

Olivetree Warbler

Olyfboomsanger

Hippolais olivetorum

This Palearctic migrant has a restricted breeding range in the eastern Mediterranean (Cramp *et al.* 1992) and the entire world population spends the nonbreeding season in the southern African thornbelt, most particularly in Botswana and the north-western Transvaal (Curry-Lindahl 1981; *contra* Tucker *et al.* 1994), but it also occurs in KwaZulu-Natal (Hockey *et al.* 1996), Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Zambia (Taylor 1979). Together with the Redbacked *Lanius collurio* and Lesser Grey *L. minor* Shrikes, the Olivetree Warbler is one of three Palearctic passerines that spend the nonbreeding season primarily in the southern African thornbelt (Pearson & Lack 1992). A regional status of 'nonbreeding endemic' may appear to be a contradiction in terms, but is appropriate.

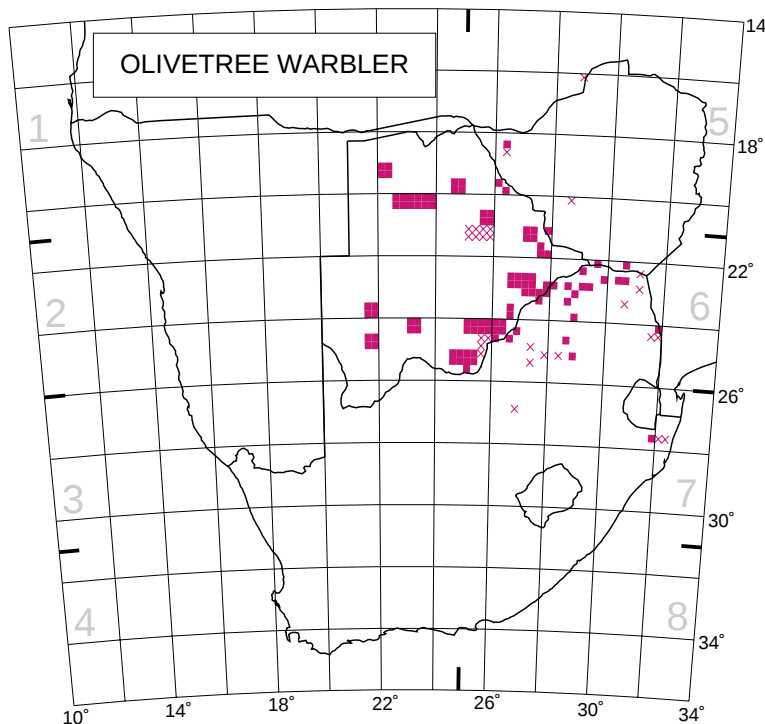
Except for its loud song, it is elusive in the nonbreeding season, and was probably widely overlooked. It may also have been mistaken for Icterine Warbler *H. icterina* when seen briefly and for Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* when only heard singing (Tree 1972a).

It has a strong preference for low and thick *Acacia* bush, particularly *A. tortilis* and *A. mellifera*, and the distribution is centred in the eastern and northern periphery of the Kalahari. The biome association with Mopane is an artefact of a mosaic with *Acacia*. In Botswana, agricultural practices and overgrazing promote coppicing of *Acacia* and *Dichrostachys*, and the great majority of records come from the south-east of this country (Abernethy & Herremans 1994) in areas with the highest human and livestock densities. The isolated records in the southcentral Kalahari (2321D, 2421D, 2423A), and the regular records near Lake Ngami and along the upper Boteti River (2022B, 2023A, 2023B), coincide with overstocked regions which have significant thornbush encroachment. The gap in the records from the Central Kalahari Game Reserve is probably genuine because the vegetation in this area is, in the absence of livestock, still more open and grassy Kalahari bushveld.

The earliest arrivals in the region are in the second half of November, but most arrive only in December (Taylor 1979; Herremans 1994d). Departure is in the second half of March.

It has restricted breeding and nonbreeding ranges (Cramp *et al.* 1992) and a small total population of c. 25 000 pairs (Tucker *et al.*). As a nonbreeding endemic to the southern African thornbelt, the Olivetree Warbler is a potentially vulnerable species, but its preference for degraded habitat indicates no conservation problems in this region.

M. Herremans



Recorded in 131 grid cells, 2.9%
Total number of records: 131
Mean reporting rate for range: 2.7%

Reporting rates for vegetation types

