



Lesser Masked Weaver

Kleingeelvink

Ploceus intermedius

Much less common than the Masked Weaver *P. velatus* in southern Africa as a whole, the Lesser Masked Weaver is found over much of northern KwaZulu-Natal, Swaziland and the Transvaal, in Zimbabwe, except for the eastern highlands and the broadleaved woodlands on deep Kalahari sands in the west, in Botswana, except for the arid southwest on Kalahari sands, and in central and northern Namibia. In southern Mozambique, Clancey (1971c) considered it more common than the Masked Weaver. North of southern Africa, it occurs in Angola, through Zambia and southern Zaire to Ethiopia and Somalia (Hall & Moreau 1970).

Two subspecies are recognized in the region, *P. i. cabanisii* in tropical lowlands and *luebberti* in higher and drier areas to the west (Clancey 1980b), with the ranges being adjacent.

It is likely to be confused with the Masked Weaver on occasion, but the data have been carefully checked and the present map is reliable.

Habitat: It mainly prefers open woodland or thornveld; this is supported by the vegetation analysis. It favours areas close to water more than Masked Weavers do, but like them will nest in both trees and reeds. Like Masked Weavers, it frequently nests away from open water in ornamental gardens (Penry 1994), most typically in noisy and busy places.

Movements: There is marked seasonality in the reporting rates which clearly follows the breeding cycle, as may be expected in a species with distinctive breeding plumage. Ringing provides little information for this species, although one bird of six recovered had moved 60 km from the ringing site (Craig 1982a).

Breeding: It is generally found in colonies of fewer than 50 birds (Penry 1994; pers. obs). The breeding season is clearly September–March in the east, narrowing somewhat in the south, and probably the same for the dry northwest of the region (Zones 1–2), although there are relatively few records for these Zones. Previous reports of breeding indicate the same period (Dean 1971; Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Skinner 1995a).

Interspecific relationships: It roosts and flocks with other gregarious ploceids, and may also nest in close proximity to other species. Parker (1994) reported a mixed breeding colony with Spottedbacked Weavers *P. cucullatus* in Swaziland, whereas, along the middle Zambezi River, Tree (1992b) noted that colonies of these two species were on mutually exclusive sections of the river.

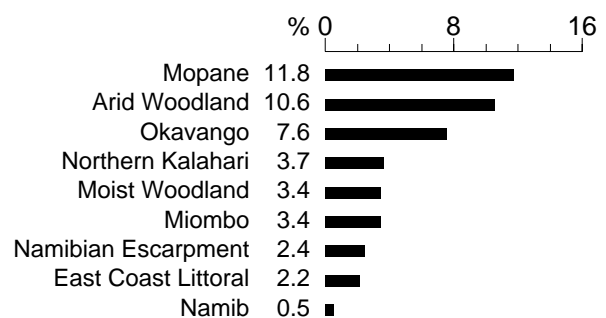
The distribution is completely encompassed by that of the similar Masked Weaver *P. velatus*, and overlaps with all eight other *Ploceus* species in the region. There is no evidence from the overall distributions for complementarity or competitive exclusion with any of the *Ploceus* species.

