

## Spectacled Weaver

### Brilwewer

*Ploceus ocularis*

The Spectacled Weaver occurs from the eastern Cape Province through the Transkei, KwaZulu-Natal, Swaziland to the eastern and northern Transvaal. In eastern and northern Botswana it is restricted to the riverine woodlands of the Limpopo River and its major tributaries and the Okavango basin; in Namibia it occurs in the Caprivi and along the Kunene River. It is widespread in the eastern half of Zimbabwe and along the Zambezi Valley. Clancey (1971c) described it as common in southern Mozambique; beyond southern Africa; it extends through savanna areas from Angola to Cameroon, and in the east as far north as lowland Ethiopia (Hall & Moreau 1970).

Five subspecies have been described for the region (Clancey 1980b), of which particularly *P. o. brevior* has major strongholds in the Transvaal lowveld, adjacent Swaziland – where the population is estimated at 20 000 birds (Parker 1994) – and KwaZulu-Natal. Three races have continuous ranges in the east, and two have well-separated distributions to the west: *crocatus* enters the region marginally in the northwest along the Kunene River and *tenuirostris* in the Okavango basin has remarkably low reporting rates in this supposedly optimal habitat.

This insectivorous weaver is found in pairs or family groups throughout the year (Maclean 1993b). Although not a demonstrative species, it is easily identified visually or by call, and is unlikely to have been overlooked or misidentified to a significant extent. The nests are conspicuous and a male may build several close together, even though the species is monogamous (Craig 1984).

**Habitat:** The vegetation types in which it was most often reported clearly reflect its preference for tall woodland or other tall vegetation (e.g. *Euphorbia* trees in the eastern Cape Province). It does not occur in forest interiors, but often occurs on the edge of forest patches and in riverine woodland and thickets.

**Movements:** Although in all the eastern Zones the reporting rates peaked in spring and summer, declining in autumn, a study in KwaZulu-Natal showed that it was resident, with pairs remaining in vocal contact throughout the year (Craig 1984). The decrease in reporting rates just after breeding may be related to the moulting period.

**Breeding:** Records of breeding activity came from all months of the year, though there was a peak September–February. Published records span a similar period, but the suggestion from the atlas data of an earlier peak in Zimbabwe is not present in earlier data (Dean 1971; Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). The same nest site is often used in successive years, although a new nest is built (pers. obs).

**Interspecific relations:** In KwaZulu-Natal savanna woodland it sometimes joins mixed-species bird parties (Craig 1984), and this has also been reported for other areas by Vernon (1980). However, it does not associate regularly with other weaver species, and roosts in pairs.

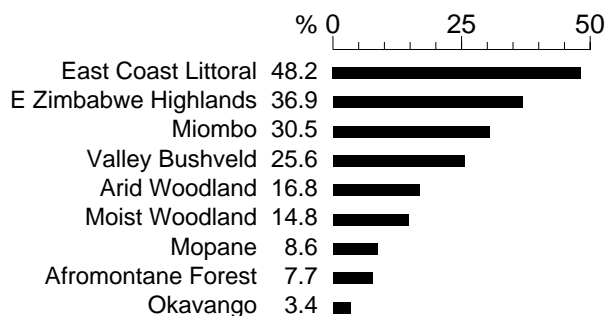
Its range overlaps to some extent with eight of the nine other *Ploceus* species in the atlas region, but its distribution is most similar to Spottedbacked Weaver *P. cucullatus* and Golden Weaver *P. xanthops*, both larger and predominantly granivorous species. There is no evidence from the distributions for complementarity or competitive exclusion with any of the other species.

