



Cape Weaver

Kaapse Wewer

Ploceus capensis

The Cape Weaver is a large, colonial weaver which has its major stronghold in the coastal regions of the western Cape Province. It is sparsely distributed in the arid interior of the Cape Province, and in the hot lowveld areas of the northern and eastern Transvaal and northern KwaZulu-Natal; it is generally absent from the Cape Province north of the Orange River. It is remarkably scarce in the Transkei. Although it occurs close to the borders, it has not yet been recorded from Zimbabwe, Botswana or Namibia; apart from small populations in Swaziland and Lesotho, it is endemic to South Africa.

It is sometimes taxonomically linked with birds from Angola and western Zambia, but these are normally treated as a separate species, *P. temporalis* (Hall & Moreau 1970). The three subspecies have continuous ranges (Clancey 1980b).

In nonbreeding plumage it could be overlooked or misidentified in mixed weaver flocks, but the present distribution is well supported by specimen records (Hall & Moreau 1970).

Habitat: It is especially common in the winter-rainfall region which supports the fynbos biome, but it prefers agricultural landscapes rather than natural fynbos (Hockey *et al.* 1989). In the Karoo and central interior it frequents the cooler, wetter highlands, not the open plains. It nests in reeds or bulrushes along rivers and dams, or in trees, which may be near homesteads far from standing water. It feeds on a wide range of plant and animal material, and can thus forage in a variety of different habitats (Skead 1947; Elliott 1973).

Movements: In all Zones, the reporting rates show clear seasonal fluctuations with peaks during the breeding season and lowest reporting rates just after breeding during moult. This is typical of ploceids which breed in colonies and have distinctive nuptial plumage. However, ringing at roosts and breeding colonies has provided numerous recoveries of this species. The greatest distance moved was 331 km, with 11 of 138 birds recovered more than 50 km from the ringing site (Craig 1982a). A later study in the southwestern Cape Province reported one bird which had moved 156 km from the ringing site, and the mean distance moved by 21 birds was 30 km (Fraser *et al.* 1990). Thus local movements certainly occur, but the pattern does not justify describing it as a 'local

migrant' in this area (Hockey *et al.* 1989). In both KwaZulu-Natal and the Transkei, the Cape Weaver is considered a winter visitor to the coastal belt (Cyrus & Robson 1980; Quickelberge 1989).

Breeding: Breeding is in the wet season. In the winter-rainfall region of the southwestern Cape Province (Zone 4), breeding is primarily August–November (cf. Winterbottom 1968a), but appears to be still earlier (July–October) in the northwestern Cape Province (Zone 3). In the eastern summer-rainfall regions, breeding is chiefly September–January, with marginal differences in timing between Zones 6–8. Peak breeding is October–December in the Transvaal (Zone 6) but about one month later in KwaZulu-Natal (Zone 7), a difference which is also found in published information (Dean 1971; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b).

Interspecific relationships: It is often associated with Red Bishops *Euplectes orix* at both roosting and breeding sites in reedbeds, and it will also flock and roost with other *Ploceus* and *Euplectes* species, and with European Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris*. In addition it may forage in mixed flocks at abundant food sources, particularly with other seedeaters, including sparrows and canaries.

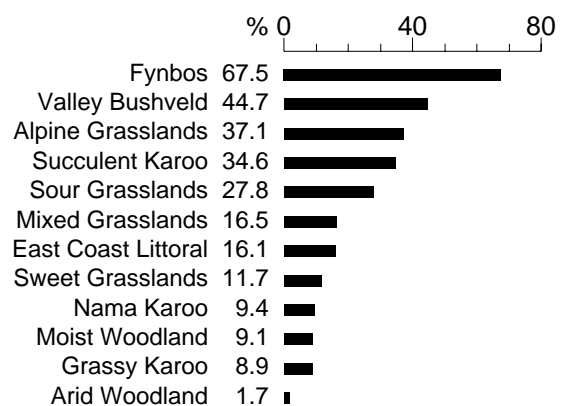
The range overlaps partly with seven of the nine other *Ploceus* species in the atlas region, but its distribution pattern is distinctive for a *Ploceus* in the region and only overlaps extensively with the much smaller Masked Weaver *P. velatus*. There is no evidence from the distributions for complementarity or competitive exclusion with any of the *Ploceus* species.

