

Bearded Robin

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Erythropgia quadrivirgata

The distribution of the Bearded Robin lies mainly in east and southeast Africa, extending from Somalia through Kenya, Tanzania and Mozambique to reach its southernmost limits at Lake St Lucia (2832AB) and the Umfolozi River (2832CB) in KwaZulu-Natal (Keith *et al.* 1992). It is found in Swaziland and eastern and northern Transvaal lowveld, and southeastern Zimbabwe. It extends along the Zambezi Valley to reach the Caprivi Strip and neighbouring sectors of Namibia, Angola and extreme northeastern Botswana along the Chobe River (e.g. Hunter 1989b, 1992; Herremans *et al.* 1993a). Three races have been recognized in southern African (Clancey 1962a, 1986d); scattered distribution makes it difficult to judge whether any breaks occur between their ranges. As shown by the low reporting rates, it is not a commonly observed species, but the atlas map nevertheless provides a good representation of its distribution. Contrary to Penry (1994), the present map does not show it in the Okavango, where all claims refer to the *E. l. ovamboensis* form of the Whitebrowed Robin *E. leucophrys*, some of which have the underside unstreaked with extensive orange (e.g. Randall 1987a; M. Herremans pers. comm.).

With its bold black-and-white facial markings, white-tipped feathers on the wing corner, and extensive white webs to the tail feathers, it is a distinctive bird. It may sometimes be confused with the closely related Brown Robin *E. signata*. It is primarily a ground forager and its plumage blends well with the leaf litter of the forest floor, so it is easily overlooked. A characteristic alarm call 'chek-chek-kwezzzzz' discloses its presence at dusk. It is one of Africa's finest songsters with a varied and versatile repertoire of phrases which can be heard at any time of the day during the breeding season.

Habitat: This is a bird of closed woodlands, of riverine forest and closed thickets on termite mounds in more open vegetation communities, and is a characteristic species of sand forest. It is one of two common riverine forest robins, the other being Heuglin's Robin *Cossypha heuglini*, at Victoria Falls (1725DD). From Zimbabwe northwards it can also be found in lowland evergreen forest, but is usually replaced in such habitat in South Africa and coastal Mozambique by the Brown Robin. The vegetation analysis indicates the broad vegetation categories in which it may be found, but within those categories it is generally confined to patches of preferred habitat, e.g. riverine forest.

Movements: It is sedentary. The January–March dips in the models probably result from denser vegetation during those wet months and the fact that the birds are less conspicuous and virtually silent during moult which takes place at that time of the year.

Breeding: Atlas records spanned September–December. This is in agreement with more comprehensive data summarized by Keith *et al.* (1992).

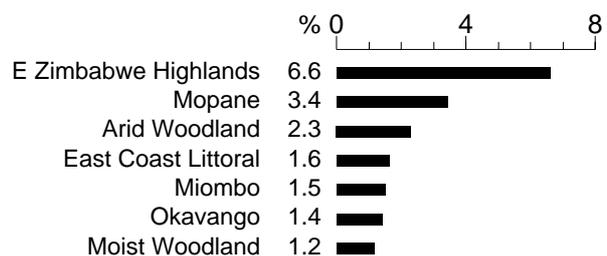
Interspecific relationships: A hybrid between this species and the Brown Robin was collected near Lake St Lucia in March 1959 (Keith *et al.* 1992). Bearded and Brown Robins do not coexist in many areas, though they do occur in adjacent habitats in some regions. Overlap occurs with Whitebrowed Robin *E. leucophrys* which frequents more open woodlands than Bearded Robins, but both species may be seen foraging together in sandy vehicle tracks after sunset in such areas of overlap (pers. obs).

