



# Biodiversity Observations

<http://bo.adu.org.za>



**An electronic journal published by the Animal Demography Unit at the University of Cape Town**

The scope of Biodiversity Observations consists of papers describing observations about biodiversity in general, including animals, plants, algae and fungi. This includes observations of behaviour, breeding and flowering patterns, distributions and range extensions, foraging, food, movement, measurements, habitat and colouration/plumage variations. Biotic interactions such as pollination, fruit dispersal, herbivory and predation fall within the scope, as well as the use of indigenous and exotic species by humans. Observations of naturalised plants and animals will also be considered. Biodiversity Observations will also publish a variety of other interesting or relevant biodiversity material: reports of projects and conferences, annotated checklists for a site or region, specialist bibliographies, book reviews and any other appropriate material. Further details and guidelines to authors are on this website.

Paper Editor: H. Dieter Oschadleus and Amour McCarthy

---

## **DEFORMED HEAD OF A BURCHELL'S SANDGROUSE *PTEROCLES BURCHELLI***

**Ursula Franke-Bryson**

Recommended citation format:

**Franke-Bryson U 2017.** Deformed head of a Burchell's Sandgrouse *Pterocles burchelli*. Biodiversity Observations, Vol 8.52:1-2

URL: <http://bo.adu.org.za/content.php?id=347>

Published online: 6 November 2017

**AFRING NEWS**

**DEFORMED HEAD OF A BURCHELL'S SANDGROUSE  
*PTEROCLES BURCHELLI***

*Ursula Franke-Bryson*

Munich, Germany

Corresponding author: [ursula@thomas-bryson.de](mailto:ursula@thomas-bryson.de)



**Figure 1** – Normal female Burchell's Sandgrouse



**Figure 2** - Deformed female Burchell's Sandgrouse (SAFRING Number 5H44764), left side of the head, with a blood-filled bag under the dark eye, and tiny scales indicating head moult.

While sandgrouse are the essence of grace and strength, we caught a strange looking Burchell's Sandgrouse during a ringing session on 1 April 2016 near Witvlei in Namibia (22°20'S 18°30'E). It looked like it had suffered a blow on the head.

The eyes were bulging outward, a featherless ring of skin around the eyes was enlarged and swollen, and the eyes themselves were not the circular form, but some twisted ovals.

The condition though, seemed not have affected the health of the bird. It was fully functional in reaction while we held it when ringing and when released, it walked away and finally flew off.



**Figure 3** - Right side of the head. It was the only sandrouse out of hundreds ringed, that would keep the beak open. (Maybe the shorter head caused breathing problems?)

The measurements of wing, tail and mass were similar to the other three females of the same species caught during these days. All the sandgrouse were on the lower edge of the measured range: 160–185 g (de Juana 2017) and 168 - 230 g (192) (Hockey et al. 2005).

Only the head of the bird described was with 38.8 mm, i.e. between 2.4 to 4.2 mm shorter than the head length of other females from that area, i.e.:

41.2 – 42.0 mm, 4 females, average 41.8 mm.

**Table 1** - Comparing measurements of four female Burchell's Sandgrouse caught during two successive days. Bird with ring 5H44764 had an abnormal head.

Ring no.	wing (mm)	tail (mm)	mass (g)
5H44764	163	60	178
5H44756	160	66	n/a
5H44752	164	63	161
5H44751	168	70	178

Although the SAFRING database holds only 21 head measurements of this species, bird number 5H44764 still presents the shortest head of all. The condition might be some birth or growth problem or stem from an injury.

#### Acknowledgement

My thanks go to Dane Paijmans for reviewing the text.

#### References

**de Juana E & Boesman P 2017.** Burchell's Sandgrouse (*Pterocles burchelli*). In: del Hoyo J, Elliott A, Sargatal J, Christie DA, de Juana E (eds). *Handbook of the Birds of the World Alive*. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona. <http://www.hbw.com/node/54096> (Accessed 28.10.2017).

**Lloyd P 2005.** Burchell's Sandgrouse *Pterocles burchelli*. In: Hockey PAR, Dean WRJ and Ryan PG (eds). *Roberts Birds of Southern Africa*. 7th edition. The Trustees of the John Voelcker Bird Book Fund, Cape Town: 341-342.

**Madge S, McGowan P 2002.** Pheasants, partidges and grouse. Including buttonquails, sandgrouse and allies. *Helm Identification Guide*, Christopher Helm, London: 166 and 461 - 462.