

# QUAIL...A VALUABLE ADDITION TO ANY AVIARY

## # 4 THE RED-BACKED BUTTONQUAIL

*Turnix maculosus*



Photo: Jim McDougall  
[www.enjoy-darwin.com](http://www.enjoy-darwin.com)

The Red-backed Buttonquail is the smallest and most cryptic of the Australian buttonquail. They are usually found in small coveys of about five birds. Their preferred habitat is pockets of damp, or rank grasslands. This quail can be either sedentary or nomadic, depending on the availability of food supply and suitable habitat. Some habitats form and disappear with the onset and retreat of wet periods. In the Top End of Australia where rank grasslands usually don't

persist year round, the Red-backed Buttonquail tends to be nomadic, whereas in the southern portion of their distribution they are more sedentary as suitable conditions tend to be permanent.

Their main distribution is coastal northern Australia. However, they are occasionally found as far south as the south coast of New South Wales and central Victoria. They also occur from the Philippines through to Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands.

The Red-backed Buttonquail prefers to hide when disturbed, but when pressed will very reluctantly fly a short distance and then hide again. However, they are capable of flying longer distances when migrating in search of suitable habitat or food. Migratory travel is probably nocturnal.

R.V.C. with help from Wikipedia

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In the following article the Red-backed Buttonquail is referred to as the "Red-backed Quail", the name by which it was most commonly known at the time.

### THE RED-BACKED QUAIL

By Eric Baxter

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Habitats of another of the *Turnix* group, the Red-backed Quail, range from Northern Victoria to northern Queensland and also New Guinea. This species is about the size of the King Quail, and in Northern Queensland is to be found in areas similar to those inhabited by the King Quail. The hen (the larger of the two) has a grey and black back markings, has a reddish brown on the breast on to which merges a reddish brown collar from around the neck. It also has black spots along the side of the body. The beak is yellow. The male being the smaller bird is also much duller in colour.

These birds settle down fairly well in an aviary and will appreciate some form of shelter as cover and for nesting. Clutches are usually two or three eggs, these being a whitish grey rather heavily marked with irregular brown spots. Incubation is approximately fourteen days and the male does the incubating being of the Turnix group it is advisable to remove the hen to another aviary). The chicks when hatched are a dark brown tending to black, and over the body they have small white spots. Here again being the Turnix species the male bill-feeds the young (this includes live food and seed) and after a week or so the young start to pick up some of the food they require. In approximately three weeks they can be taken away from the male and placed in another aviary. They take three months or so to attain their adult plumage—hens usually take a little longer.

A suitable live diet is white ants, mealworms, gents (maggots), and the usual seed diet supplied to finches will meet their requirements. Their normal breeding season usually commences about September and may extend to March. It is possible to work one hen with several males: whilst the first male is busy incubating and rearing the chicks, a further mating with another male could result in the second male incubating eggs before the chicks of the first mating are independent. Of course in each instance the hen must be removed so as to avoid interference (and their interference means dead chicks).

*Unfortunately this delightful species is now extremely rare in Australian aviaries. Hopefully someone may be able to gather together odd birds from here and there around the country and build up the numbers so that the Red-backed Buttonquail once more becomes available to interested aviculturists. (Ed.)*