



## Scalythroated Honeyguide

### Gevlekte Heuningwyser

*Indicator variegatus*

The Scalythroated Honeyguide is endemic to the Afrotropics and has a range from Ethiopia southwards through eastern Africa to Mozambique and into the eastern edge of the atlas region; it ranges from northern Zambia in the east to the Atlantic Ocean coast in central Angola (Fry *et al.* 1988). In Zimbabwe it occurs primarily in the forests of the east. It occurs along the eastern Transvaal escarpment, in Swaziland, KwaZulu-Natal and the eastern Cape Province as far west as Mossel Bay (3422AA).

Although subspecies have been described, Fry *et al.* (1988) treated it as a monotypic species on the grounds that geographical variation in colour is matched by individual and seasonal variation within local populations.

Because of its sylvan habitat and apparent long periods of daily inactivity (Maclean 1993b), it is far more often heard than seen, its far-carrying, ascending trill being a characteristic sound of its preferred haunts, especially in spring and summer. Stark & Sclater (1903) described its jizz as 'sitting motionless on a branch giving vent to a monotonous frog-like croak'. The call can be heard at distances of up to 500 m under ideal conditions (Ranger 1955). When seen, it is not difficult to identify; its breast markings distinguishing it from all other honeyguides in southern Africa.

**Habitat:** It frequents a variety of habitats from wooded savanna to montane bamboo belts. In southern Africa it can

be found in forest at all altitudes and along wooded gullies in river valleys and bushveld; it is perhaps more common in woodland–forest mosaics than in forest proper. Friedmann (1955) found it to be 'much more of a wooded-river-bottom dweller than either the Greater *I. indicator* or the Lesser *I. minor* Honeyguides.' The three vegetation types with highest reporting rates collectively cover most of its range in southern Africa.

**Movements:** No seasonal movements have been noted and Fry *et al.* (1988) stated that it is resident throughout its range. Ranger (1955) noted that particular males called virtually throughout the year, but their vocalizations diminished in late summer and early autumn. The spring peaks in reporting rates in most Zones are almost certainly due to more frequent calling of males at the onset of the breeding season.

**Breeding:** Few records of breeding were made by atlas observers, which is not surprising for a secretive brood parasite such as this. The few known laying dates span September–January in the atlas region (Irwin 1981; Maclean 1993b).

**Interspecific relationships:** Barbets, tinker-barbets and woodpeckers – all of which nest in tree holes – are its usual brood hosts (Fry *et al.* 1988).

It sometimes joins mixed-species foraging flocks (Fry *et al.* 1988) and is alleged to guide humans and Honey Badgers *Mellivora capensis* to bees' nests. Macdonald (1994) suggested, on the basis of strong circumstantial evidence, that associations between honeyguides and Honey Badgers are mythical, and Fry *et al.* (1988) considered that, in view of its secretive habits, guiding of humans by this species is unlikely or at least rare. However, it

is known to investigate noisy human activity within its habitat and also to monitor guiding Greater Honeyguides *I. indicator* (Fry *et al.* 1988), so it would appear to exploit the associations of congeners to its own benefit.

**Historical distribution and conservation:** The range is similar to that described by Stark & Sclater (1903). Even though the Scalythroated Honeyguide is on the periphery of its distribution in southern Africa, it is not considered to be threatened here.

T.B. Oatley

Recorded in 200 grid cells, 4.4%  
Total number of records: 1656  
Mean reporting rate for range: 5.8%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types



