Gamebirds have been domesticated for food production and for ornamental aviculture for centuries, yet they remain a mostly under-appreciated group of birds. This might be because they can be seen along roadsides, in open farmlands, urban fringes and even within towns and gardens. The gamebirds have representatives on all continents except Antarctica and, together with the ducks and geese, form the basal group among the Neoaves. The Galliformes comprise nine major groups of terrestrial gamebirds: megapodes, cracids, guineafowls, grouse, turkeys, pheasants, partridges (including francolins and spurfowls), and Old World and New World quails.

Studies combining the genetics and anatomy of living species and fossils suggested that pheasants, partridges, quails, spurfowls and francolins are not natural evolutionary groups, but rather mosaics of evolutionarily unrelated species. Even the best-known gamebird and the wild ancestor of the domestic chicken, the Junglefowl *Gallus gallus*, was moved on the gamebird evolutionary tree from being with the pheasants to a branch that includes a mix of ‘francolins’ and ‘partridges’.

Traditionally, the largest group of African gamebirds, the francolins, was classified with partridges in the tribe Perdicini within the family Phasianidae, although the only anatomical feature that supports this grouping is that they all have 14 tail feathers. The 41 species of francolins, 36 from Africa and five from Asia, were placed in a single genus, Francolinus, but we now know that the genus contains two quite distinct lineages: the ‘true francolins’ and spurfowls. The distinction between these groups is apparent in their plumage, escape flight behaviour and vocalisations. Francolins have quail-like upperparts while spurfowls have streaked or vermiculated back feathers. Francolins typically crouch and sit tight before flushing when disturbed, whereas spurfowls tend to run for cover. And francolins have musical, whistling calls compared to the raucous crowing or cackling calls of spurfowls.

The African francolins are related to the Asiatic francolins, the Junglefowl and Bamboo Partridge *Bambusicola fytchii*. Since they link with Asiatic francolins, including the Black Francolin *Francolinus francolinus*, which was the first francolin described to science, they have maintained the common English name ‘francolin’. By comparison, spurfowls group with quails and a range of northern hemisphere ‘partridges’. The name ‘spurfowl’ was already in use for the Yellow-necked Spurfowl *Pternistis squamatus* of East Africa and so offered an alternative name for the species with no close affinities to the true francolins.

Recent research by a team from the FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology, UCT, and the University of California, Berkeley, was based on morpho-behavioural and genetic evidence and tested the classification of spurfowls and francolins. It was the first francolin described to science, they have retained the common English name ‘francolin’. By comparison, spurfowls group with quails and a range of northern hemisphere ‘partridges’. The name ‘spurfowl’ was already in use for the Yellow-necked Spurfowl *Pternistis squamatus* of East Africa and so offered an alternative name for the species with no close affinities to the true francolins.

The Scaly Spurfowl subspecies *Pternistis squamatus schuetti* has been elevated to a full species and is now known as Schuett’s Spurfowl *Pternistis schuetti*. It occurs in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), extending east to Uganda, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania and Malawi. It resembles the Scaly Spurfowl, but is less vermiculated overall, the scallop pattern on the lower neck is less clearly defined and each feather has a deep red-brown centre. Somewhat surprisingly, its closest relative is the Grey-striped Spurfowl *Pternistis leucopsis* of East Africa and so offered an alternative name for the species with no close affinities to the true francolins.

The other new spurfowl is the Red-necked Spurfowl subspecies *Pternistis squamatus hubbardi* (male shown), which has been elevated to a full species and is now known as Cranch’s Spurfowl *Pternistis hubbardi*. This less distinctly marked ‘new species’ is distributed across the southern DRC, northern Angola, northern Zambia, etc.

Above: Plain-bellied Francolin *Campocolinus subfasciatus* (male shown) has been elevated to a full species. Opposite: Also elevated to a full species, Cranch’s Spurfowl *Pternistis squamatus schuetti* was a subspecies of *P. afer*.

