

Forktailed Drongo

Mikstertbyvanger

Dicrurus adsimilis

The Forktailed Drongo is an Afro-tropical species distributed throughout sub-Saharan Africa, except in deserts and other treeless regions; in southern Africa it avoids the high grassveld areas, the arid Karoo and the Namib Desert. Hall & Moreau (1970) considered that the subspecies *D. a. coracinus* inhabits the equatorial rain-forests, but this is atypical habitat for a species characteristic of savannas and woodlands.

Clancey (1980b) recognized three subspecies in the region; their ranges appear continuous. There are, however, areas of lower reporting rate between the strongholds in the upper Limpopo River catchment in the southwestern Transvaal and the Molopo River catchment in the northern Cape Province and adjacent Botswana, and on the plateau along the eastern Transvaal escarpment.

It is conspicuous owing to its bold and aggressive habits and harsh, scolding calls. The atlas data are comprehensive and reliable.

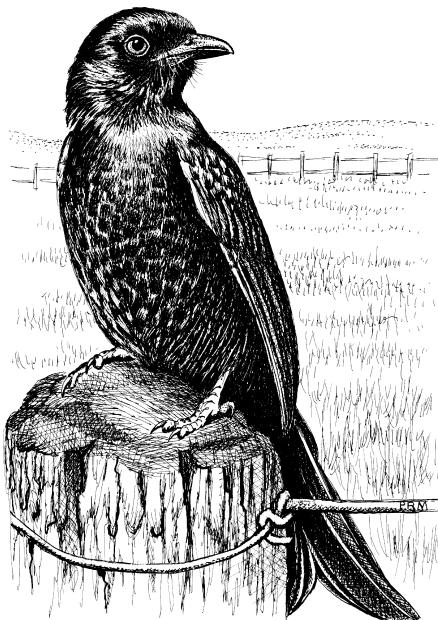
Habitat: The vegetation analysis indicates the wide range of vegetation types in which this species is encountered. Notwithstanding the high reporting rate for Afromontane forest, it is not a bird of the forest interior, though it may frequent the edges of some forest patches, taking advantage of fringe trees as lofty perches. It also frequents plantations of alien trees such as wattle, pine and eucalyptus, which are commonly found adjacent to mistbelt forests. Its occurrence on the highveld is most usual in the vicinity of alien trees. Its most favoured habitat is open bush and woodland. Recorded densities for broadleaved and *Acacia* woodlands are 1 pair/30 ha and 1 pair/11 ha respectively (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). It also inhabits farmlands and built-up areas, using fences or telephone poles as perches where trees are scarce. The Afrikaans name is appropriate as it sometimes frequents the vicinity of beehives, feeding on bees.

Movements: Normally considered a resident, Maclean (1993b) mentioned that it may exhibit 'some short-distance local movements'. The models show small autumn–winter increases in reporting rates, most noticeable in Zone 6; this may be due to increased conspicuousness when trees are not in leaf.

Breeding: The models for all Zones peak in late spring–summer, though breeding records span virtually the whole year; Maclean (1993b) gave a range of August–January. Most clutches are begun September–November, and egg-laying later than March must be uncommon. There is a trend for progressively later breeding with increasing latitude in the eastern Zones, which also emerges from published egg-laying data (Dean 1971; Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b).

Interspecific relationships: The other drongo species in southern Africa, the Squaretailed Drongo *D. ludwigii*, occurs in the interior of evergreen forest; the two species are ecologically separated.

The Forktailed Drongo mobs eagles, hawks, and owls, and has been observed to attack and drive off a *Gymnogene Polyboroides typus* that was attempting to rob the nests of a



weaverbird colony (pers. obs.). It also mobs mongooses and other terrestrial predators, hovering over them to mark their progression through tall grass.

It associates with larger game and livestock during the dry winter, feeding on the insects they disturb (Dean & Macdonald 1981); up to 12 have been observed following a small herd of elephants (M. Herremans pers. comm.).

It is the only confirmed host of the African Cuckoo *Cuculus gularis*, whose eggs closely match some of the several egg patterns in the drongo (Tarboton 1975, 1986). The aggression of the drongo makes the female cuckoo's task of laying in the host's nest hazardous, and the evidence of cuckoo feathers beneath unparasitized drongo nests shows that the cuckoos are not always successful (Tarboton 1986).

Historical distribution and con-

servation: It has probably expanded its range into highveld areas where it did not previously occur as tree planting modified the grassland habitat. Expansion in the southwestern Cape Province during the 1980s has been documented (Underhill & Hockey 1988), but it has yet to colonize the Cape Peninsula (3418A) itself, where occasional stragglers have been recorded (Hockey *et al.* 1989). It has been observed to feed at night on insects attracted to floodlights at two localities in Namibia (Koen 1988; Underhill 1988).

The Forktailed Drongo is so widespread and successful in the Afrotropics that it is not likely to become threatened in the foreseeable future.

T.B. Oatley

Recorded in 3192 grid cells, 70.4%
Total number of records: 66 758
Mean reporting rate for range: 57.5%

Reporting rates for vegetation types