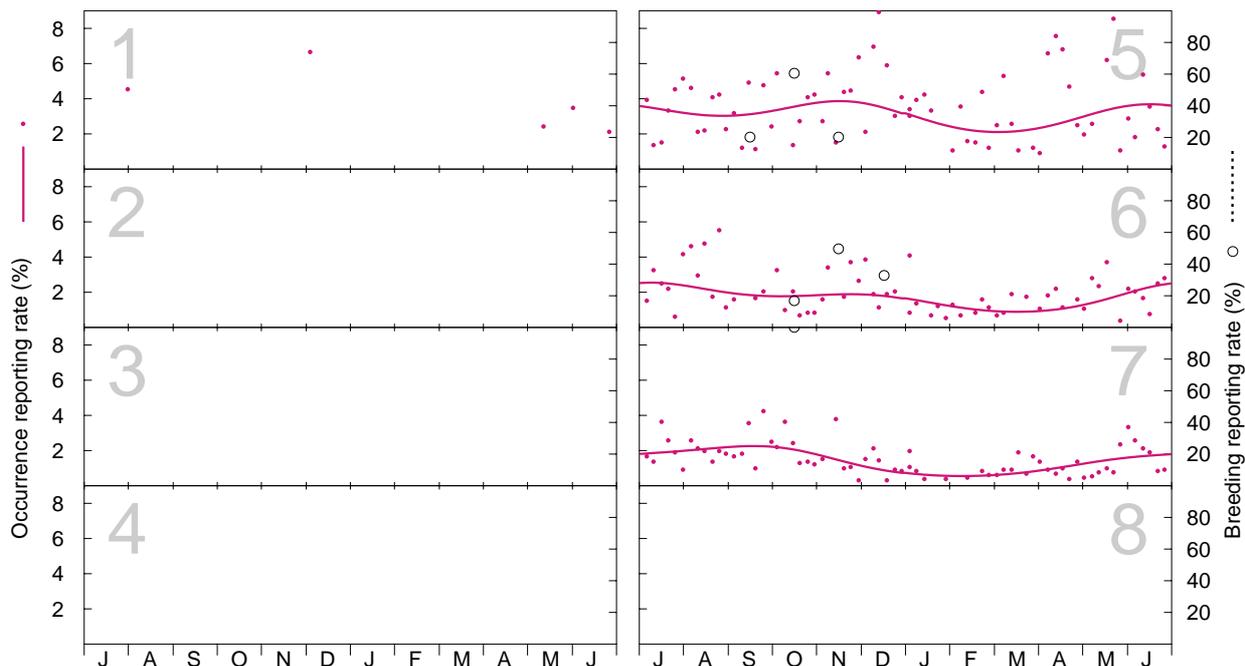
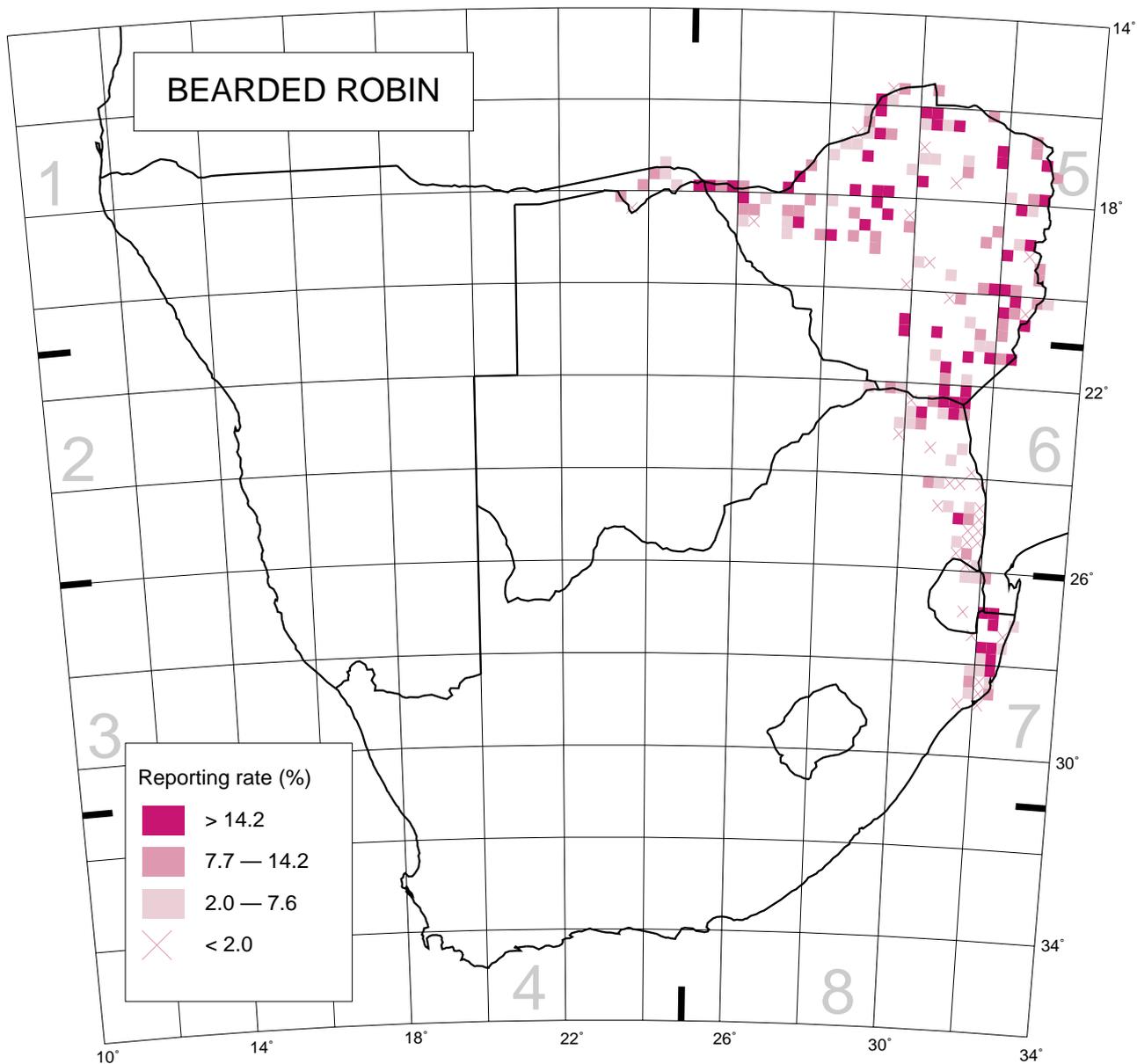
Historical distribution and conservation: Clearance of extensive tracts of woodland and sand forest in the Hluhluwe–False Bay area (2832AB) of KwaZulu-Natal in the mid-1950s robbed it of much habitat. By 1975, however, it was present in the Hluhluwe Game Reserve (2832AA) complex where it had not previously been recorded (pers. obs) and is now frequently recorded from the Richards Bay area (2832CC) (H. Chittenden pers. comm.), so southerly range expansion is evidently taking place. In view of its extensive Afrotropical distribution, the Bearded Robin is not considered to be a threatened species.

T.B. Oatley

Recorded in 196 grid cells, 4.3%
Total number of records: 1081
Mean reporting rate for range: 9.1%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 5, 0, 0, 0, 271, 192, 271, 0; Breeding: 0, 0, 0, 0, 5, 6, 3, 0.