

## Subspecific Status of the Painted Button-quail of the Houtman Abrolhos, Western Australia

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Peters (1934: 148) was uncertain of the validity of *Turnix varia scintillans* (Gould) of the Houtman Abrolhos. Condon (1975: 98) accepted it; his diagnosis was evidently adapted from the excellent description in Gould (1865: 181).

Although the disparity is not as great as Gould believed, Abrolhos birds are certainly smaller than those from throughout the mainland of south-western Australia (specimens examined from Yuna, Trayning, Canning Vale, Canning River, Dongolocking, Chorkerup and Wilsons Inlet). For example, length of wing is 87-89 mm in two males, 91 in one female and 85-92 mm in seven unsexed specimens from the Abrolhos, compared with 96-101 in five males and 102-112 in four females from the mainland. The weight of nine Abrolhos birds ranged from 52 to 82 g, v. 85-112 in three mainland specimens.

Differences in dorsal coloration mostly concern the chestnut feathers of the back and rump. The transverse black bars on these feathers are narrower in Abrolhos birds than on the mainland, and they do not tend posteriorly to coalesce into large black blotches. A higher proportion of the chestnut feathers in Abrolhos birds are laterally edged with white; moreover these white margins are broader and not tinged with grey. The white dorsal streaks are consequently more numerous and more conspicuous than in mainland birds. Similarly the white spots on the wing coverts are more conspicuous in Abrolhos birds; they are smaller and tinged with grey on the mainland.

Abrolhos birds are paler ventrally, e.g. the abdomen is buffy-white, v. reddish-buff on the mainland. The pale quadrangular marks on the breast tend to have the longer axis transverse in the Abrolhos, longitudinal on the mainland (Gould described this difference as 'crescentic' v. 'elongated').

In conclusion, *T. v. scintillans* is worthy of recognition. It is confined to North Island and the Wallabi Group.

### References

- Condon, H.T. (1975). *Checklist of the Birds of Australia, 1. Non-passerines*. (Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union: Melbourne.)  
Gould, J. (1865). *Handbook of the Birds of Australia, 2*. (J. Gould: London.)  
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