A RECORD OF THE KING QUAIL *Coturnix chinensis* FROM THE OVENS FLOODPLAIN, NORTH-EAST VICTORIA

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The King Quail *Coturnix chinensis* is classified as Critically Endangered in Victoria (DNRE 2000). The strongholds for the species appear to be wet heaths at French Island, Lower Glenelg, Grampians and Croajingalong National Parks (AVW 2000). Records from prior to 1969 exist for other coastal and sub-coastal locations such as the Geelong district, Yarra Ranges, South Gippsland and Wilson's Promontory (AVW 2000), indicating a formerly more continuous range across wetter areas of southern Victoria. AVW (2000) contains no provenanced records from north of the Great Dividing Range in Victoria, and the one presented here from the Lower Ovens Regional Park (36°03'03"S, 146°11'26"E) near Yarrawonga is the first. These birds were observed during a more extensive study of the vertebrate fauna of Gunbower Island, Barmah State Forest and Lower Ovens Regional Park (Mac Nally *et al.* 2000).

On 27 February 2000, a single female King Quail was observed at the end of North Track in the Lower Ovens Regional Park. Two days later on 29 February, a pair (adult male and female) were observed near the first location. The first bird was observed without optical aids at *ca* 5 metres, before it flushed and flew into dense grasses, showing its characteristic small size, dark appearance and weak flight (Pizzey 1997). The pair of birds were observed at a distance of *ca* 10 metres with binoculars (Swarovski SLC 10 × 42 WB, Swarovski Optik, Austria). Viewing conditions on both occasions were good. The birds were shy, unbanded and gave no reason to suspect that they were aviary escapees. We believe them to be wild birds.

The Lower Ovens capture site was in mature River Red Gum *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* woodland with a Silver Wattle *Acacia dealbata* middle-storey and dense ground sward of Common Tussock-grass *Poa labillardieri*, adjacent to a backwater of the Ovens River. Parts of the area were wet under foot, and could be characterized as seasonally inundated. This accords with the generally mesic habitats occupied by King Quail in Victoria, but differs in that most other known sites are in treeless, wet heathland or sedgeland (Baverstock *et al.* 1980; Emison *et al.* 1987; Pizzey 1997).

This addition to the fauna of the Lower Ovens Regional Park brings to eleven the number of threatened Victorian vertebrate species recorded there during our fieldwork. These species are: Squirrel Glider *Petaurus norfolcensis*, King Quail, Pied Cormorant *Phalacrocorax varius*, Great Egret *Ardea alba*, Australasian Bittern *Botaurus poiciloptilus*, White-bellied Sea-Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster*, Barking Owl *Ninox connivens*, Powerful Owl *N. strenua*, Nankeen Night Heron *Nycticorax calendonicus*, Royal Spoonbill *Platalea regia*, Giant Banjo Frog *Limnodynastes interioris* and Growling Grass Frog *Litoria raniformis*. These observations reinforce the value of this important park for biodiversity conservation in north-eastern Victoria.

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