

Forest Weaver

Bosmusikant

Ploceus bicolor

The Forest Weaver is a non-colonial, largely insectivorous weaver which is usually encountered in pairs. It occurs in coastal, riverine and inland forests from the eastern Cape Province northwards. Previous tentative records from the extreme southeastern Transvaal, the escarpment and the Kruger National Park (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b) were not confirmed during the atlas period. In Zimbabwe the species was found in the southeastern lowveld, the eastern highlands, where it occurs up to 1500 m (Irwin 1981), and along the Mazowe River (1632CB,DA), a tributary of the Zambezi River. It is widespread in suitable habitat in southern Mozambique (Clancey 1971c), and to the north of the atlas region it extends from Angola to Cameroon in the west, and to southern Sudan and southern Somalia in the east (Hall & Moreau 1970).

With five subspecies in the region (Clancey 1980b), it is highly polytypic for such a limited distribution. *P. b. bicolor* occurs along the coast northwards to about Mtunzini (2831DD), where a relative stronghold of lowland *sclateri* begins, and *lebomboensis* is found further north and in the Lebombo Mountains. In the highlands of eastern Zimbabwe, birds belong to the endemic race *sylvanus*, while those in the lowlands to the north and south are *stictifrons*.

It is easily recognized visually or by its musical duet, and the distinctive nests may remain intact for more than a year, giving notice of its presence.

Habitat: The reporting rates confirm its close association with forest types, namely lowland, montane and riparian. The Valley Bushveld includes dense river-valley vegetation, which is occupied by many typical forest species such as Knysna Lourie *Tauraco corythaix* (Skead 1967b).

Movements: While reporting rates fluctuate to some extent, there is no good evidence of seasonal movements. The reduction in reporting rates towards the end of the breeding season may be related to inconspicuousness while moulting. It is present in montane forests in the eastern Cape Province in winter (pers. obs), but Vernon (1989) noted that it wanders outside forested areas during this season. The high degree of differentiation in subspecies is indirect evidence for residency, even in rather small forest regions. A bird considered on detailed description to be of the race *stictifrons* appeared at Rukomechi (1529CC), on the Zambezi River, from 29 April to 6 August 1995, some 370 km west of the nearest known site on the Mazowe River (Riddell 1995).

Breeding: Records mainly span September–February, peaking October–January in all Zones, which is consistent with existing information (Dean 1971; Irwin 1981; Maclean 1993b).

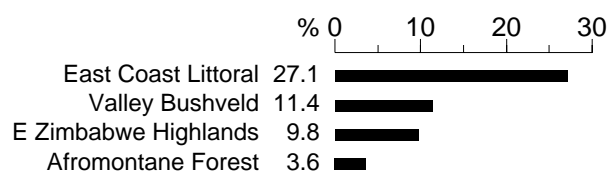
Interspecific relations: It joins mixed bird parties in winter (Vernon 1980; Quicquelberge 1989). There are ten *Ploceus* species in the atlas region, but the Forest Weaver is the only one which prefers the interior of true forest.

