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COMMENT

A reply to Markus Ehrengruber and Urs Glutz von Blotzheim

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In their comment on our paper "Breeding biology of Coquerel's Coua in western Madagascar" (Chouteau and Pedrono 2009), Markus Ehrengruber and Urs Glutz von Blotzheim point out the fact we did not pay attention to information reported by Dr. O. Appert in his publications on Coquerel's Coua.

We would clearly like to state here that we do not consider Appert's work in Madagascar (1966, 1970, 1980) as being without interest. One of us (PC) completed a PhD on the ecology of three species of coua in Madagascar, and the three publications by Appert were instrumental as background to this study, as there was little literature available at this time (1995) on these birds. Appert's publications have also been cited in most of Chouteau's publications on couas. We therefore take advantage of this reply to acknowledge Appert's earlier publications in providing valuable information to the scientific community.

It is possible that the word 'anecdotal' used in our article is simplistic, but we believe that our study does not duplicate those reported in Appert's publications—specifically if we consider the article referred to by Ehrengruber and Glutz von Blotzheim "Erste farbaufnahmen der Rachenzeichnung junger Kuas von Madagaskar (Cuculi, Couinae)," which translates into English as: "The pattern of the buccal cavity of young couas of Madagascar photographed for the first time (Cuculi, Couinae)." As the title states, in this paper Appert predominantly describes and discusses a mark on the throat of young Coquerel's Coua. In his other publications, he describes the nests in some detail and provides some information on the number of eggs in the nest and possible predators of the nests. However, he does not publish any information on incubation or nesting period. Additionally, he does not note that young birds leave the nest at an early stage before being able to fly; to the best of our knowledge, our paper is the first to describe this phenomenon.

Ehrengruber and Glutz von Blotzheim are also critical of our map showing the distribution of Coquerel's Coua, especially in its southern range. They claim Appert provided a more precise description of the repartition of this species. Although the repartition of Coquerel's Coua was not central to our study, our map in fact included the area situated to the north of the Mangoky River, where Appert worked (1966, 1970, 1980), contrary to the claim of Ehrengruber and Glutz von Blotzheim. Coquerel's Coua actually occurs in more southerly locations than the Antserananomby Forest (21.7°S, 44.1°E) where Appert lived and worked. The species was originally thought to be present only as far south as the Zombitse Forest (22.7°S, 44.7°E, Payne 2005). However, according to some authors (Raherilalao and Wilmé 2008), recent observations suggest that at the present time *Coua coquereli* can also be found 200 km to the south of the area indicated by all earlier maps, including the one recently published in Payne (2005). Such new information was obviously not obtained from Appert's work. This recent information should have been included in the map given in our article, and it is a regrettable oversight.

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Regarding the particular area pointed out by Ehrengruber and Glutz von Blotzheim, we believe that any biologist working in the field of species repartition in Madagascar should be reluctant to consider records made before 1980 as still being valid if a recent survey has not been carried out to confirm whether that species actually still occurs in a particular location. The data reported by Appert relating to repartition may possibly be outdated, as there has been—and still is—intensive deforestation and habitat disturbance in Madagascar, with forest birds disappearing from specific locations as a result. In addition, such birds are heavily hunted. Couas may have been extirpated from many localities covered in Appert's distribution map. The Mangoky area still appears as an apparently intact forest block on the map provided by Moat and Smith (2007), and so we would expect that couas are still encountered there. However, the hypothesis of a probable decline is possibly supported by the fact that recent fieldwork (Kelley et al. 2007) carried out in the same area where Appert worked indicates that extensive changes have occurred in this forest since the late 1970s, mainly due to extensive slash and burn cultivation. Kelley et al. (2007) discovered a significant decline in different lemur populations compared to the surveys made in the 1970s, and a similar trend has probably occurred in forest birds.

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