

Olive Bee-eater

Olyfbyvreter

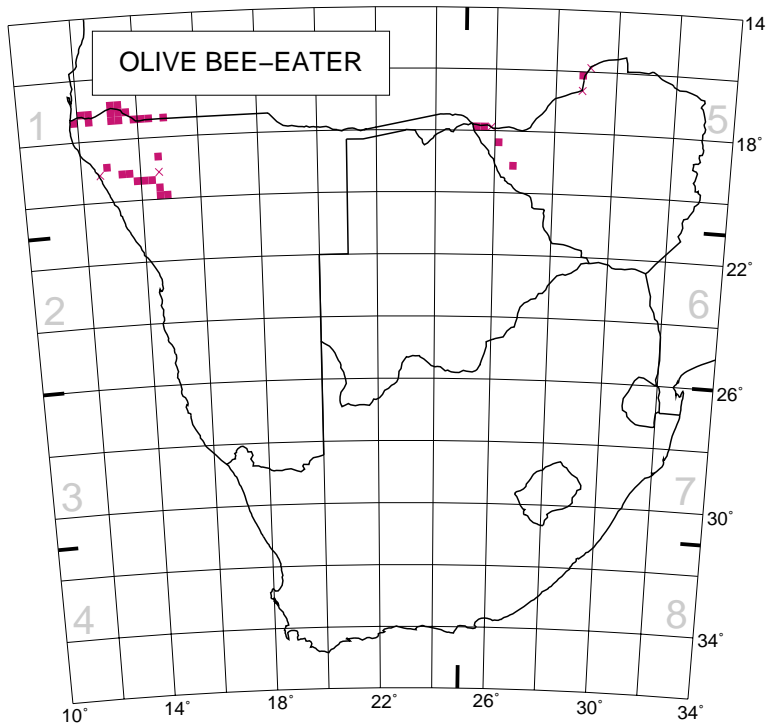
Merops superciliosus

The Olive Bee-eater is an intra-African migrant with poorly understood movements (Irwin 1981; Fry *et al.* 1992). Two, possibly three, populations occur in southern Africa. One population, subspecies *M. s. alternans*, breeds mainly in southern Angola, reaching its southern limit in northwestern Namibia, especially the lower Kunene River valley, where it occurs mainly November–April. This population presumably migrates northwards within Africa, but where it spends the nonbreeding season is unknown. One population of the nominate race breeds from Somalia to Mozambique, and sporadically in Zimbabwe (Dean & Brooke 1991). Within the atlas region this population was recorded along the middle Zambezi Valley, mostly December–March; it migrates northwards to unknown destinations in Africa but may be resident on islands off Mozambique (Dean & Brooke 1991). A second population of this race breeds on Madagascar and the Comoro Islands, and is sometimes thought to migrate to Africa, but Louette (1988) and Fry *et al.* (1992) disagreed because it occurs throughout the year in Madagascar (see also Langrand 1990) and on the Comoros. A third subspecies, *philippinus*, breeds in southeast Asia, from Pakistan to Papua New Guinea (Fry *et al.* 1992).

The atlas did not provide evidence that it is a common nonbreeding visitor to northeastern KwaZulu-Natal (*contra* Fry *et al.* 1992); breeding was, however, recorded in 1928 near Richards Bay (2832CC), and it has been reported from the area in the last decade (Kruger 1990; Dean & Brooke 1991).

The drab juveniles and moulting adults of the Bluecheeked Bee-eater *M. persicus* are frequently mistaken for Olive Bee-eaters. Careful vetting of records in Botswana resulted in only two being accepted, both from along the Chobe River (Borello 1992b; Bishop 1995).

It is a gregarious species, occurring mainly in riverine woodland, often hunting for bees and other flying insects from a high perch in a dead tree, and returning to the same perch between sallies. It roosts in reedbeds and mangrove swamps.



Recorded in 35 grid cells, 0.8%
 Total number of records: 93
 Mean reporting rate for range: 8.7%

The most commonly utilized breeding habitat is near-vertical sandbanks, but it does also excavate burrows in open flat areas. Breeding in Namibia was first reported from Swartbooisdrif (1713BD) in October 1965 (Winterbottom 1966a). Egg-laying was recorded in Zimbabwe in September and in Namibia in September, October and December (Brown & Clinning in press).

The Olive Bee-eater reaches the southern periphery of its distribution in southern Africa. The range does not appear to have changed, though it apparently bred more widely in the region during the 19th century (Dean & Brooke 1991); its habitat in the region does not appear to be threatened.

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