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## **DEFORMED HEAD OF A BURCHELL'S SANDGROUSE *PTEROCLES BURCHELLI***

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**AFRING NEWS**

**DEFORMED HEAD OF A BURCHELL'S SANDGROUSE  
*PTEROCLES BURCHELLI***

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**Figure 1** – Normal female Burchell's Sandgrouse



**Figure 2** - Deformed female Burchell's Sandgrouse (SAFRING Number 5H44764), left side of the head, with a blood-filled bag under the dark eye, and tiny scales indicating head moult.

While sandgrouse are the essence of grace and strength, we caught a strange looking Burchell's Sandgrouse during a ringing session on 1 April 2016 near Witvlei in Namibia (22°20'S 18°30'E). It looked like it had suffered a blow on the head.

The eyes were bulging outward, a featherless ring of skin around the eyes was enlarged and swollen, and the eyes themselves were not the circular form, but some twisted ovals.

The condition though, seemed not have affected the health of the bird. It was fully functional in reaction while we held it when ringing and when released, it walked away and finally flew off.



**Figure 3** - Right side of the head. It was the only sandrouse out of hundreds ringed, that would keep the beak open. (Maybe the shorter head caused breathing problems?)

The measurements of wing, tail and mass were similar to the other three females of the same species caught during these days. All the sandgrouse were on the lower edge of the measured range: 160–185 g (de Juana 2017) and 168 - 230 g (192) (Hockey et al. 2005).

Only the head of the bird described was with 38.8 mm, i.e. between 2.4 to 4.2 mm shorter than the head length of other females from that area, i.e.:

41.2 – 42.0 mm, 4 females, average 41.8 mm.

**Table 1** - Comparing measurements of four female Burchell’s Sandgrouse caught during two successive days. Bird with ring 5H44764 had an abnormal head.

Ring no.	wing (mm)	tail (mm)	mass (g)
5H44764	163	60	178
5H44756	160	66	n/a
5H44752	164	63	161
5H44751	168	70	178

Although the SAFRING database holds only 21 head measurements of this species, bird number 5H44764 still presents the shortest head of all. The condition might be some birth or growth problem or stem from an injury.

**Acknowledgement**

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