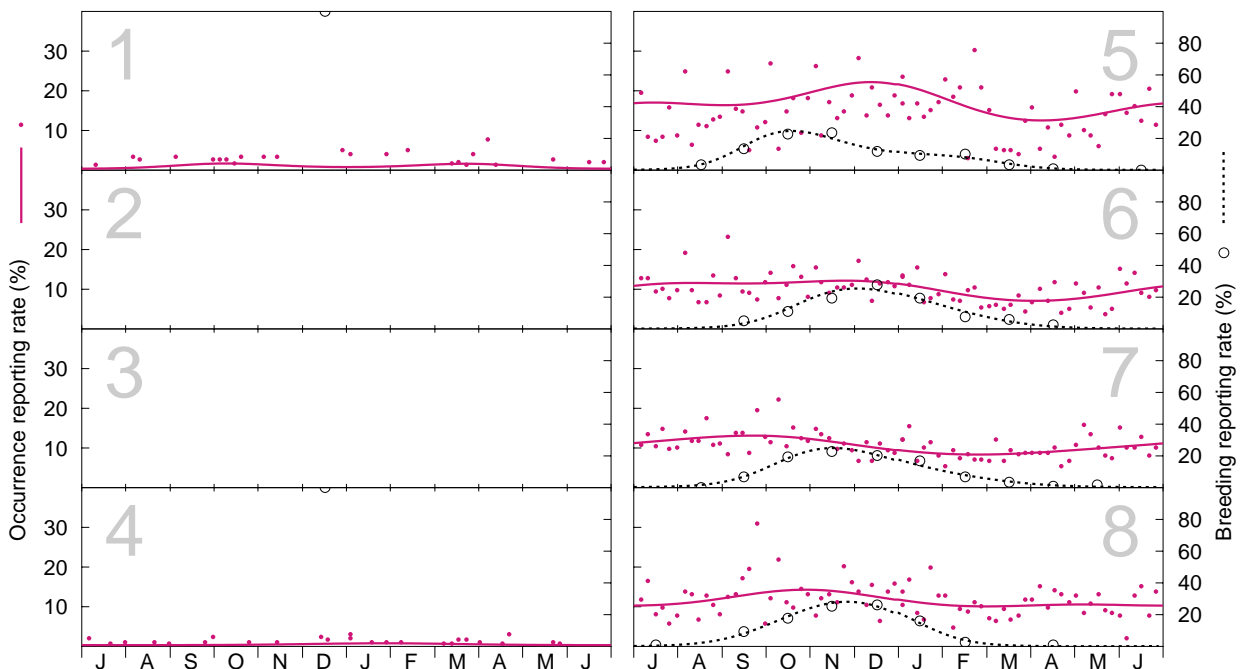
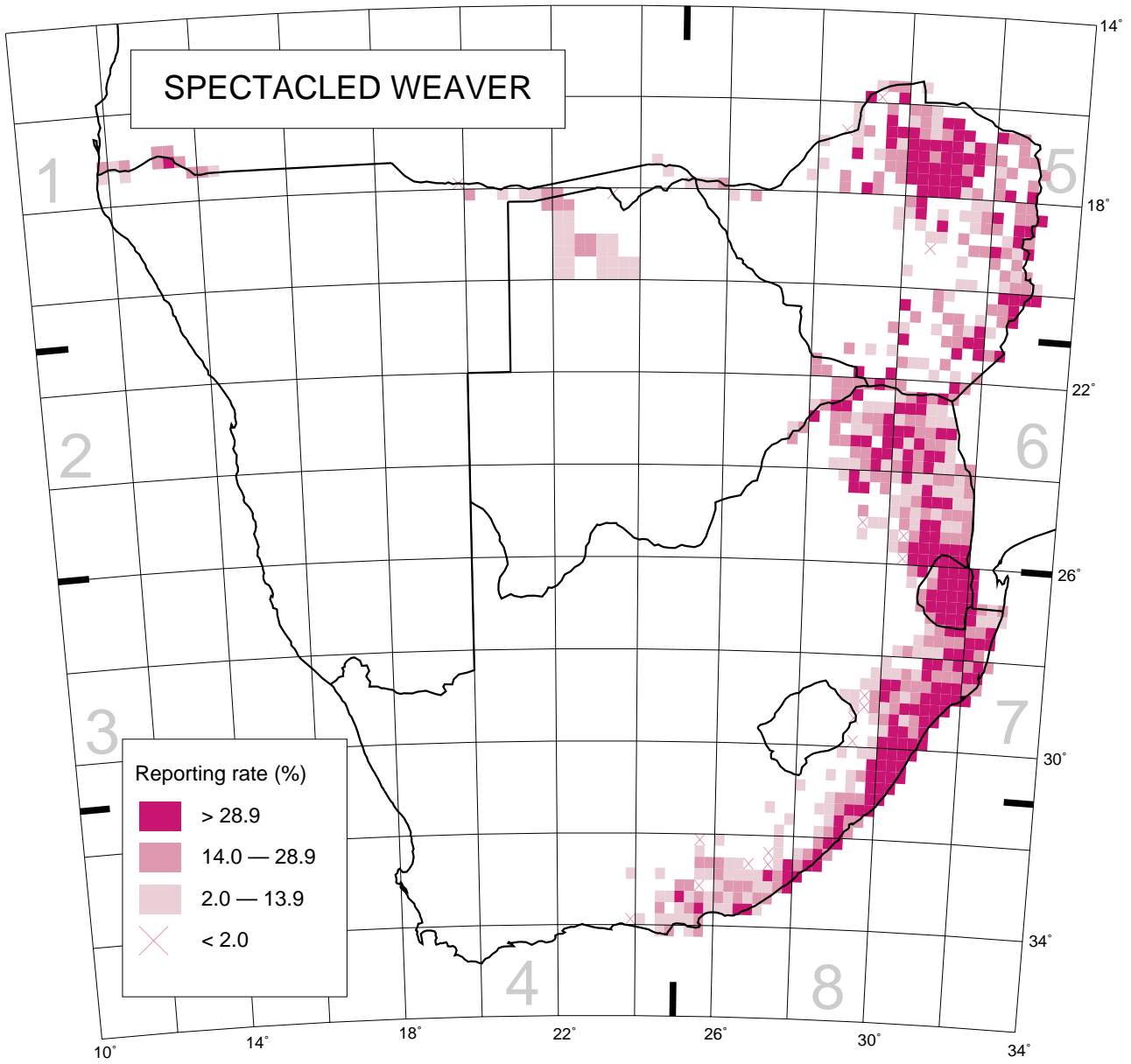
**Historical distribution and conservation:** For Botswana, Smithers (1964) had records only from the north, but predicted that it would be found further south in the Limpopo region. While it does nest in gardens, this does not seem to have led to major range expansion on the Transvaal highveld nor on the western plateau in Zimbabwe (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). The Spectacled Weaver is widespread, and can adapt to some man-made environments. Unlike the granivorous weaver species, it does not come into conflict with human interests.

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Recorded in 684 grid cells, 15.1%  
Total number of records: 15 214  
Mean reporting rate for range: 30.9%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 35, 0, 0, 41, 1476, 1154, 2072, 635; Breeding: 1, 0, 0, 2, 186, 117, 213, 99.