



## Harlequin Quail

### Bontkwartel

#### *Coturnix delegorguei*

The Harlequin Quail is widespread through southcentral and eastern Africa. It is regarded as a nomadic resident and intra-African migrant which can be locally common to abundant (Urban *et al.* 1986). In southern Africa it occurs in central and northern Namibia, northern and eastern Botswana, throughout Zimbabwe, the Transvaal and Swaziland, with scattered records from the Free State and KwaZulu-Natal. It is a more tropical species than the Common Quail *C. coturnix*, and it is not as common as the latter on the Transvaal highveld (Wolff & Milstein 1977). It is also more gregarious than Common Quail, often found in coveys of 6–20 individuals during the nonbreeding season.

It is infrequently seen unless flushed, and is probably most frequently encountered when heard calling. It can easily be confused with the Common Quail, as the two species are similar when seen in flight from the rear.

**Habitat:** It usually inhabits relatively short to medium-long, rank, open grass with scattered bush cover. It may also occur on fallow land and in grassy clearings in woodland, and locally in dry floodplains (e.g. Northern Plains (1824B, 1825A) on vertisols in northern Botswana). The vegetation analysis shows it to be strongly associated with woodland and not grassland biomes.

**Movements:** It is an intra-African migrant which occurs mainly as a sporadic summer-breeding visitor in southern Africa. Substantial residency/overwintering is apparent from the models and has been reported previously from Zimbabwe (Irwin 1981). Its presence and abundance can be variable between years, and it is inclined to large-scale irruptions, e.g. in the Transvaal, Swaziland, Zimbabwe and Botswana, where massive arrivals after good rains can be as late as the end of January (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Tree 1988b; Herremans 1994d; Parker 1994).

**Breeding:** In Zimbabwe and the Transvaal most egg-laying occurs in midsummer (January–February), and the atlas data are in broad agreement with this pattern (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). Egg-laying in Namibia has been recorded January–August with a February peak. The season is extended and tends to be opportunistic relative to rains which generally occur later in the west than in the east (Brown & Clinning in press; C.J. Brown pers. comm.). A

scatter of winter records has been reported by the sources given above and by the atlas.

**Interspecific relationships:** It is congeneric with the Common and Blue *C. adansonii* Quails and is sympatric with the Common Quail in northeastern South Africa. The Harlequin and Common Quails are largely altitudinally separated in Zimbabwe (Benson & Irwin 1966a) with the former occurring in lower, drier, more wooded regions. Where it is parapatric with the Blue Quail, the latter species is generally confined to damp and flooded grasslands in lightly wooded areas.

**Historical distribution and conservation:** The paucity of atlas records for KwaZulu-Natal, Lesotho and the eastern Cape Province is at variance with the distribution as shown in Urban *et al.* (1986), but the sources for the latter map are not known. Although locally abundant in some years, the Harlequin Quail is poorly known and research is needed on its conservation status, movements and habitat requirements. Some birds fly into built-up areas during nocturnal migration, but it is unlikely that this constitutes a significant mortality factor.

R.M. Little

Recorded in 622 grid cells, 13.7%  
Total number of records: 1908  
Mean reporting rate for range: 5.3%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types



