

Heuglin's Robin

Heuglinse Janfrederik

Cossypha heuglini

Heuglin's Robin is the most wide-ranging *Cossypha* robin in the Afrotropical region (Keith *et al.* 1992) but has only a limited distribution in the more tropical parts of southern Africa. The range extends from northern KwaZulu-Natal through Swaziland, the Transvaal lowveld and the Limpopo Valley, over most of Zimbabwe, and westward into the Okavango and Caprivi regions. Clancey (1980b) recognized two subspecies in southern Africa: *C. h. orphea* with a stronghold in the Okavango and adjacent tributaries to the Zambezi River, and *euronota* east of this throughout the remainder of the region.

Its magnificent crescendo duetting song is one of the characteristic sounds of Africa in both towns and wildlife sanctuaries. Its white eyebrow and overall bright orange underparts provide a unique combination which should preclude confusion with any other southern African bird, yet for many years other species have repeatedly been misidentified as Heuglin's Robin in areas which are ecologically unsuitable and outside its range (e.g. Morley 1964). The present atlas data provide an accurate picture of distribution.

Habitat: Throughout its range it is a characteristic species of riverine forest, even where this is limited to a thin discontinuous fringe. Where it is common it also frequents evergreen thickets (as on termite mounds) in woodland and in modified areas, frequenting the gardens of homesteads

and towns. In the Transvaal and Zimbabwe it was found most commonly (up to 3 birds/ha) in riverine forest with a high percentage of evergreens, discontinuous canopy and well-developed shrub and ground layers (Farkas 1973). The vegetation analysis, besides showing where it is most commonly encountered, provides a diagrammatic representation of its decreasing abundance and smaller range from Zimbabwe southwards. From Zimbabwe northwards it is a common garden bird and may nest close to human dwellings in places such as vine-covered verandah trellises.

Movements: It is not known to undertake regular seasonal movements anywhere within its range (Keith *et al.* 1992). The slightly lower reporting rates in winter in some regions are probably explained by quieter and more covert behaviour in the nonbreeding season.

Breeding: Atlas records show breeding July–May in the north (Zone 5) and September–April further south (Zone 6) with a general peak in October–November. Egg-laying is usually restricted to September–January (Dean 1971; Irwin 1981; Skinner 1995a), two August records from Zimbabwe notwithstanding (Irwin 1981).

Interspecific relationships: From the eastern highlands of Zimbabwe south into the Transvaal and KwaZulu-Natal (and in many other parts of its Afrotropical range), it shares its habitat with the Natal Robin *C. natalensis* (Farkas 1969). These species breed alongside each other and have similar diets (Oatley 1970a) but there is as yet no evidence of so-called competitive exclusion of either species by the other.

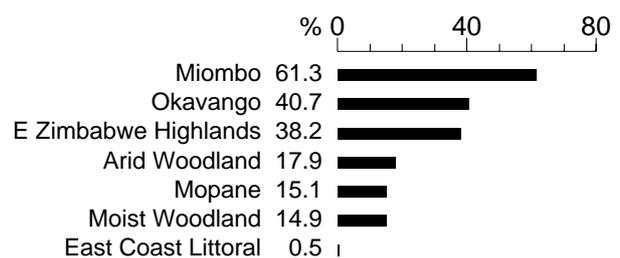
Historical distribution and conservation: It appears to be slowly extending its established range in the south. In the 1950s its southernmost limit was that portion of the Mkuze River east of the Lebombo range (the 'northern Zululand' of McLachlan & Liversidge 1957). By the 1970s it had reached the Hluhluwe River in the south and pushed west of the Lebombo range by way of the Pongolo and Mkuze rivers into the Louwsburg (2731CB) and Magut (2731DA) districts of KwaZulu-Natal (Cyrus & Robson 1980). Severe damage to riverine forests of northern KwaZulu-Natal by Cyclone Demoina in 1987 has probably halted or at least set back this expansionary phase.

