



SWAINSON'S SPURFOWL DAYNE BRAINE

# photographing African gamebirds

**T**he *Terrestrial Gamebirds and Snipes of Africa* covers 74 species of upland African gamebirds and snipes, including guineafowls and Congo Peafowl, francolins and partridges, spurfowls, quails, sandgrouse, and snipes and Eurasian Woodcock. More than 250 photographs convey the general appearance, characteristic features, behaviour and, in many cases, the favoured habitats of each species.

The task of sourcing the photographs involved a plea to bird photographers world-wide and resulted in more than 950 photographs being submitted by over 60 contributors. Then began the difficult task of selecting the images that would best represent the birds. While considering the most appropriate photographs, some interesting issues became apparent. These included which sex was recorded more often, if chicks or egg clutches were often photographed, and which species were the most commonly portrayed.

For those species that are not sexually dimorphic there was little if any bias towards either sex, except where males (particularly the spurfowls and francolins) were

often photographed when calling from a prominent perch. This was to be expected, since calling males are conspicuous, but otherwise any individual is representative of the species. However, where there is significant sexual dimorphism, such as with sandgrouse and the Coqui Francolin, there was a distinct bias towards the more striking males. Predictably, the reverse was true for the Greater Painted-snipe, where the superbly coloured females are more usually photographed than the more inconspicuous males.

Photographs of nests and chicks were rare, probably also not surprisingly, because the galliformes at least are particularly secretive with their nest placement, and all terrestrial gamebird chicks are precocial. It is probably also the case that most gamebird photography is opportunistic and photographers seldom make the effort to deeply enter the world of these birds' natural history, since for some reason the species might not be considered a target group for sought-after images.

Sandgrouse were the most popular group as far as the number of photographs

offered per species, possibly because they are emblematic of their harsh, arid environments. The most photographed species overall was the widespread Helmeted Guineafowl, which has iconic status in the African landscape.

Predictably, the forest species were the most under-represented in the image stakes. There are few photographs available of most of the forest guineafowls, spurfowls and partridges, with the Rubeho Forest Partridge best represented in the wild only by camera-trap images. It was also a struggle to find suitable photos of Black, Plumed and White-breasted guineafowl and, apart from the relatively recent photograph by Mark Beaman of a roosting female Congo Peafowl, the only decent shots of a male were of captive individuals in the Bronx Zoo, New York.

The major surprise was that the two most difficult species to source photographs for were Finsch's and Ring-necked francolins. Here too, the only suitable photos of Finsch's Francolin were from camera-trap images and we would never have imagined that the most under-photographed African gamebird would be the Ring-necked Francolin; even at the time of going to print, an image of this species had still not been sourced. In-depth Internet trawls revealed nothing, even from sites such as the *Handbook of the Birds of the World*, the Internet Bird Collection, BirdLife International and Wikipedia (disregarding various misidentified photographs that were typically Coqui or Crested Francolins). To a degree, the situation is explained by the fact that many birders/photographers still need this species as a lifer.

Although the Ring-necked Francolin was uplisted from a species of Least Concern to Near-Threatened status in the 2007 IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, evidence from interactions with more than 80 bird enthusiasts suggests that this may be conservative and that a rigorous population status and threat assessment for this species is needed.

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