

The exotic Black Francolin (*Francolinus francolinus*) is now well established in southwestern Louisiana. Birds were first released at the Moore-Odom Ranch at Gum Cove in April 1961 and have since become established in a wide area of Cameron and Calcasieu Parishes. They have been reported from as far away as Beaumont, Texas. Birds of the original release were all banded, but banded individuals have not been seen for some years, indicating that the entire population now is made up of birds produced in the wild. The birds show every sign of being a permanent addition to our avifauna, having survived in 1973 both record floods and a record freeze. The male Black Francolin, about twice the size of a Bobwhite, is mostly gallinaceous bird with a prominent white cheek patch. The back, wings and flanks are spotted and streaked with white and buffy yellow, while the rump and tail are finely barred with black and white. The neck is encircled by a prominent rufous-chestnut collar. The legs are bright red. Females are buffy, spotted and barred with darker brown. The vocalizations of the male are loud and can be heard at a considerable distance. The "song" consists of a series of five rasping, mechanical-sounding "crick-ik . . . crick-ki-dick." The sound is like that of thimbles being drawn across a washboard, or like a giant cicada.

Black Francolins are extremely wary, running through the grass ahead of a person on foot. They are virtually impossible to flush in this manner. But during the spring and early

summer, males habitually call from exposed perches, making this the best time to see them. To see a francolin, one should drive slowly along the highway listening for the call, which is so distinctive as to be instantly noticeable to any experienced birder. Calling males are usually in sight when they are heard but the calls are ventriloquial. Careful scrutiny of nearby trees and fence posts is required to find the bird.

The accompanying map shows the area of greatest concentration of Black Francolins at the present time. Dotted lines indicate gravel roads, but all others are paved. The gravel roads are high quality and passable at all times. The birds may be found along any of the roads shown south of I-10, but they are most frequently seen along the dead-end road that leads south from La. 108 toward the Gum Cove area. The immediate vicinity of the Gum Cove Ferry has been highly productive recently.

Residents of the area are tolerant of birders, but respect for private land is necessary to maintain our good relationship. At any rate, there is no need whatever to leave the public highway to see francolins. Their favorite singing perches are small trees and fences that are confined to roadsides in this rice-growing country. Incidentally, the rice fields are excellent spots for shorebirds in the spring. Recent sightings have included Baird's Sandpiper and Hudsonian Godwit.

