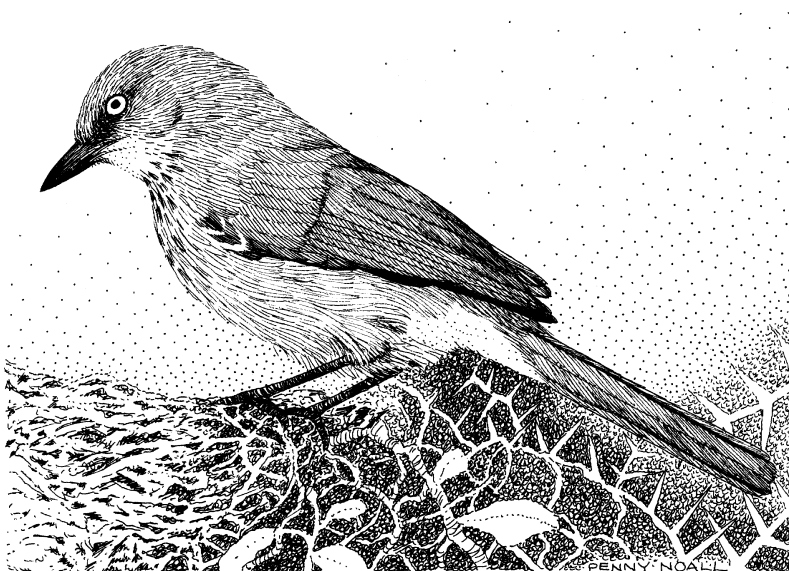




Layard's Titbabbler

Grystjeriktik

Parisoma layardi

Layard's Titbabbler is endemic to southern Africa. It is scarce to locally common, ranging from northern Namibia to the southwestern Cape Province, eastwards through the Karoo to Lesotho and the Free State, marginally entering KwaZulu-Natal in alpine habitat. It is patchily distributed in Namibia. Atlas records from the northern Cape Province north of the Orange River are an extension of the previously described range (e.g. Maclean 1993b). The three southern subspecies recognized by Clancey (1980b) appear to have continuous ranges on the present map, but the Lesotho highlands endemic, *P. l. barnesi*, is probably separated by altitude as it does not occur in the foothills (Bonde 1993). *P. l. aridicola* appears to have a scattered distribution throughout its range from the northern Cape Province into Namibia.

It occurs singly or in pairs. It is relatively inconspicuous, foraging within the lower stratum of scrub; its call usually indicates its presence. It is more vocal during the breeding season, when the male may sing from a conspicuous perch and make short display flights. It is easily identified when clearly seen. Confusion with the similar Titbabbler *P. subcaeruleum* is possible in areas of overlap because the diagnostic colour of the vent is not always conspicuous, and the two species have similar plumage, calls and behaviour. In general, the Titbabbler is the more common of the two, hence misidentifications are more likely to have been of Titbabbler for Layard's Titbabbler than the reverse, possibly resulting in a degree of under-reporting of the latter.

Habitat: It lives in scrub and bushes from the coastal fynbos of the western Cape Province, through semi-arid scrub in the Karoo to valley scrub in the alpine zone of the Drakensberg. It is often found in *Olea* scrub in the Free State (Earlé & Grobler 1987). Typically occurring in short scrub on rocky slopes, it also occurs in taller montane fynbos and in karroid vegetation away from mountains. It occurs at high altitudes on mountain slopes in the northeast, occurring above 2400 m at Sani Pass (2929C) (Little & Bainbridge 1992). It was most frequently recorded in the Grassy Karoo, Nama Karoo and Succulent Karoo.

Movements: The reporting rates show a winter increase in most regions, particularly in the western Cape Province as previously noted by Hockey *et al.* (1989). This is likely to result from seasonal changes in behaviour which enhance conspicuousness; it is more vocal and conspicuous as breeding approaches, and this is as early as July in the western Cape Province. This trend in reporting rates decreases to the east and north of the western Cape Province. There is no evidence of local movement.

Breeding: Atlas records were July–January in the winter-rainfall areas. Breeding was previously reported October–November (Maclean 1993b). It presumably breeds later to the north and east in summer-rainfall areas, but there were insufficient atlas records to show this. Breeding of the race *barnesi* in the Lesotho highlands is probably in summer, as indicated by the few available records in the atlas and the record provided by Bonde (1993).

Interspecific relationships: It is morphologically similar to the Titbabbler, and presumably

competes with it where they occur together in the coastal fynbos of the southwestern Cape Province (Hockey *et al.* 1989), and in the Free State, particularly the central region (Earlé & Grobler 1987). In karroid areas, it occupies different habitats; the Titbabbler occurs in fringing *Acacia* along watercourses whereas Layard's Titbabbler occurs in scrub on rocky slopes (pers. obs). In the western Cape Province it may compete with the Barthroated Apalis *Apalis thoracica* in taller scrub of the coastal lowlands.

Historical distribution and conservation: The distribution is not known to have differed from the present, but the loss to agriculture of coastal fynbos between Cape Town (3318CD) and Saldanha Bay (3317BB) must have had a negative impact. It was not considered to be threatened by Brooke (1984b) and most of its habitat is unsuitable for intensive agriculture. However, because it is endemic and relatively scarce, the distribution and abundance of Layard's Titbabbler should be monitored. It is vulnerable to any land-use which decreases scrub cover, e.g. frequent fires and overbrowsing.

A. Berruti

Recorded in 509 grid cells, 11.2%

Total number of records: 2087

Mean reporting rate for range: 10.3%

Reporting rates for vegetation types