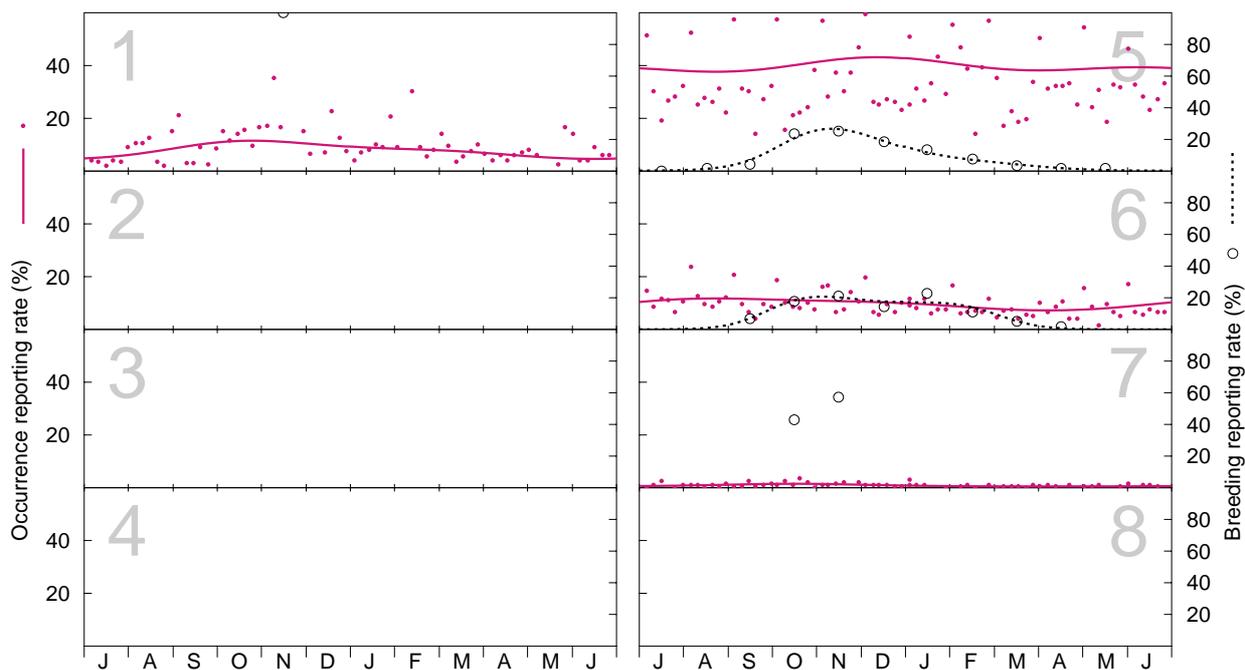
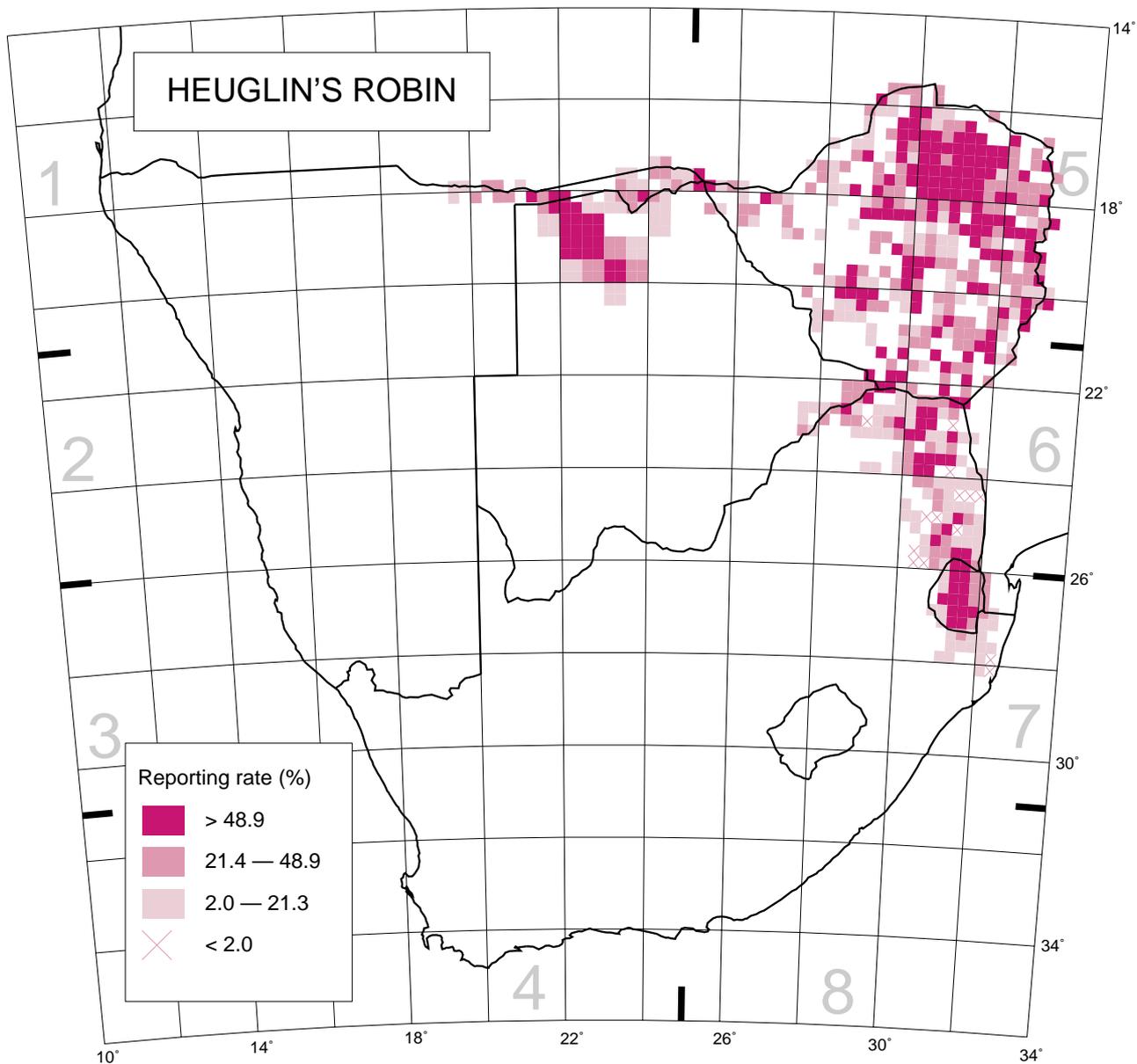
Heuglin's Robin is common throughout most of its widespread Afrotropical range and is not listed in the Red Data books of Brooke (1984b) and Collar *et al.* (1994).

T.B. Oatley

Recorded in 607 grid cells, 13.4%
Total number of records: 10 592
Mean reporting rate for range: 39.3%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 251, 0, 0, 0, 3465, 1102, 166, 0; Breeding: 1, 0, 0, 0, 169, 57, 7, 0.