

Karoo and Spotted Prinias

Karoo- en Gevlektelangstertjies

Prinia maculosa and *P. hypoxantha*

These two taxa were treated as conspecific during the atlas period but were taxonomically split in 1989 (Clancey 1989d). Both are endemic to southern Africa, and restricted largely to South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland, although the Karoo Prinia extends marginally into southern Namibia. The Karoo Prinia occurs from Lesotho westwards across the Cape Province, and the Spotted Prinia occupies the regions to the east and north, from the far eastern Cape Province, through KwaZulu-Natal and the eastern Free State, to western Swaziland and the eastern Transvaal. The montane race of the Karoo Prinia (*P. m. exultans*) occurs throughout Lesotho and the adjacent high Drakensberg mountains (Clancey 1982b). The adoption of the common name 'Drakensberg Prinia' for the Spotted Prinia by some authors (e.g. Sinclair *et al.* 1993; Newman 1996) is therefore unfortunate; indeed Sinclair *et al.* (1993) used the name Spotted Prinia for *maculosa*, while Maclean (1993b) (followed here) used the name Spotted Prinia for *hypoxantha*. The three recognized races of the Karoo Prinia (Clancey 1980b; Clancey *et al.* 1987) show continuous ranges on the present map and their ranges are also continuous with that of the single race of the Spotted Prinia. Clancey (1982b, 1989d) argued that the Karoo Prinia replaces the Spotted Prinia west of East London (3327BB), and that there is a sharp division between the distributions of the two forms with interbreeding apparent only in the Mount Currie area (3029AD). In the eastern Cape Province, the Spotted Prinia is confined to the coastal areas while the Karoo Prinia occurs at higher altitudes (Clancey 1982b, 1989d; Quickelberge 1989).

The Spotted Prinia occurs at much lower reporting rates compared with the Karoo Prinia (note especially the relatively high reporting rates for the Karoo Prinia in the Lesotho highlands compared with the Spotted Prinia in adjacent areas to the east). The Karoo Prinia is particularly abundant in the western Cape Province and adjacent regions, and was the eighth-most abundant species recorded in the bird atlas of the southwestern Cape Province (Hockey *et al.* 1989).

Both forms are vocally conspicuous and occur singly, in pairs or family groups in relatively open habitats, and are seldom overlooked. The Karoo Prinia may occasionally be mistaken for the Namaqua Warbler *Phragmacia substriata* which is far less strongly marked below, and both forms may be confused with the Blackchested Prinia *P. flavicans* in nonbreeding plumage. Juvenile Karoo Prinias generally are yellowish below with less distinct streaking, and thus may be difficult to separate from adult Spotted Prinias in the field.

Habitat: Both are birds of scrub and rank growth, particularly along drainage lines. The Karoo Prinia is associated with Karoo and fynbos shrublands in the west of its range, and a mixture of grassland and scrub in the Lesotho highlands. Indeed, Rutherford & Westfall (1986) considered the Lesotho highlands to be more akin to the Nama Karoo than to the grassland biome. The Spotted Prinia inhabits rank grass, bracken and scrub, also fallow lands and the edges of natural forest and alien plantations (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b) in fairly high-altitude and high-rainfall parts of the grassland biome. The Karoo Prinia therefore occurs across a wide rainfall range (i.e. <100 mm–>700 mm) and also in both mountainous and flat regions, compared with the Spotted Prinia which is restricted to high-rainfall (only >700mm) and hilly to mountainous areas. Nevertheless, the ecological differences between the two species appear relatively slight. In the southwestern Cape Prov-



ince, the Spotted Prinia has been described as occurring in all habitats except forest, but restricted to renosterveld patches in wheatlands, and as tolerant of alien plants (Hockey *et al.* 1989). In the vegetation analysis, the data from Fynbos and three Karoo regions (exclusively) and the Alpine Grasslands (mainly) refer to the Karoo Prinia, and that for the Sour Grasslands (mainly) to the Spotted Prinia. The information for Valley Bushveld and Mixed Grassland substantially combines data for both species.

Movements: Both forms are considered resident and the small increases in reporting rates in spring in Zones 4 and 8, where the Karoo Prinia is most abundant, are probably due to increased activity and vocalizations during the breeding season.

Breeding: The data from Zones 3 and 4 pertain solely to the Karoo Prinia and show a well-marked breeding season mainly August–December, peaking September–October. The data for Zones 7 and 8 combine breeding information from both forms and suggest a similarly well-defined breeding season which is, however, later in these summer-rainfall areas (peak November–January), especially in the northeast.

Interspecific relationships: Further research is required to confirm whether these two taxa are indeed separate species. The Karoo Prinia overlaps with the Namaqua Warbler which occupies *Phragmites* reedbeds and riverine *Acacia karroo* in the semi-arid interior of South Africa. Hybridization, or suspected hybridization, between the Karoo Prinia and the Blackchested Prinia, with which it overlaps in the northern Cape Province, has been reported twice (Rowan 1962b; Brooke 1993). The Karoo Prinia occupies shorter, scrubbiest vegetation than the Blackchested Prinia, and Clancey (1989d) suggested that the Karoo and Spotted Prinias are derived from the Blackchested Prinia. The Spotted Prinia overlaps broadly with the Tawnyflanked Prinia *P. subflava* (e.g. Tarboton *et al.* 1987b), which replaces it in lower and more humid areas, and also marginally with the Blackchested Prinia along the western edge of its range.

Historical distribution and conservation: The Karoo Prinia may have replaced the Spotted Prinia west of East London (Clancey 1982b, 1989d). Both forms adapt to alien vegetation and habitat modification, and use small patches of secondary vegetation. They are not threatened.

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Recorded in 1005 grid cells, 22.2%

Total number of records: 23 546

Mean reporting rate for range: 39.1%

Reporting rates for vegetation types



