

= Djibouti francolin =

The Djibouti francolin (*Pternistis ochropectus*) is one of over forty species of francolins , a group of birds in the Phasianidae family . It is critically endangered and found only in Djibouti , a nation in the Horn of Africa . This species is grayish @-@ brown overall with white stripes and streaks on its underparts which become finer towards the upperparts . It has black markings on the head and a gray crown and has a short tail . It is 35 cm (1 @. @ 15 ft) in length , and weighs 940 g (33 oz) .

Its natural habitat is high altitude subtropical or tropical dry forests composed primarily of African juniper . However , the juniper forests preferred by the francolin are dying , so it may be found in other habitats , such as box @-@ tree forests . This bird is only known from two locations in Djibouti , one of which is largely unsurveyed . It can be found in small groups and is extremely shy . It is known to feed on berries , seeds , and termites , and it breeds between December and February . It is considered a critically endangered species because it underwent a 90 % population decline in twenty years . The degrading of its juniper habitat through man @-@ made disturbances , such as overgrazing , is a major threat to the francolin 's survival . Ongoing conservation work includes the restoration of some juniper forest , and surveys to obtain accurate population counts and to raise awareness .

= = Taxonomy = =

Birds in the Phasianidae family , such as the Djibouti francolin , are Old World ground @-@ dwelling gamefowl , many of which are found in forests . Francolins are terrestrial birds of the that feed on insects , vegetable matter , and seeds . Most species have a hooked upper beak , tails with fourteen feathers , and in many of them the male has tarsal spurs . Of the 41 extant species , 36 are found solely in Africa .

The Djibouti francolin was originally collected on February 22 , 1952 by Captain Albospéyre , the military commander of Tadjoura in the Forêt du Day . It was then described by French ornithologists Jean Dorst and Christian Jouanin later that year as *Francolinus ochropectus* in L 'Oiseau et la Revue française d 'Ornithologie . Its specific epithet is derived from the Ancient Greek ochros , which means " ochre " , and the Latin pectus , meaning " breast " . Other authors have since proposed moving the species to other genera , including *Oreocolinus* and *Pternistis* , the latter a move proposed in a recent attempt to reorganize *Francolinus* , and one which would include 23 other francolins . Though some still maintain all these in *Francolinus* , the split into multiple genera is becoming more widespread .

The distinctness of this species has been described as weak by some authors , although its status as a full species has been maintained . It forms a superspecies with Jackson 's francolin , handsome francolin , chestnut @-@ naped francolin , and Erckel 's francolin ; it is particularly closely related to the latter two species and is intermediate to them in both location and morphological features . The Djibouti francolin has no recognized subspecies .

This species has formerly been named as the ochre @-@ breasted francolin , the Tadjoura francolin , and the pale @-@ bellied francolin . To the native people of Djibouti , it is known as the kukaq .

= = Description = =

This francolin is a large , rotund bird of approximately 35 cm (1 @. @ 15 ft) in length and 940 g (33 oz) in weight . It is grayish @-@ brown overall with white stripes and streaks on its underparts which become finer toward the head . The bird is darker on its back than on its underside . The nape has a hint of rufous , while the top of the head is gray . The forehead , lore , and eye stripe form a black mask , and the chin and throat are whitish . The eyes are brown . The feathers on the body and neck have a gold or straw @-@ colored center that is bordered with dark brown and edged in white . The tail is short . The bill is black with some yellow on the lower mandible , and the Djibouti francolin 's legs are a greenish @-@ yellow .

The sexes are similar , although the male averages slightly larger than the female and has two prominent spurs on the legs , whereas the female is virtually unspurred . The female also has more rufous in its tail . The juvenile resembles the adults , but is duller , with buff barring , rather than streaking , on the underparts .

The call of this species is a rattling erk erk erk @-@ kkkkkkkk that descends into a chuckling gurgle . Feeding birds may give a low conversational clucking .

No other francolin share this bird 's restricted range (although the yellow @-@ necked francolin occurs elsewhere in Djibouti) so it is unlikely to be confused with any other species .

= = Distribution and habitat = =

The Djibouti francolin is endemic to Djibouti , a nation in eastern Africa , and is known from only two locations . One is the Forêt du Day in the Goda Mountains , approximately 25 km (16 mi) north of the Gulf of Tadjoura . This site is only 15 km² (3 @,@ 700 acres) and is undergoing habitat changes . The other site is located in the Mabla Mountains , which are 80 km (50 mi) northeast of the Forêt du Day and remain unsurveyed . This site has been exposed to more human disturbance than the Forêt du Day , and is therefore considered less viable . Combined , the total estimated range of this bird is 58 km² (14 @,@ 000 acres) .