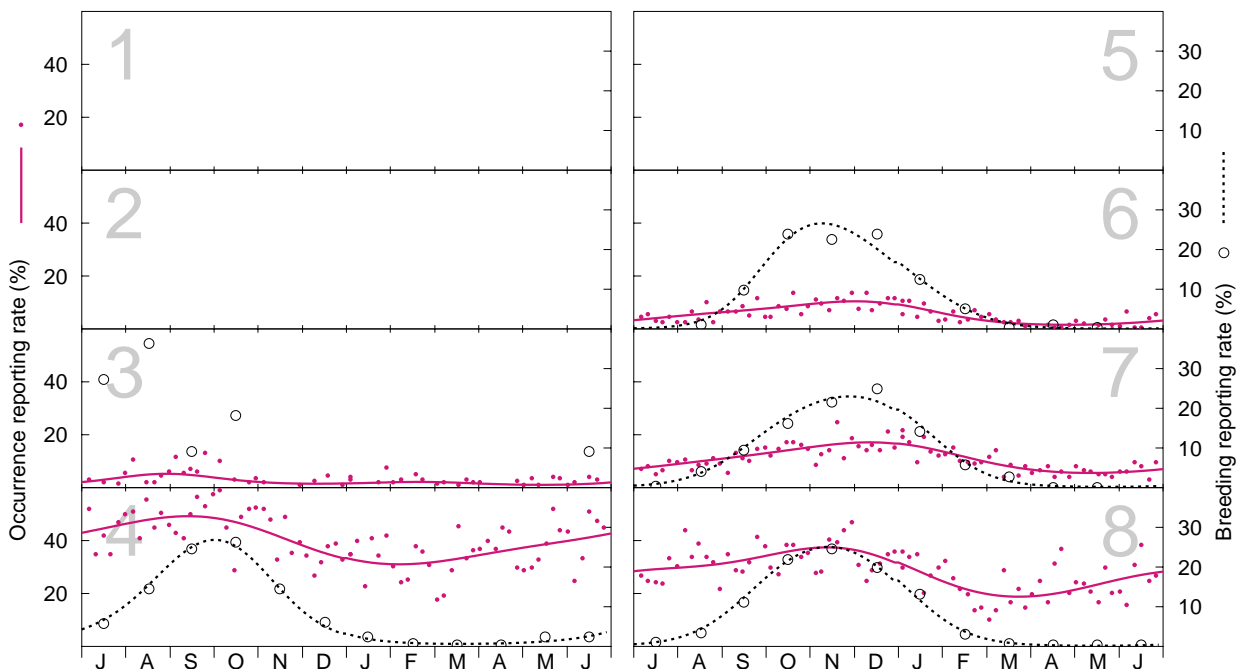
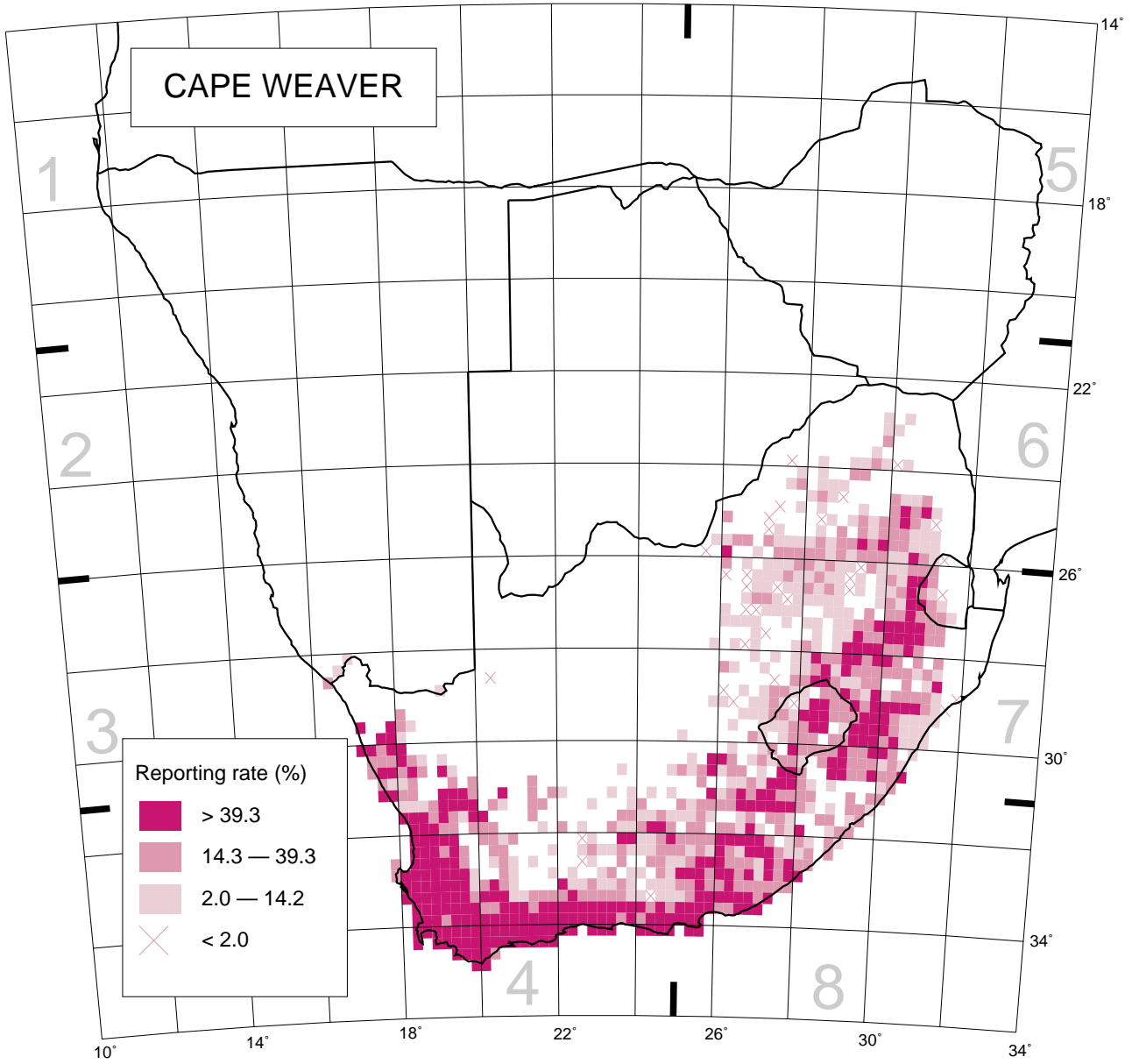
Historical distribution and conservation: It has probably increased within its range following the expansion of cropland, the building of dams and planting of alien trees, but there is no indication that any major range expansion has occurred. In the Cape Province, the Cape Weaver is an unprotected species, often destroyed by grain and fruit farmers (Elliott 1973; Fraser *et al.* 1990).

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Recorded in 927 grid cells, 20.4%
Total number of records: 30 642
Mean reporting rate for range: 35.2%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 0, 0, 134, 3494, 0, 618, 2138, 1554; Breeding: 0, 0, 11, 1292, 0, 206, 819, 597.