

THE OCCURRENCE OF RAIN QUAIL, *COTURNIX COROMANDELICA*, IN NORTH-EAST THAILAND

While birdwatching in an area of dry paddyfields in Kham Thale So District, Nakhon Ratchasima Province (ca. 15° 00' N, 102° 00' E) on 8 February 1987, my companion, Martin Heubeck, drew my attention to an unfamiliar call. We approached the source of the call and flushed a quail *Coturnix* sp. We flushed several more quail within a few metres and estimated that at least 8 birds were calling within an area of about 1 ha. The following morning at about 0700 h I revisited the same area and obtained tape recordings of the call. I attempted to lure the birds into view by using tape playback but although I was able to stimulate further calling I did not obtain good views of any birds. The call was a regular “whit-whit,” both notes being similar in quality to the initial syllable of the call of Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix*. The call was repeated in bursts of two to five phrases in quick succession. Although I had not obtained good enough views of the birds to identify them from plumage features I was confident that the calls came from Rain Quail, *Coturnix coromandelica*, as the description of the call of this species given by KING et al. (1975) fitted perfectly. I was not able to return to the area until mid-March 1989 when I attempted to locate the birds again. The habitat was no longer suitable in the area where we had found the birds in 1987, being wet paddyfields, and although I flushed two quail nearby, I failed to locate any calling birds. I returned again during 11–15 April and located some calling birds in an area about 1 km from the original 1987 site. Despite hearing the “whit-whit” call from several birds all my attempts to obtain views in the early morning failed.

However, a late afternoon visit was more productive and I finally obtained excellent views of several birds including a group of 6 and 2 separate pairs. I was able to see clearly the distinctive black throat and breast of male birds and was also able to watch a bird calling. I tried tape playback on this bird which responded by facing the source of playback. I counted a minimum of 14 birds within an area of 25 ha. Further visits in late afternoon produced sightings of up to 11 birds.

The birds frequented a mosaic of dry paddyfields, with rice stubble to a height of about 20 cm, interspersed with areas of dry scrub and crops. The birds were generally very secretive and almost impossible to see on the ground except in the late afternoon when they flew out into dry paddyfields to feed. Some birds were apparently paired while others were in groups of 4–6 individuals. No immature birds were observed and I presumed that breeding had not yet taken place.

These records represent the first sightings of the species in North-east Thailand and probably the most easterly records in the world since the species is elsewhere only known from the Indian subcontinent (ALI & RIPLEY, 1987) and Burma (SMYTHIES, 1986). LEKAGUL & CRONIN (1974) depict the species as occurring in the region of Suphanburi and Kanchanaburi Provinces in west-central Thailand, based on a specimen in the National Reference Collection, Bangkok, taken at Ban Talat

Khet, Panomthuan District, Kanchanaburi Province (ca. 14° 18' N; 99° 42' E). There is also one further skin from Chiang Mai Airport, northern Thailand, obtained on 2 September 1982. I sent a tape of the calls to Philip Round who commented that he had heard the same call at two localities: Ban Lat Krating, Sanam Chai Khet District of Chachoengsao Province (13° 35' N, 101° 27' E) and at Kamphaengsaen District, Nakhon Pathom (ca 14° 00' N; 100° 00' E), both times in dry farmland with sugar cane fields, but without discovering the source. It may well be that this secretive species is much more widespread in Thailand than was previously known.

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