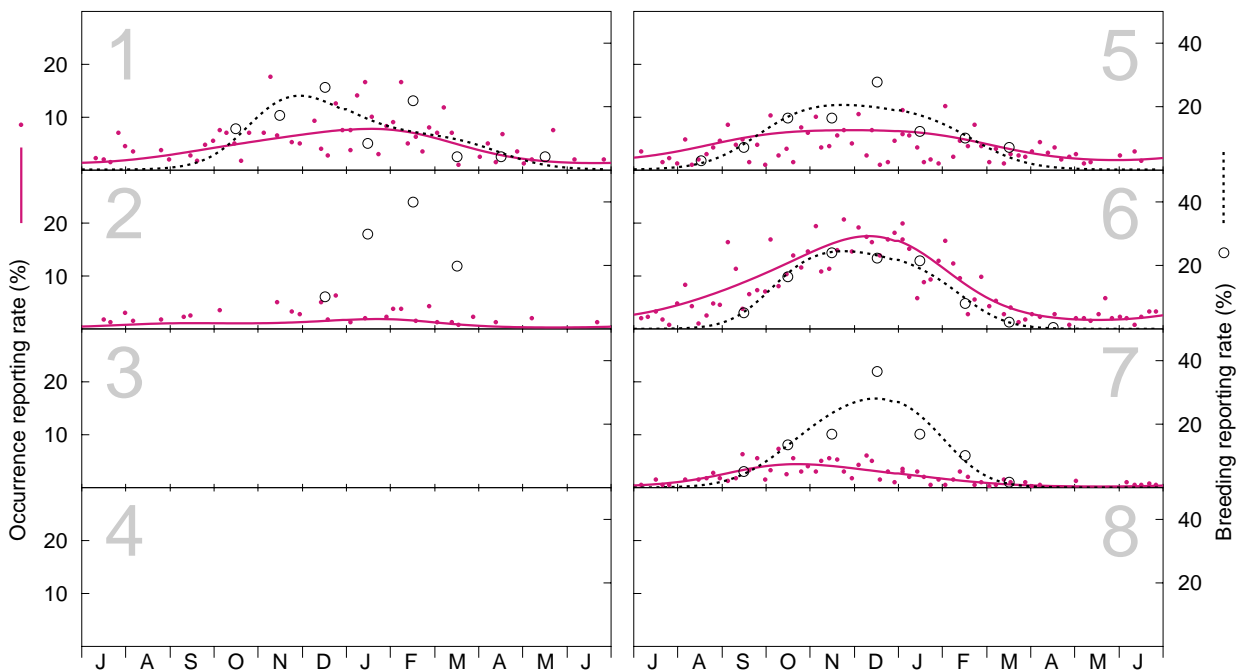
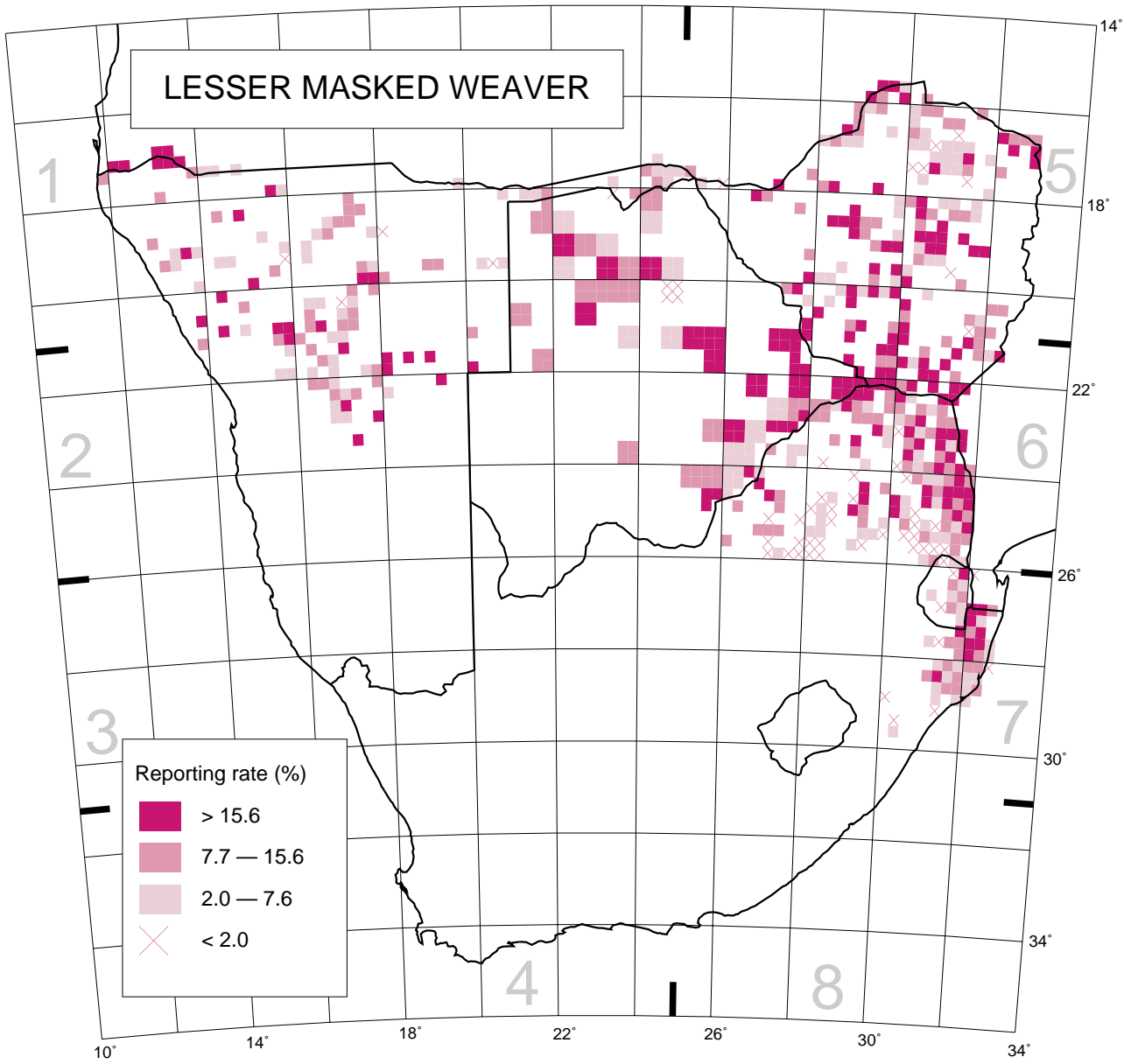
Historical distribution and conservation: Earlier records reflect essentially the same distribution as shown here, and although Clancey (1964b) reported it from the Pietermaritzburg (2930CB) area as a new record, it is likely that it had merely been overlooked previously. This species is insectivorous as much as granivorous, and widely distributed, even if it is less numerous than other weavers in the region. The Lesser Masked Weaver is neither threatened, nor a pest.

A.J.F.K. Craig

Recorded in 689 grid cells, 15.2%
Total number of records: 4019
Mean reporting rate for range: 10.6%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 125, 32, 0, 0, 431, 916, 364, 0; Breeding: 23, 10, 0, 0, 98, 315, 60, 0.