

Icterine Warbler

Spotvoël

Hippolais icterina

The Icterine Warbler is a Palearctic migrant occurring over most of the southern tropics in Africa (Curry-Lindahl 1981; Pearson & Lack 1992). In southern Africa it is a common summer visitor to a wide range of wooded habitats, both broadleaved and *Acacia*, but it is absent from the drier southwestern quarter. Relative strongholds are the more humid, taller woodlands in northern Namibia, northern and eastern Botswana, the northwestern Transvaal, but also in tall *Acacia* savannas in the western part of the central Kalahari.

It is less elusive than the *Sylvia* warblers, and sings for prolonged periods throughout the nonbreeding season. Nevertheless it was probably frequently overlooked or confused with the smaller Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*.

Habitat: It prefers taller stands of trees in dry woodlands where it forages from the mid-stratum to the canopy. Although it is found in both pure *Acacia* and pure broad-leaved vegetation, it is most common in mixed woodlands, particularly where there is also a well-developed shrub stratum (viz. much higher reporting rates in Okavango and Northern Kalahari biomes). Less tall or less mixed woodland (e.g. Mopane, Arid and Moist Woodlands, and Central Kalahari vegetation types) are of secondary importance. In drier, more shrubby bushveld (e.g. parts of the Arid Woodland biome), it is associated with taller riverine vegetation. It is marginal in Miombo, the Namibian Escarpment, the Southern Kalahari, and in the grassland biomes at higher altitude.

In transect-counts in northern and eastern Botswana during late summer 1992, it was found in nine of 16 wooded habitats, with peak densities of 1 bird/2 ha in broadleaved *Baikiaea* woodland and of 1 bird/ha in mixed Northern Kalahari bushveld (Herremans 1993c, 1994e).

Movements: It arrives slowly in the region (Herremans 1994d; see also Taylor 1979 for the pattern in Zambia): the first birds arrive by mid-October in the northern Zones 1 and 5, but arrival starts in late November in the southern

half of the region. November is also the period of peak arrival in the north. Early arriving birds seem to 'wait' in the more humid belt in the north and east for the rains to improve bush conditions in the drier parts, before they continue migration, probably joined by many birds that arrive in the region only when conditions have generally improved. Arrival and redistribution may continue till late December and, depending on local rainfall; this results in uneven distribution and numbers varying locally from year to year (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b).

Departure is quick and almost simultaneous over the whole region, with most birds leaving in the second part of March and early April. There have been no ring recoveries in southern Africa (Dowsett *et al.* 1988).

Interspecific relationships: Although Palearctic warblers are far outnumbered by resident Sylviidae warblers in southern Africa (Herremans 1993c), the Titbabbler *Parisoma subcaeruleum* and the Barred Warbler *Calamonastes fasciolatus* are probably the only species that come ecologically close and have similar distributions. There is broad overlap, but the Icterine Warbler is less restricted to *Acacia* and generally prefers somewhat taller woodland. The Yellow Warbler *Chloropeta natalensis* looks similar to the Icterine Warbler but prefers different habitat and behaves like an *Acrocephalus* warbler (Ginn *et al.* 1989; Maclean 1993b).

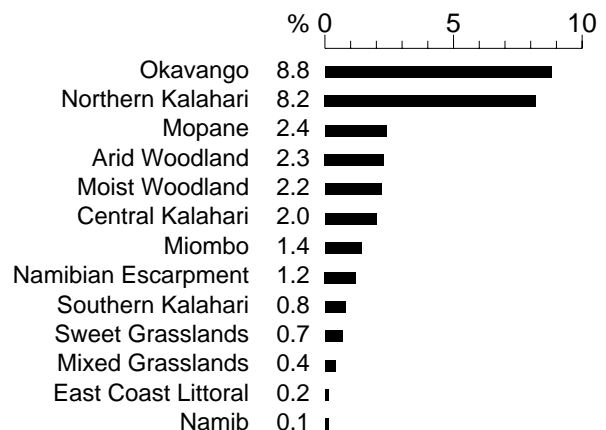
The Icterine Warbler has a regional distribution somewhat similar to the Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*, but it is much more common in the Kalahari thornbelt which the latter avoids. Whitethroat *Sylvia communis* and Icterine Warbler also overlap widely, but the former is rare in the west (Namibia). Both can be found commonly in the same habitat, e.g. northern Kalahari, *Baikiaea* and secondary riverine thickets (Herremans 1993c), but the Whitethroat is a skulking bird of dense scrub in the lower stratum, while the Icterine Warbler prefers the mid- and upper stratum.

Historical distribution and conservation: The historical distribution is not known to differ from the present map. The Icterine Warbler does not seem to be subject to any particular threat while in southern Africa.

