

## Redbilled Buffalo Weaver

### Buffelwewer

#### *Bubalornis niger*

The Redbilled Buffalo Weaver is widespread in the northern half of southern Africa and is locally common in some areas (Maclean 1993b). In Namibia it is found mainly north of latitude 24°N and inland of the escarpment. It is widespread in the more mesic northern and eastern parts of Botswana, scattered in the central Kalahari, but absent from the driest part of the southwestern Kalahari. It occurs in southern and western Zimbabwe, and in the Transvaal, except for most of the highveld. The eastern lowveld population extends southwards through the lowveld of Swaziland where the estimated population is 80 birds (Parker 1994), to northern KwaZulu-Natal at Nkonkoni (2731DB). It is widespread in the Limpopo River valley and extends into the central Transvaal and the northern Cape Province. Beyond the atlas region it occurs in western Angola and discontinuously through the drier savannas of Central and East Africa, to Somalia (Hall & Moreau 1970). The gap in the distribution along the Transvaal escarpment separates the subspecies *B. n. militaris* in the lowveld to the east from *niger* which occurs to the west and has its strongholds in the upper Limpopo catchment, the Okavango basin and northern Namibia.

It is unmistakable and usually found in small flocks. Its untidy stick nests are conspicuous, built communally in large trees, and also on windmills and pylons (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). Some gaps in its range in Namibia and Botswana match areas poorly covered, but the atlas data are otherwise reliable, including the scattered records south of the Bloemhof Dam (2725D).

**Habitat:** Its preference for drier savannas is obvious, with Mopane the most favoured; the overlap of this vegetation type with most of the Okavango probably accounts for the high reporting rates in the latter area. In South Africa, an association with heavily grazed woodland with sparse ground cover, has been reported (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). It prefers large trees for nesting, which partly explains the patchiness of its distribution (Ginn *et al.* 1989).

**Movements:** Late-summer peaks in reporting rates are evident in the models for the northern and central regions of Namibia and Botswana (Zones 1–2). These peaks coincide with breeding activity in these areas but, because such peaks are not evident during breeding in the eastern regions (Zones 5–6), they possibly result from movements. A slight but distinct decrease in reporting rates after the main breeding season in Zone 6 may indicate some post-breeding dispersal from conspicuous colonies, as occurs in the Kruger National Park (Kemp & Kemp 1975a), while nomadism occurs in this Zone in years of low rainfall (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Ginn *et al.* 1989). The pattern in the drier parts of the range may be a composite of presence throughout the year during and following years of good rainfall, and partial emigration in years of drought.

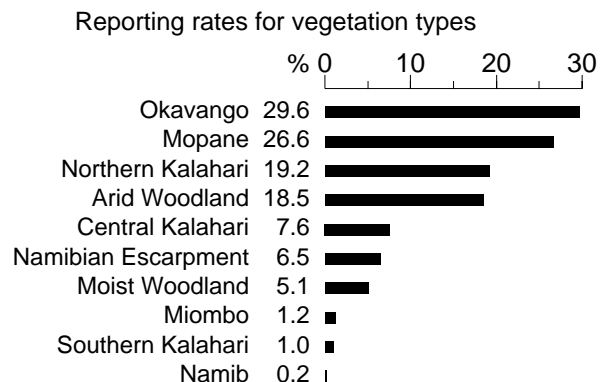
**Breeding:** It was recorded breeding in all parts of its range, mainly October–April. Breeding peaks earlier in the Transvaal (Zone 6) than in Zimbabwe (Zone 5), confirming published information (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). The more mobile birds in the drier western parts of the range, breed in late summer, mostly after December (Skinner 1995a). Breeding activity reported during the dry months (June–August) probably involved birds using nests as roosts during this period.

