

TAXON SUMMARY

Red-backed Button-quail (Australian)

1	Family	Turnicidae
2	Scientific name	<i>Turnix maculosa melanota</i> (Gould, 1837)
3	Common name	Red-backed Button-quail (Australian)
4	Conservation status	Least Concern

5 Reasons for listing

Although the range of this subspecies has contracted, it is still more than half its historical extent (so not Near Threatened: a) and there is no reporting frequency data available to suggest a decline in density (so not Near Threatened: c).

	Estimate	Reliability
Extent of occurrence	500,000 km ²	high
trend	stable	high
Area of occupancy	10,000 km ²	low
trend	decreasing	low
No. of breeding birds	100,000	low
trend	decreasing	low
No. of sub-populations	3	medium
Largest sub-population	70,000	low
Generation time	3 years	low

6 Intraspecific taxa

None of the thirteen other subspecies found throughout south-east Asia has been recorded in Australian territory.

7 Past range and abundance

Restricted to north Australian coastal and subcoastal regions, and offshore islands between Derby, W. A. and Sydney, N. S. W. Probably breeding throughout range, but cryptic, so few records (Blakers *et al.*, 1984, Marchant and Higgins, 1993). Not recorded from some sections of range for extended periods, but not known if this reflects abundance (Blakers *et al.*, 1984).

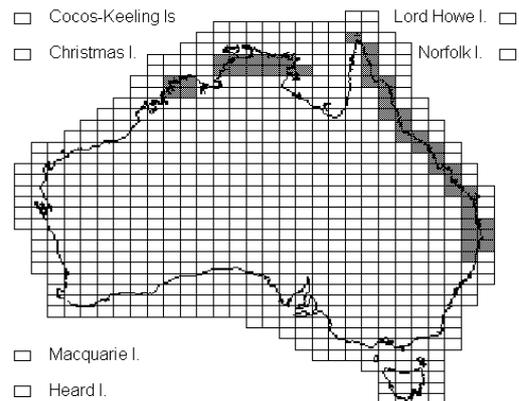
8 Present range and abundance

As above, except not recorded near Sydney since 1904 (Hindwood and McGill, 1958). Conjecture over whether or not species has declined (Frith 1979, Blakers *et al.*, 1984), but recent analyses suggest a possible decline in range (Franklin, 1999).

9 Ecology

Red-backed Button-quail live among tussock grasses in grassland and grassy woodland, along roadsides in rainforest, and in crops and gardens (Blakers *et al.*, 1984, Marchant and Higgins, 1993). They usually occur close to fresh water (Blakers *et al.*, 1984), particularly when breeding (Marchant and Higgins, 1993). They feed on seeds, green shoots and insects. Although they are reluctant to leave protective vegetation (Marchant and Higgins, 1993), they concentrate in unburnt

grasses after fires (Deigran, 1964). Generally considered nomadic, they reappeared annually to breed near Townsville in years when suitable habitat was available (M. Lewis).



10 Threats

The species may be threatened by inappropriate burning and grazing regimes that destroy extensive areas of ground layer vegetation or enable occlusion of grasslands and grassy woodlands by woody weeds (Harrington and Sanderson, 1994, Crowley and Garnett, 1998). Over a six-year period, at one site near Townsville, Red-backed Button-quail failed to breed in the only year in which habitat was grazed by cattle (M. Lewis). While there may have been some contraction of the range, further data are required to confirm trend that may be an artefact of a change in detection methods (Franklin, 1999).

11 Recommended action

- 11.1 Develop an appropriate monitoring system for button-quail and apply at sites where species recorded regularly.
- 11.2 Determine relationship between cattle grazing and button-quail abundance and behaviour.

12 Bibliography

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