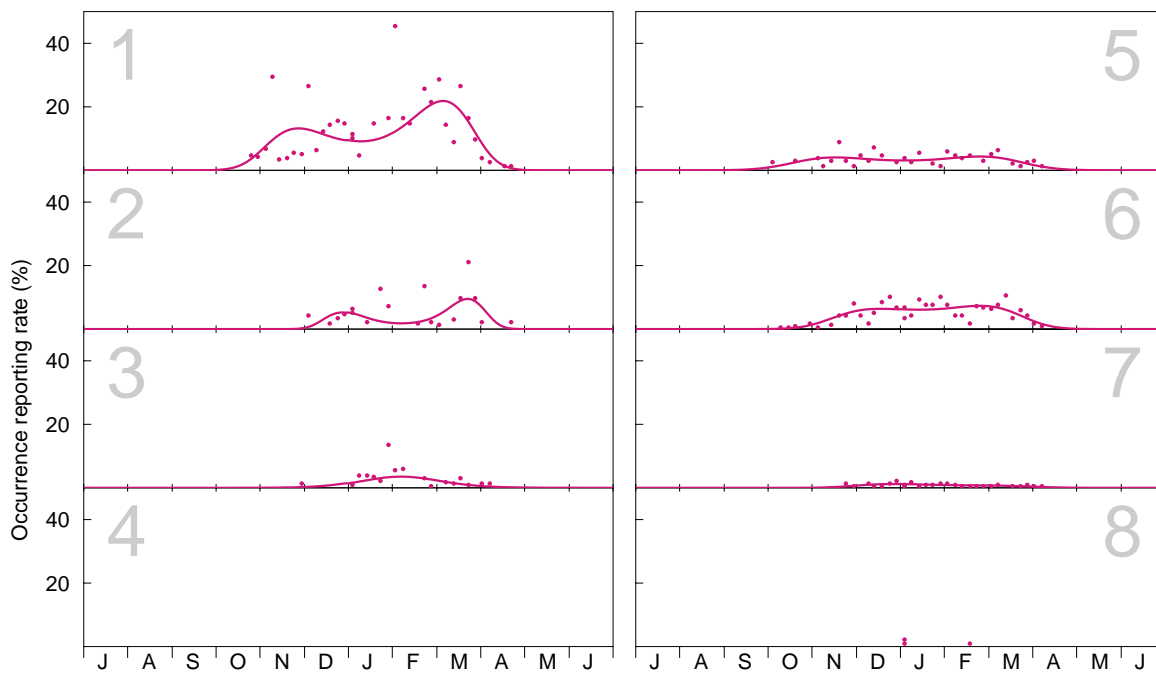
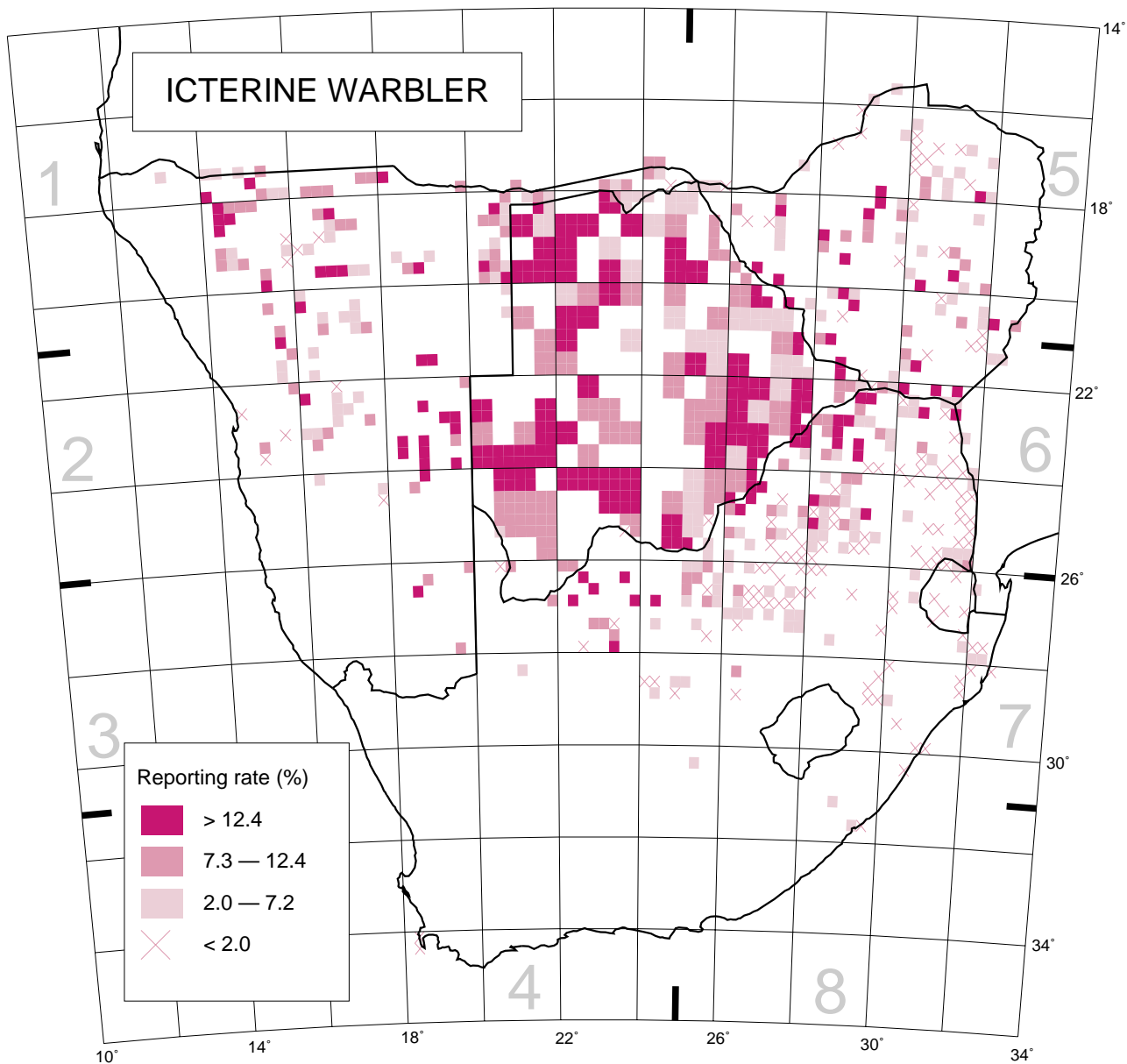
M. Herremans

Recorded in 935 grid cells, 20.6%
Total number of records: 1464
Mean reporting rate for range: 3.1%

Reporting rates for vegetation types



Also marginally in Valley Bushveld.



Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):

Occurrence: 164, 70, 30, 0, 147, 279, 66, 4.