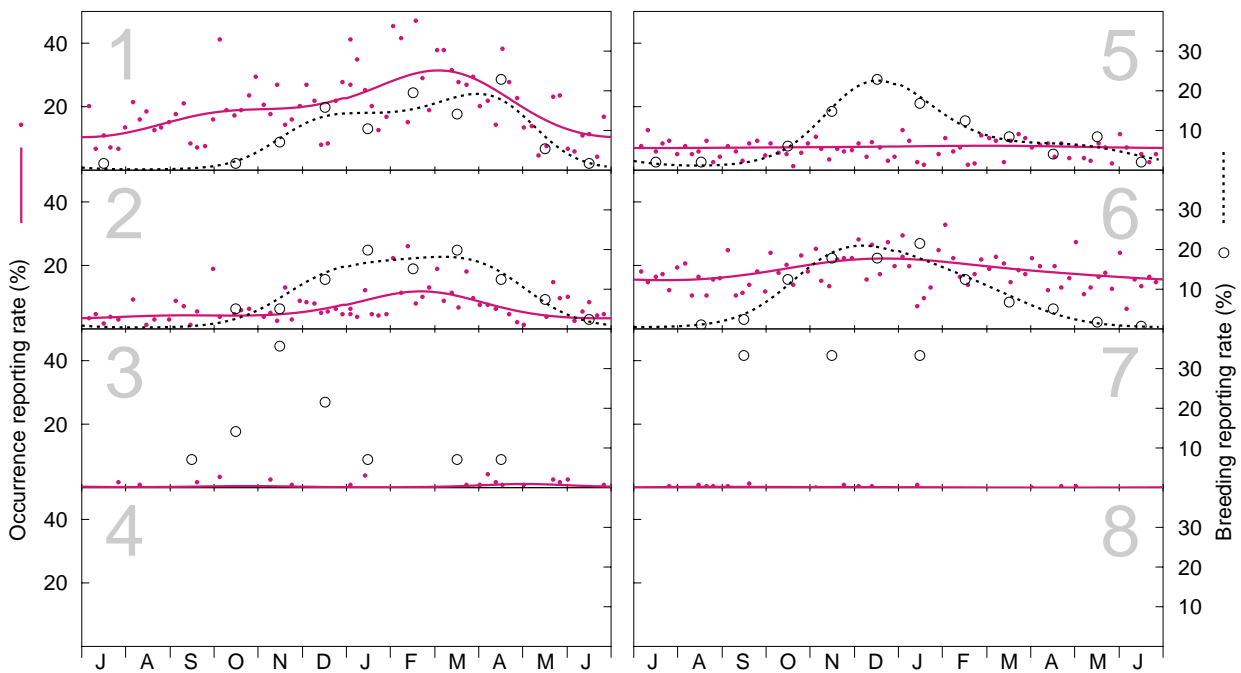
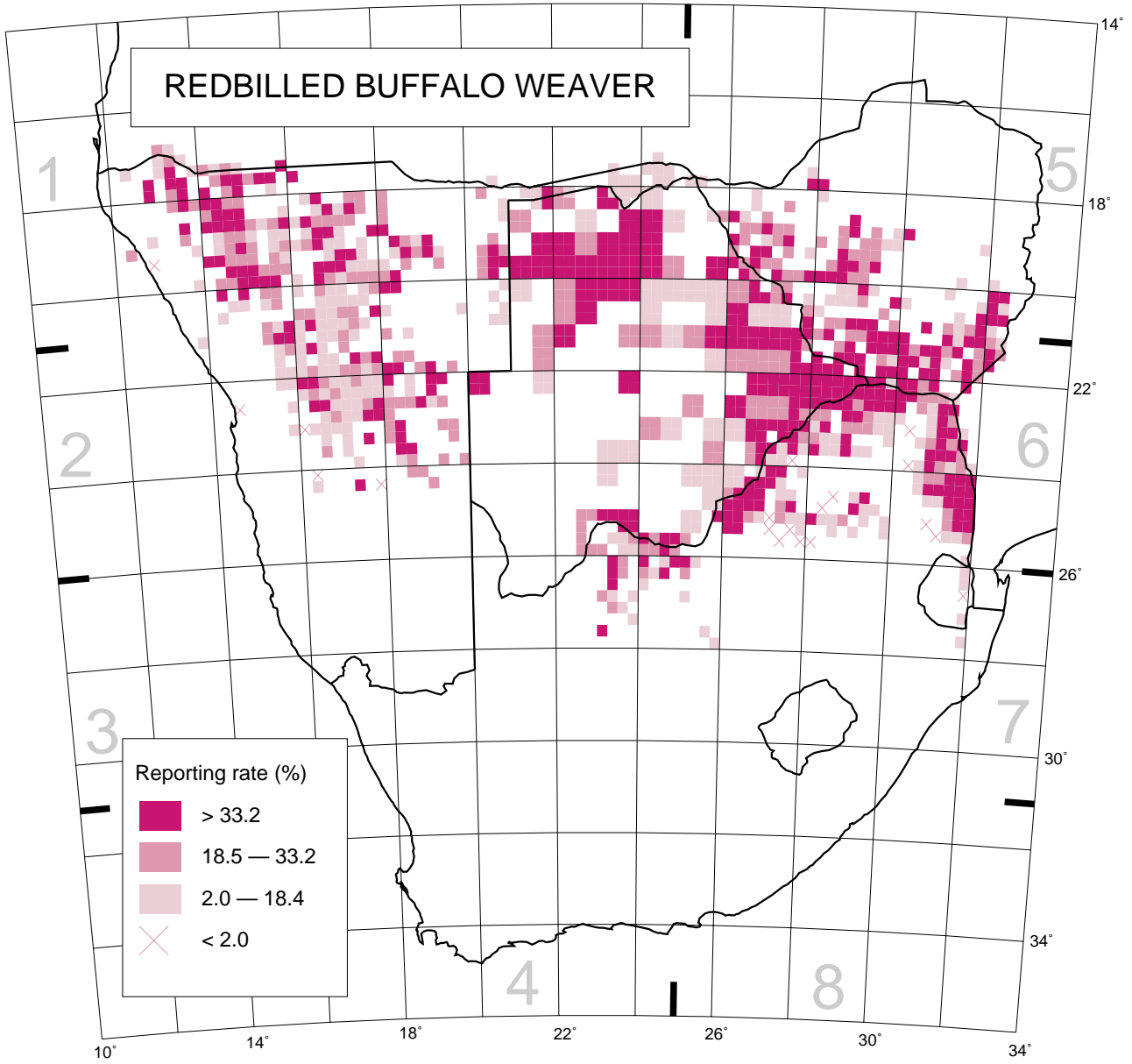
**Interspecific relationships:** The range overlaps with that of the Whitebrowed Sparrowweaver *Plocepasser mahali*, probably its closest potential ecological competitor, and both species occur widely alongside each other; the strongholds, however, are in distinctly different vegetation types. Foraging buffalo weavers regularly associate with starlings, four species having been reported: Burchell's *Lamprotorornis australis*, Glossy *L. nitens*, Greater Blue-eared *L. chalybaeus* and Wattled *Creatophora cinerea* Starlings (Irwin 1981; Ginn *et al.* 1989). In the dry season, foraging flocks of Redbilled Buffalo Weavers are frequently accompanied by Forktailed Drongos *Dicrurus adsimilis* which feed on prey flushed by the weavers, but occasionally become kleptoparasitic (M. Herremans pers. comm.).

**Historical distribution and conservation:** The present map does not seem to differ from previous distributional information. The Redbilled Buffalo Weaver is widespread and common, and under no particular threat.

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Recorded in 1088 grid cells, 24.0%  
Total number of records: 7294  
Mean reporting rate for range: 26.3%





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 647, 223, 25, 0, 638, 2114, 26, 0; Breeding: 57, 40, 14, 0, 48, 284, 6, 0.