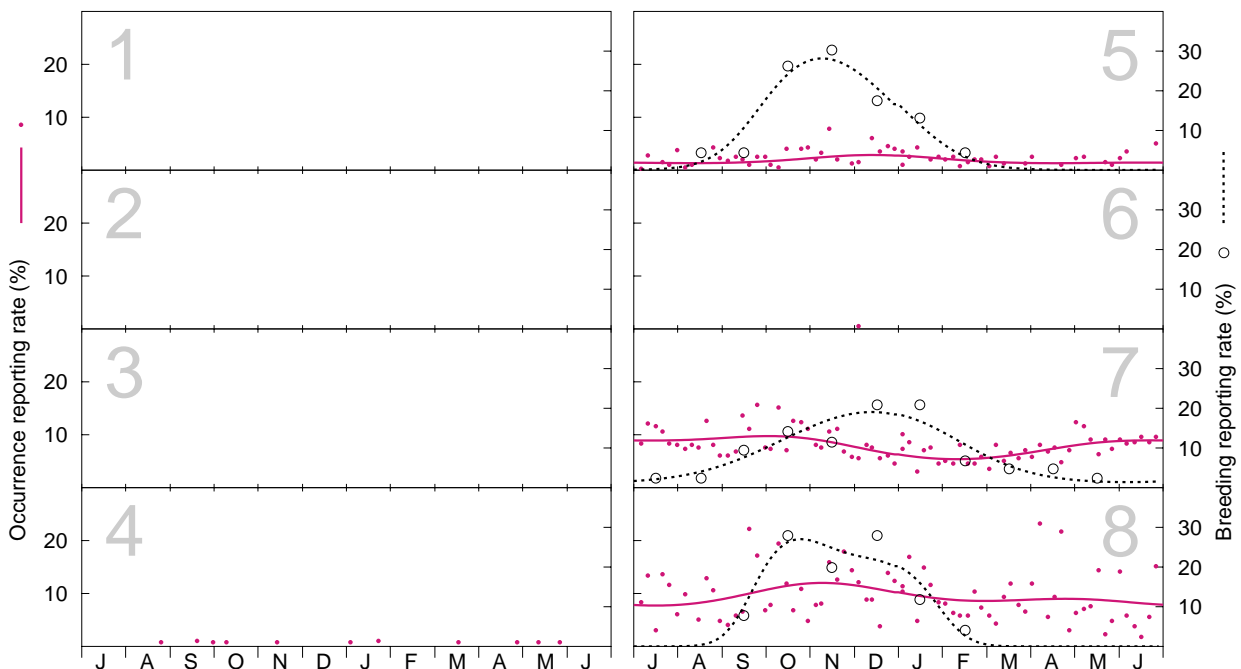
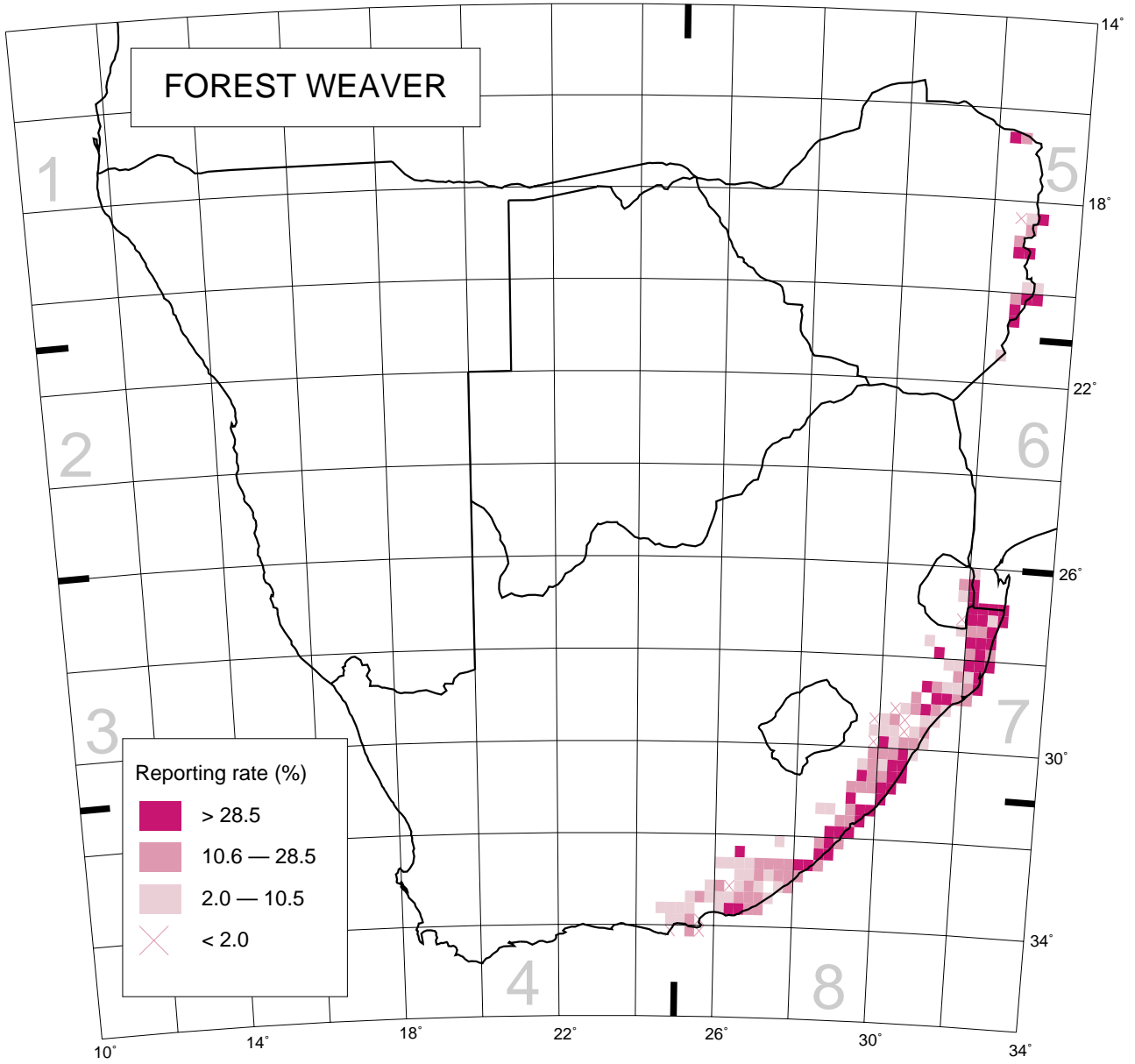
Historical distribution and conservation: In broad geographical terms, the distribution in the region has probably not changed. However, forest habitat in southern Africa has been progressively reduced and fragmented, and this may have had negative effects at a local level. It is not known to what extent relict patches are visited or colonized. The Forest Weaver is still regular in many areas, but habitat loss may be affecting the overall population.

A.J.F.K. Craig

Recorded in 175 grid cells, 3.9%
Total number of records: 4493
Mean reporting rate for range: 20.2%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 0, 0, 0, 11, 154, 1, 1542, 520; Breeding: 0, 0, 0, 0, 23, 0, 43, 25.