

Spottedbacked Weaver

Bontrugwewer

Ploceus cucullatus

Known as the Village Weaver in other parts of Africa, this is probably the most widespread and abundant *Ploceus* species on the continent. It is found throughout sub-Saharan Africa except in the more arid areas where it occurs only near major rivers (Hall & Moreau 1970). In southern Africa, the Spottedbacked Weaver ranges through Zimbabwe, the Transvaal, Swaziland, KwaZulu-Natal and southwards along the Transkei coast to the eastern Cape Province. It is also found throughout southern Mozambique (Clancey 1971c). In Botswana it is restricted to the Okavango region and the Limpopo drainage; in Namibia it occurs only in the Caprivi.

The three subspecies in the atlas region (Clancey 1980b) have continuous distributions. There are strongholds of *P. c. spilonotus* in southern KwaZulu-Natal and of *dilutescens* in the Transvaal lowveld and Swaziland, while *nigriceps* was surprisingly infrequently reported from the Okavango basin.

It can be confused with several other species, and even males in breeding plumage can be confused e.g. with Masked Weavers *P. velatus*, but the data have been carefully checked and the present map is reliable.

Habitat: It is generally found near water, and thus penetrates different woodland vegetation types along river valleys. It usually nests in trees, less often in reeds, but is not found in forest except where there are clearings and secondary growth, as around villages in tropical Africa. It avoids treeless grasslands. It may, however, be found in open thornveld, particularly in winter.

Movements: As with other colonial weavers with a distinct breeding plumage, reporting rates peak during the breeding period and drop off markedly at other times. Nevertheless, conspicuousness at different seasons may not be the only explanation. Local movements were reported from Zimbabwe (Irwin 1981), but ringing data produced only two recoveries of birds more than 50 km from the

ringing site (Craig 1982a). In other parts of Africa regular seasonal movements have been described (Adegoke 1983).

Breeding: Breeding activity was reported from all months of the year, with a distinct peak September–February throughout the east (Zones 5–8), but considerably later (December–April) in the Okavango (Zone 1). A long and almost bimodal breeding season was also recorded by Irwin (1981) in Zimbabwe, while the other models also agree with published information (Dean 1971; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Skinner 1995a).

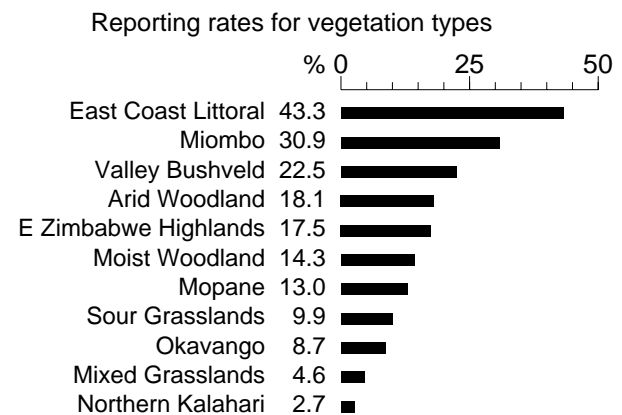
Interspecific relations: It often flocks and roosts with other gregarious ploceids, chiefly in the nonbreeding season.

