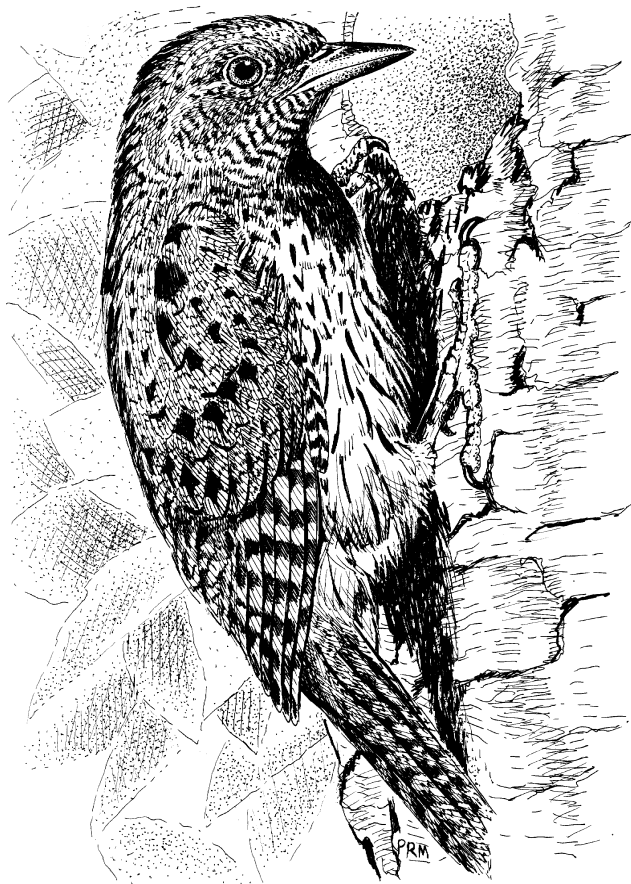




Redthroated Wryneck

Draaihals

Jynx ruficollis

The Redthroated Wryneck, endemic to the Afrotropical region, has an inexplicably disjunct and fragmented range across the continent. Five widely separated populations occur, the southern African one being the most extensive and the most isolated. It is centred on the grassland biome. An outlying record from eastern Zimbabwe represents a sighting of a pair of birds investigating a hole in a tree at Vimba Forest (2032BB) on 16 December 1991, and is the only record from Zimbabwe (Hustler *et al.* 1992a).

Encountered singly or in pairs, it varies greatly in abundance from place to place. Densities at two sites north of Johannesburg (2628AA) only 15 km apart varied from 8 pairs/240 ha to 2–3 pairs/2000 ha (Tarboton 1976), while the village of Wakkerstroom (2730AC) had a density of 9 pairs/300 ha in July 1995 (pers. obs). This is a fairly unobtrusive species but its characteristic call often reveals its presence. It is distinctive in appearance and not easily misidentified.

Habitat: The climatic determinants of the extent of the grassland biome, viz. summer rainfall, low summer-aridity index, low winter temperature (Rutherford & Westfall 1986), are probably the ultimate determinants of this species' distribution, although the presence of lightly wooded

habitat is the proximal determinant. Within the grassland biome, Redthroated Wrynecks were reported with greatest frequency in the Sour and Mixed Grasslands, i.e. in those parts of the biome receiving the highest rainfall. Its virtual absence from the Alpine Grassland region indicates that climatic factors and/or the relative absence of trees are limiting. Its distribution has an altitudinal ceiling at about 2200 m. It forages mostly on the ground (Tarboton 1976) but uses trees for nesting, roosting and cover; it is only found in grassland where there are trees present (*Protea*, *Acacia* and others). In much of its range, alien species, especially wattles, willows and eucalypts, provide the necessary tree cover. It is absent where trees are either too sparse or too dense, and it has disappeared from parts of the highveld (e.g. north of Johannesburg 2628A) where suburban development has reduced the amount of open ground (pers. obs).

Movements: Although it is reported to be migratory (e.g. Maclean 1993b), the models do not suggest any seasonal movements between the Zones, although altitudinal movements within Zones remain a possibility. There is a consistent dip in reporting rates during the late summer, perhaps due to reduced calling after the breeding season. North of Johannesburg it was resident and pairs held year-round territories (Tarboton 1976). Its occurrence in the eastern Cape Province is erratic at any particular locality, with long-term presence the exception rather than the rule (A.J. Tree pers. comm.).

Breeding: The atlas data indicate a spring/summer breeding season (mainly August–February) with an October–January peak.

Interspecific relationships: It competes for nest sites in parts of its range with other hole-nesting species including barbets, hoopoes and starlings (Tarboton 1976).

Historical distribution and conservation: Although its past distribution has not been documented, it is unlikely to be different, at a macro-scale, from its present distribution. Within this range, however, it is likely that numbers of the Redthroated Wryneck have increased dramatically as a result of alien trees being introduced to many formerly treeless parts of the grassland biome. Much of the eastern Transvaal and northeastern Free State, for example, would not have provided habitat prior to such introduction. It is not considered to be at risk in southern Africa.

W.R. Tarboton

Recorded in 420 grid cells, 9.3%
Total number of records: 7356
Mean reporting rate for range: 14.5%

Reporting rates for vegetation types

