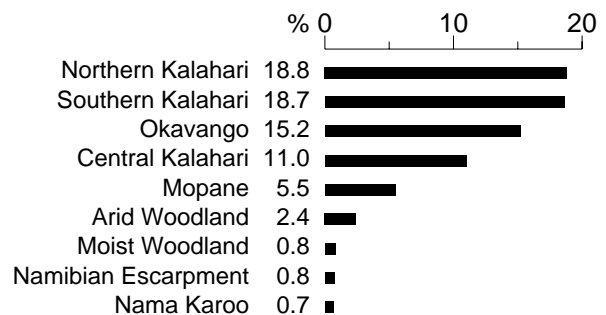
Historical distribution and conservation: Because sandgrouse have long been regarded as gamebirds, their presence has been well documented, and the distribution appears not to have changed in historical times.

Because of the remoteness of much of its habitat, Burchell's Sandgrouse is relatively safe from most anthropogenic threats. It has almost certainly benefited from the provision of artificial watering places, which have allowed it to forage further afield than before. However, it breeds during the dry winter and is thus highly dependent on local watering holes. Massive slaughter at such places in northern Botswana has caused serious local population declines (K. Oake pers. comm.). Breeding is in the nonbreeding season of Namaqua Sandgrouse in the northern Cape Province, where it can be misidentified in flight and thus also exposed to hunting during its breeding season (Malan *et al.* 1992). Fortunately, because it favours sandier habitats than the calccrete favoured by Namaqua Sandgrouse, and is as loyal to watering sites as the latter, it can be separated from Namaqua Sandgrouse hunting sites by providing waterholes within its favoured habitats. When hunting is properly managed, Burchell's Sandgrouse should pose no conservation problems.

G.L. Maclean and R.M. Little

Recorded in 833 grid cells, 18.4%
Total number of records: 2453
Mean reporting rate for range: 18.3%

Reporting rates for vegetation types



Also marginally in Sweet Grasslands.