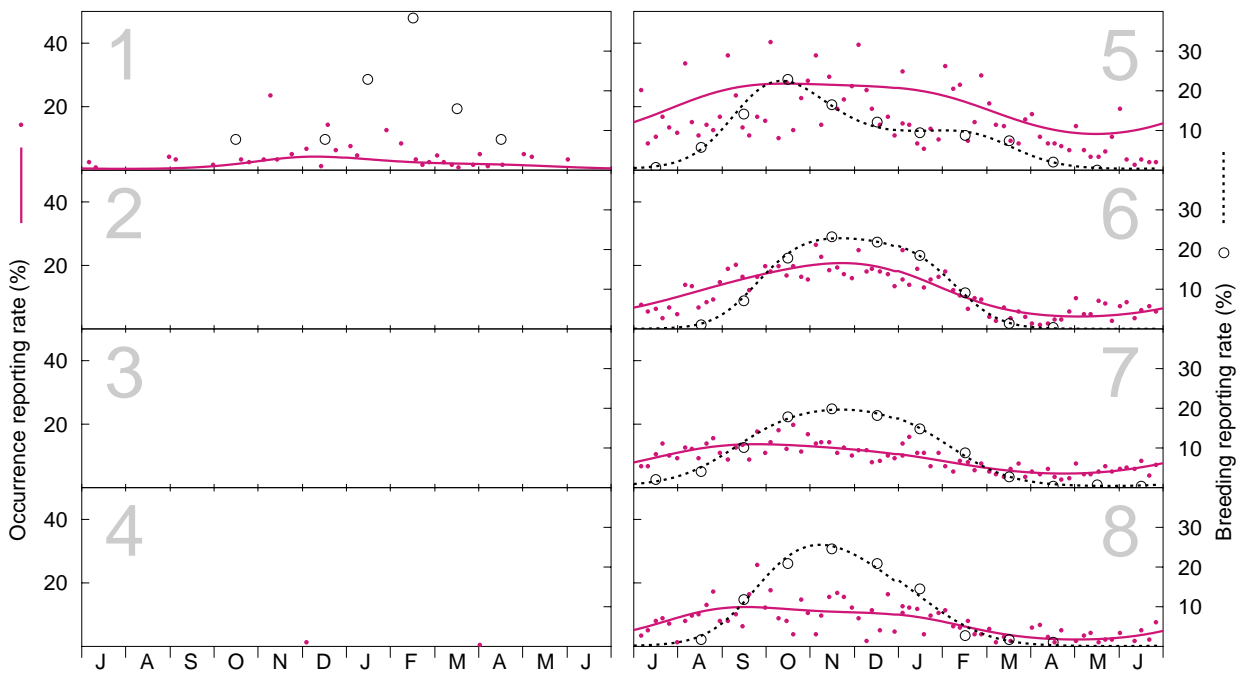
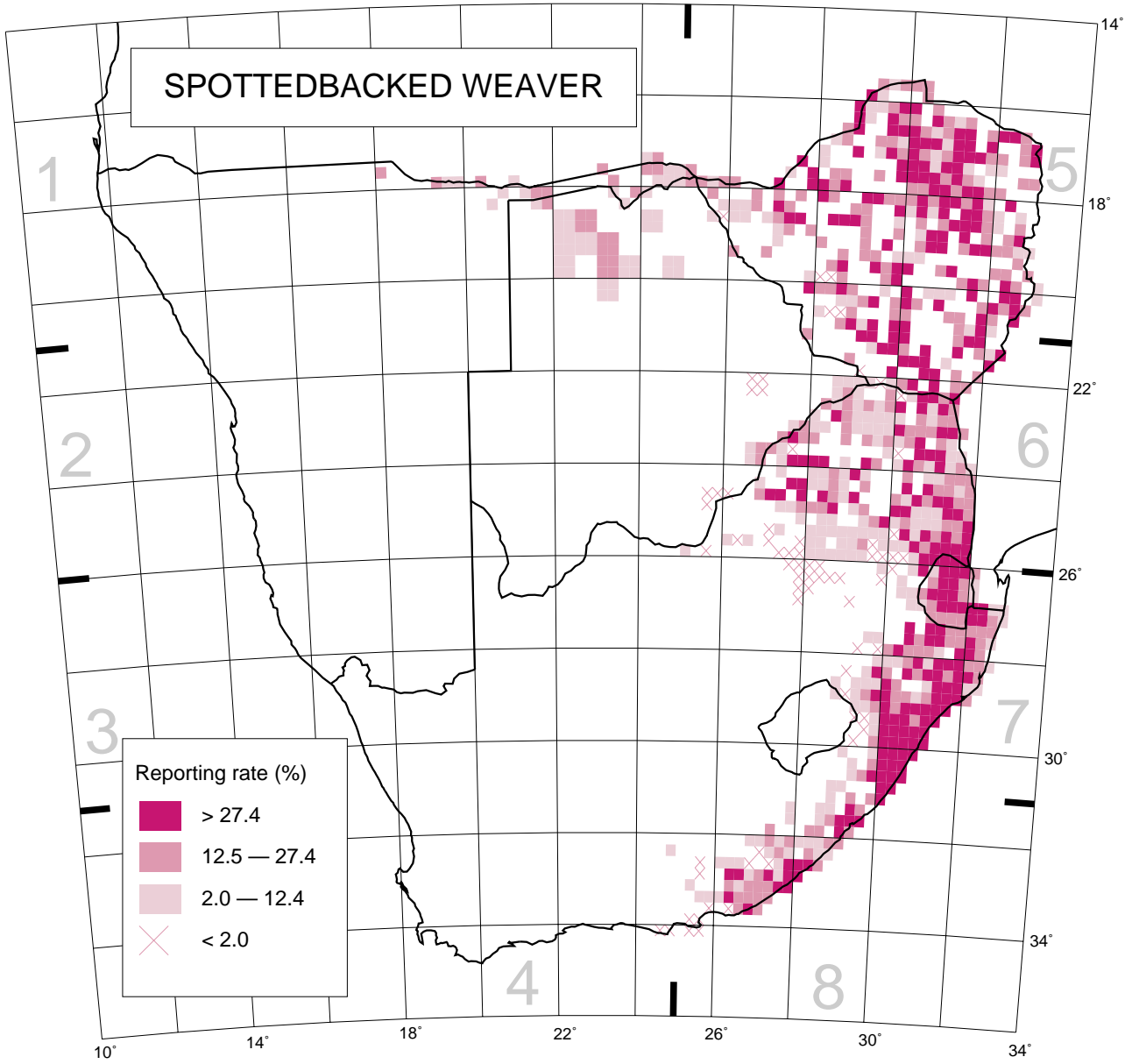
The range overlaps partly with that of eight of the nine other *Ploceus* species in the atlas region, but its distribution is most similar to the Spectacled Weaver *P. ocularis* and Golden Weaver *P. xanthops*. The Spectacled Weaver is a smaller, predominantly insectivorous species, but Spottedbacked and Golden Weavers are similar in size and probably have similar food requirements. They occur in the same riparian and swamp habitat, but the Spottedbacked Weaver is more mobile and occurs more regularly in open, savanna type habitat, while the Golden Weaver is relatively restricted to riparian thickets. There is no evidence from the distributions for complementarity or competitive exclusion with any of the *Ploceus* species.

Historical distribution and conservation: The atlas data are more comprehensive than those of previous reviews, and there is no indication that this principally northern and tropical species is expanding its range considerably in the southwest of our region. Its establishment in the Gaborone area (2425D), at the edge of the range, seems to be a minor recent expansion (Petersen 1991; Herremans *et al.* 1994a). Less common than some other weaver species of southern Africa, the Spottedbacked Weaver is neither rare nor a major pest in this region.

A.J.F.K. Craig

Recorded in 896 grid cells, 19.7%
Total number of records: 15 792
Mean reporting rate for range: 22.5%





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 57, 0, 0, 2, 1818, 1325, 1804, 413; Breeding: 13, 0, 0, 0, 478, 552, 663, 178.



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