Black-rumped Buttonquail *Turnix (hottentottus) nanus* at Lewa Wildlife Conservancy; a first record for central Kenya

The Black-rumped Buttonquail *Turnix (hottentottus) nanus* is an Afrotropical species with a rather scattered and poorly understood distribution from Senegambia in the west to Kenya in the east, Angola in the southwest, and eastern South Africa in the southeast. It prefers open, often wet, short grassland and occurs from sea level to 1800 m (1200–1800 m in East Africa). Its movements are not well known but it is assumed to have both resident and intra-African migratory populations and is generally itinerant in its presence across most of its range (Britton 1980, Lewis and Pomeroy 1989, Zimmerman *et al.* 1996, del Hoyo *et al.* 2020).

Opinions on the taxonomy of this species complex remain divided. Hockey *et al.* (2005) treat *T. hottentotus* and *T. nanus* as separate species based on morphological features, distinct geographical ranges, and habitat preferences, while other authors including Britton (1980), Dowsett & Dowsett-Lemaire (1993), and Zimmerman *et al.* (1996) prefer a single species treatment. Molecular evidence to support a two-species treatment remains lacking.

In Kenya, the Black-rumped Buttonquail "was once apparently regular" in the Tranz Nzoia area (Zimmerman *et al.* 1996), and Lewis & Pomeroy (1989) refer to two records from there. The first is of the type specimen, collected by C. T. Stoneham, who also reportedly found several clutches of eggs in June and July (year unspecified, quoting Jackson (1938)) and the second is of a specimen collected on 2 February 1958. *The Checklist of the Birds of Kenya* (EANHS 2019) lists the species as historical ("Hist."), meaning there were no acceptable records of the species in Kenya for at least 50 years at the time of the checklist's publication. However, this source overlooks three additional published records: in Trans Nzoia County, again, on 25 August and 9 November 1988 (Anon 1990), and in nearby Busia County on 18 September 2002 (Anon 2003). Stevenson & Fanshawe (2020) refer to it as "now very rare in western Kenya".

On 9 May 2023, while on an ornithological survey at Lewa Conservancy, I recorded the calls of two counter-singing Black-rumped Buttonquails at the edge of the large marsh near Lewa Headquarters (0°12′5″N, 37°27′30″E). Later in the year while reviewing some audio files recorded on 5 February 2023 using an AudioMoth (Hill *et al.* 2017), I detected another singing Black-rumped Buttonquail, this time a single individual. The identity of the birds in both recordings was confirmed by James Bradley, who compared the songs with that of the species in South Africa (see recordings at www.xenocanto.org), finding them to be a perfect match (Fig. 1). The call comprised a distinctive and slowly repeated "ooop" note, which was low in pitch and had a muted quality. These recordings have been archived at the Macaulay Library (www.macaulaylibrary.org).

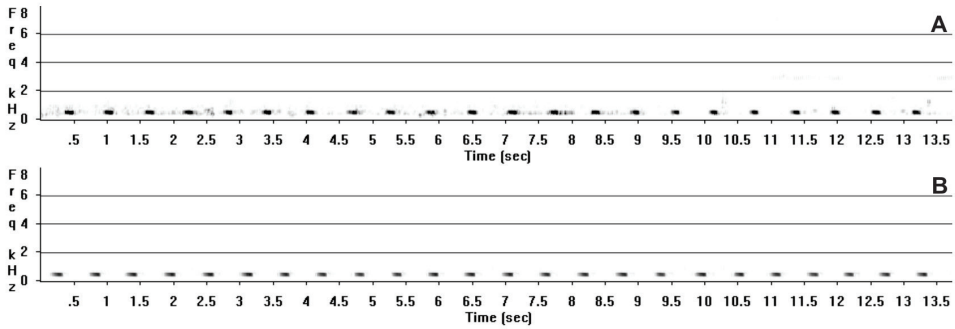

Figure 1. Sonograms comparing the vocalizations of Black-rumped Buttonquail *Turnix nanus* in South Africa (A; XC340941; L. Rudman) with the 5 February 2023 bird recorded at Lewa (B; ML613596431; S. Shema; automated recording).

The fact that the calling birds were present from February to May (and possibly longer than that) indicates that they may have been breeding in the area. This begs the question of whether this species is a previously undetected breeding visitor, resident at Lewa, or whether this represents vagrancy. Lewis & Pomeroy (1989) confer a 'detectability and coverage rank' of D0C0 to this species, meaning that it is secretive, often very difficult to detect or identify, and may be very rare. The possibility that it is resident at Lewa cannot be completely ruled out but given the sporadic presence of this species elsewhere in Kenya, and the fact the Lewa area is well-watched by ornithologists and birders, it is more likely that these records represent an unusual occurrence.

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