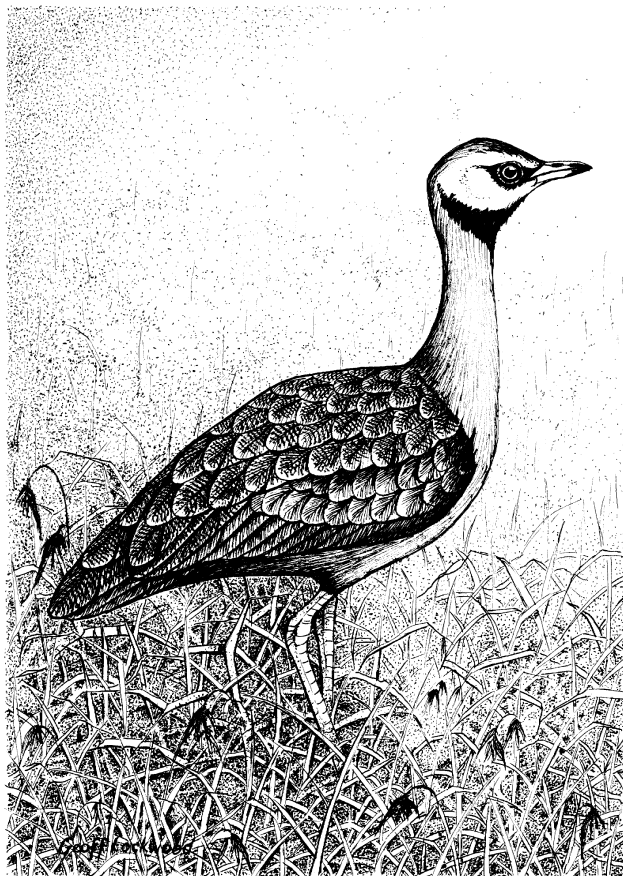




## Blue Korhaan

### Bloukorhaan

#### *Eupodotis caerulescens*

The Blue Korhaan is virtually endemic to South Africa, extending only marginally into western Lesotho. Its distribution is centred on the eastern Cape Province, the Free State, the southern Transvaal and northwestern KwaZulu-Natal. The distribution map shows a tendency towards higher reporting rates in the southern part of its range, compared with the north, except for a clustering of high reporting rates in the northeast. It can be locally common with a measured density of about 20 birds/10 km<sup>2</sup> in the southeastern Transvaal (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). Siegfried (1992) estimated the total South African population at 1501–5000 birds, but this may be an underestimate as the Transvaal population alone has been estimated to exceed 10 000 birds (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b).

It is usually found in groups of 2–5 individuals (Maclean *et al.* 1983). Its open habitat renders it fairly conspicuous, as do its vocalizations, and it is a distinctive species, unlikely to be visually confused with other similarly sized korhaans. Its call, however, is similar to that of the Karoo Korhaan *E. vigorsii* and this could have led to misidentifications.

**Habitat:** The Blue Korhaan inhabits open, fairly short grassland in the grassland biome and a mixture of grassland and Karoo dwarf shrubland in the ecotone between these two biomes, i.e. the Grassy Karoo. The vegetation analysis shows it to be most common in the dry Grassy Karoo, followed by the Sweet (also dry) Grasslands, and less common in the eastern, moister Mixed, Alpine and Sour Grasslands. It can be found in crop fields and planted pastures (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b).

**Movements:** It is not thought to have any seasonal movements (e.g. Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). The models suggest an increase in reporting rates in the winter in Zone 7, the Zone encompassing most of its range, but this may be due to increased conspicuousness. Allan (1993) found the Blue Korhaan to be more conspicuous during road counts in winter in the Grassy Karoo, and suggested that this may be due to reduced grass length through burning and grazing, and the birds' increased activity at this time; also decreased conspicuousness during the summer may be compounded by the secretiveness of breeding birds.

**Breeding:** Breeding was recorded September–June, mainly November–March. Egg-laying in the Transvaal spanned September–February, with an October–November peak (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b).

**Interspecific relationships:** The range of the Blue Korhaan overlaps that of two similar species, namely the Karoo Korhaan in the southwest and the Whitebellied Korhaan *E. cafra* in the northeast. The former prefers more scrub and the latter longer grass than the Blue Korhaan.

**Historical distribution and conservation:** Clancey (1972a) suggested that the Blue Korhaan has decreased in the west of its range, i.e. in the Cape Province, and this statement has been repeated in both Urban *et al.* (1986) and Johnsgard (1991). The atlas distribution map appears to refute this, as it has higher reporting rates in the west of its range than in the east, in particular its reporting rate is highest in the Grassy Karoo. Allan (1988e) suggested that it is the only southern African *Eupodotis* species of immediate conservation concern owing to its restricted range and the intensive human pressures on its grassland habitat. Tarboton *et al.* (1987b), however, pointed out that this species apparently benefits from small-scale agriculture in its grassland habitat, as it regularly forages in crop fields and planted pastures. The South African Red Data book (Brooke 1984b) mentioned that it is not threatened but the latest world list of threatened birds (Collar *et al.* 1994) listed it as globally 'near-threatened'.

It would appear certain that the Blue Korhaan has decreased to some extent in the east of its range in the face of dense human settlement and extensive agriculture. In the west, human populations are less dense and the drier conditions militate against widespread crop farming, especially in the Grassy Karoo. Siegfried (1992) estimated that it occurs in at least 15 nature reserves in South Africa but the total population in these reserves is only 101–500 individuals. The conservation status of this endemic species should be monitored.

D.G. Allan

Recorded in 365 grid cells, 8.0%  
Total number of records: 3875  
Mean reporting rate for range: 16.8%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types