This francolin prefers dense African juniper woodland with a closed canopy between 700 and 1 @,@ 780 m (2 @,@ 300 and 5 @,@ 840 ft) in elevation , and preferably on a plateau . Mixed in with this forest habitat are box @-@ trees (*Buxus hildebrandtii*) and African olives (*Olea europaea africana*) . This francolin has been found in secondary woodland , box @-@ tree woodlands (*Buxus hildebrandtii*) , and acacia woodland (*Acacia seyal*) . It is also known to venture into more open woodland and wadis following the breeding season . Much of the bird 's African juniper forest habitat has been damaged or destroyed due to human usage ; the ability of this dead woodland to support the Djibouti francolin remains unknown , although some juveniles have been seen in it . It is believed that the birds are reacting to the destruction of their juniper habitat by trying to find habitat as close to it as possible . It has been noted that due to the decline of the juniper , *Buxus hildebrandtii* is now the dominant tree in areas most frequently inhabited by the francolin .

= = Ecology and behavior = =

This species lives in small groups and is very shy , often remaining in dense vegetation to avoid detection , and therefore its ecology is very little studied . It is believed that the francolin may migrate from lower altitudes to higher altitudes and juniper forest in the warmer months . Its main predator is the common genet . The bird is most active and most likely to call between 6 am and 9 am . After this it may spend most of the day perched motionless in a tree up to 4 m (13 ft) above the ground . It eats berries , seeds , termites and figs . It scratches the ground to collect seeds and , when it finds an area disturbed by warthogs , also scratches the ground for termites . It is monogamous and breeds between December and February .

Only one nest has been recorded ; this was located on a mountain ledge , and was a shallow grass @-@ lined depression in the earth . These birds roost in nearby trees at heights of 5 to 8 m (16 to 26 ft) . It is probably monogamous , and local people say that the clutch is typically 7 ? 9 eggs , but this is unconfirmed .

= = Conservation = =

This species is considered critically endangered by the IUCN because it underwent a 90 % population decrease over twenty years . In 1977 , there were an estimated 5600 birds in Forêt du Day , which was the only known location for the species at the time . By 1986 , this number had dropped to 1500 individuals . The species was discovered at its second site in the Mabla Mountains in 1986 . While the population in the Mabla Mountains has yet to be surveyed , numbers in the Forêt du Day continued to drop , with 500 ? 1000 Djibouti francolins recorded in 1998 and only 115 ? 135

in 2004 . The total world population in 2006 was estimated to be between 612 and 723 adults .

This species is threatened because of habitat destruction . At the Forêt du Day site , 95 % of its preferred juniper habitat is dead or dying and is unable to support this bird . While an overarching reason behind this destruction remains unknown , overgrazing by cattle , camels , and goats is believed to have been a significant contributor , along with rain , climate change , and a fungal disease . Hunting , the gathering of firewood , egg collecting , and general human disturbance are also believed to be threats . At the Mabla Mountains site , the habitat is also being degraded by the collection of firewood and overgrazing .

In 1937 , part of the Forêt du Day site was set aside as Day Forest National Park ; this designation is no longer valid . There have been studies of the area and the related environmental and economic issues involved ; very few of the suggestions made by these surveys have been implemented , partially due to the unrest in Djibouti since the early 1990s . In May 2008 , 1 @, @ 000 km² (250 @, @ 000 acres) of forest near the village of Day were set aside for a tree nursery in an attempt to restore some of the francolin 's damaged habitat . Surveys are under way to determine population sizes and current range , including plans to survey the largely unknown site in the Mabla Mountains and potentially suitable areas in between the two known sites . A promotional campaign in local schools took place in 2008 to raise awareness for the species .

= = Relationship with humans = =

The majority of native people in areas surrounding the francolin 's range believe that the species is important , either because of its meat , which may be eaten by the Muslims who comprise the predominant religious group of the region , or because it is part of the natural heritage of the region . While the species is rarely eaten today due to its rarity , decades ago the species was so common that it was easily captured when it approached nearby villages .

The Djibouti francolin has been featured on two stamps : one in 1989 from Djibouti , and another from the French Territory of the Afars and the Issas , which was what Djibouti was known as under French rule , in 1972 .

= = Other sources = =

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