



## Burchell's and Whitebrowed Coucals

Gewone Vleiloerie en Witbrouvleiloerie  
*Centropus burchellii* and *C. superciliosus*

Fieldwork for the atlas commenced prior to these two taxa being split at species level, and the species were not distinguished by observers; all records in Namibia, northern Botswana and the Zambezi River catchment in Zimbabwe belong to what is now called the Whitebrowed Coucal *C. superciliosus*, while all records from the eastern highlands of Zimbabwe southwards, via the Save and Limpopo river valleys into eastern and southeastern Botswana and South Africa, belong to Burchell's Coucal *C. burchellii* (Clancey 1989d; Clancey *et al.* 1991). Beyond the atlas region, this species-complex occurs in a belt from Angola to Sudan and Ethiopia.

The Whitebrowed Coucal occurs in the tropical river valleys of the region: the Kunene in western Namibia, the Okavango, Kwando, Linyanti and Chobe in the Caprivi and northern Botswana, and the Zambezi Valley and adjacent catchments in northern Zimbabwe.

Burchell's Coucal is widespread to the south of this and occurs in southeastern Zimbabwe, the Limpopo River drainage, most of the Transvaal (except the southeastern highveld), and along the coast to the southwestern Cape Province. There are strongholds in the Transvaal lowveld, Swaziland and KwaZulu-Natal. It avoids the highlands of KwaZulu-Natal, Lesotho and most of the Cape Province. The range extends into the Free State and the northern Cape Province along parts of the Vaal River catchment.

Adult Whitebrowed Coucals are readily distinguished from Senegal Coucal *C. senegalensis*, on plumage, but less so on call. Juvenile coucals in this group are very difficult to identify to species, and particularly Burchell's Coucal, which is more difficult to distinguish from Senegal Coucal, may occasionally have been confounded with the latter.

**Habitat:** These coucals inhabit rank and tangled growth, ranging from reedbeds, marshes, and thickets to coastal bush.

They occur especially along drainage lines and at the edge of wetlands (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Hockey *et al.* 1989; Parker 1994; Penry 1994). Burchell's Coucal has adapted readily to vegetation around human habitation, more so than the Senegal Coucal (Rowan 1983). The two species were most commonly reported from East Coast Littoral forest, Moist Woodland, Valley Bushveld and Arid Woodland.

**Movements:** Both are resident, and may be overlooked during winter when silent (Rowan 1983). As for the Senegal Coucal, it may occasionally wander short distances to find better habitat, e.g. when wetlands dry out or when seasonally flooded grasslands are burnt. The atlas data show seasonal variation in reporting rates in Zones 6–8, but the peak corresponds to improved conspicuousness with calling in summer.

**Breeding:** Egg-laying spans August–February, with an October–December peak, without clear evidence for differences between Whitebrowed and Burchell's Coucal (Dean 1971; Irwin 1981; Rowan 1983; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Skinner 1996a). The atlas data suggest that breeding may occur in all months of the year but peaks during summer, even in the winter-rainfall region (Zone 4). That peak breeding is generally later than recorded in publications is due to inclusion of dependent fledglings.

**Interspecific relationships:** Whitebrowed and Burchell's Coucals do not overlap in the region, but have very similar ecology. (See also the text for Senegal Coucal.)

**Historical distribution and conservation:** Burchell's Coucal has expanded its range into the southwestern Cape Province in recent years. This is in keeping with its tolerance of a wide range of rank habitats, thus being able to use 'gardens with well-developed shrubberies and hedges' (Rowan 1983). It has also expanded its range in other areas wherever suitable habitat has been created by humans, e.g. in Zimbabwe (A.J. Tree pers. comm.). There is no evidence for a change in range of the Whitebrowed Coucal. Neither species is of conservation concern in the region, but continued loss and degradation of wetlands is likely to reduce habitat.

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Recorded in 958 grid cells, 21.1%  
Total number of records: 27 198  
Mean reporting rate for range: 30.4%

### Reporting rates for vegetation types