**New Francolin and Spurfowl Taxonomy**

**Text** Rob Little

**Taxonomy**

**Gamebirds**
Ortygornis is one of three species in the new genus opposite Grant’s Francolin previously a subspecies, is now a full species. Pternistis schuetti, below S. psilolaema from sis, above Elgon Francolin birdlife ing shuffle is the shifting of Ring-necked with the red-tailed group. An interest­
dix no fewer than 14 subspecies to species Scleroptila
Francolin is isolated in the genus
propose the five relevant genera: colins. We support these sub­groups and
striated, red­tailed and red­winged fran­contain four sub­groups: the spotted,
west, and through eastern Tanzania,
bordering Namibia and Angola in the
tributed along the lower Cunene River
afer
Spurfowl with three subspecies (P . a.
Uganda. This leaves the Red­necked
Malawi, western Tanzania, Kenya and
Uganda. This leaves the Red­necked Spurfowl with three subspecies (P. a. afer, humidobolit and castaneovenere) dis­tributed along the lower Cunene River bordering Namibia and Angola in the west, and through eastern Tanzania, Mozambique and eastern South Africa. The francolins were also thought to contain four sub­groups: the spotted, striated, red­tailed and red­winged franc­olins. We support these sub­groups and propose the five relevant genera: Franco­linus, Ortygornis, Campocolinus, Pelpere­dix and Scleroptila. The Forest (Lathanis) Francolin is isolated in the genus Pelpere­dix as a result of its overall differences with the red­tailed group. An interest­ing shuffle is the shifting of Ring­necked Francolin Scleroptila streptophora from the striated francolin group to a basal position within the red­winged franc­olins (Scleroptila spp.).
Perhaps most exciting for birders is that the study recommends elevating no fewer than 14 subspecies to species level (see box opposite) and lumping other subspecies into more inclusive entities, with only 14 subspecies in contrast to 52 previously. The bantam­like Crested Francolin is designated a new genus, Ortygornis, and split into three species. The Crested Francolin O. r. rovuma has been con­ fined to a band across southern Angola, northern Namibia, Botswana, Zambia, Zimbabwe and north­eastern South Africa. Kirk’s Francolin O. r. spilogaster in eastern Ethio­pia and Somalia. The third species, Grant’s Francolin O. r. grantii, is found in southern Sudan and western Ethiopia through to north­central Tanzania. The Orange River Francolin also of­fers a new species, the Kunene Francolin Campocolinus jugularis in southern Angola and northern Namibia, while the Or­ange River Francolin is now confined to two subspecies, S. levalliantoides and S. l. pallidior in South
Africa and Botswana respectively. The closely related Archer’s Francolin S. get­turnux in East Africa is supported as a full species. Crawshay’s Francolin P. cranchii from north of the Zambezi River is elevated from the Red­winged Fran­colin S. levalliantoides, which now becomes a southern African endemic.
The Coqui Francolin complex in the new genus Campocolinus has five newly elevated species: Pale­bellied Franco­lin C. spinoturnus, Bar­bellied Francolin C. mahurna, Plain­bellied Francolin C. hubbardi, Thika Francolin C. thikae and Stuhlmann’s Francolin C. stuhlman­ni, while the Coqui Francolin retains four subspecies: C. coqui coqui, C. c. ruahdae, C. c. vernayi and C. c. leucosticta.
Other francolin changes see Chestnut­ 
breasted Francolin Campocolinus dewitt­ tei elevated from being a subspecies of White­throated Francolin C. albigu­
ria, Elgon Francolin Scleroptila el‐
gon­sis elevated from Meerland Francolin S. psilolaema, and both Ulu Francolin S. ulensis and Rufous­throated Fran­
colin S. whytei elevated from Shelley’s Francolin S. shelyei.
The enigmatic Nahan’s Francolin Pri­lopachus nahanii is neither a spurfowl nor a francolin, but rather a sister spe­cies to the Stone Partridge P. petrosus. Even more surprising is that these two African ‘partridges’ are relatives of the New World Quails (Odontophoridae) and thus are placed in their own sub­family, Prilopachinaceae.
If these recommendations are wide­ly adopted, there will be three new species in southern Africa: Kunene Francolin in northern Namibia, Kirk’s Francolin in central Mozambique and Stuhlmann’s Francolin in central to north­eastern Zimbabwe and Mozam­bique. The subregion will also acquire three more endemic francolins in addi­tion to Grey­winged Francolin S. afra and Stuhlmann’s Francolin.

**NEW SPURFOWL AND FRANCOLIN SPECIES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scientific name</th>
<th>Common English name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Campocolinus dewitttei</td>
<td>Chestnut-brecked Francolin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campocolinus jugularis</td>
<td>Red-tailed Francolins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campocolinus spinoturnus</td>
<td>Bare-bellied Francolin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campocolinus thikae</td>
<td>Striated Francolins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scleroptila crawshayi</td>
<td>Red-winged Francolins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scleroptila elgonensis</td>
<td>Scaly Spurfowl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scleroptila mahurna</td>
<td>Striated Francolins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scleroptila nahanii</td>
<td>Bare-throated Spurfowls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scleroptila ruahdae</td>
<td>Pternistis schuetti</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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