



Namaqua Warbler

Namakwalangstertjie

Phragmacia substriata

The Namaqua Warbler is endemic to South Africa and Namibia. It is distributed mainly in the Cape Province, with scattered records from the western Free State. Other than for a short distance along the Fish River in southern Namibia, and longer distances along the Modder and Riet rivers in the east, the northern limits of the distribution are along the northern banks of the Orange River; it was not recorded on the Vaal River. It is one of the Karoo endemics, only sparsely recorded outside of the Succulent and Nama Karoo. There were high reporting rates along the Orange and other large rivers, and for the Great Karoo and eastern Karoo, but it was reported only sparsely in Bushmanland and the arid central Karoo. It is considered monotypic (Clancey 1980b), but the Orange River population appears isolated from the birds further south in the Karoo and may deserve closer taxonomic investigation.

It is seen singly or in pairs, sometimes in family parties. It is a distinctive species with an unmistakable call, but some confusion with the Karoo Prinia *Prinia maculosa* is

possible; the heavier chest-streaking and terminally spotted tail of the Karoo Prinia should prevent confusion. The Namaqua Warbler is brownish on its flanks and under the tail, the tail is plain brown, and the streaks on the white chest are narrow and subtle. The atlas data appear to be reliable and comprehensive.

Habitat: It occurs in the Karoo but is firmly associated with watercourses, from large rivers to small seasonal streams. A mixture of *Acacia karroo* thicket and reeds appears to provide an optimum habitat, with dense acacias being the essential component. It will also forage in other dense vegetation, such as clumps of kriedoring *Lycium* spp., African thistles *Berkheya* spp. and in overgrown gardens (Brooke & Dean 1990; Maclean 1993b). A watercourse may be quite dry and still provide suitable habitat, but prolonged absence of water would cause the habitat to degrade and become unsuitable. The paucity of records from the northern parts of the Karoo reflects the lack of wooded watercourses. This, in turn, is the result of a flat topography and low rainfall giving rise to endorheic drainage systems with many pans but few streams and rivers.

Movements: The models show a reduction in reporting rates in summer and midwinter, which is probably due to lowered detectability, while higher reporting occurs during the breeding season when vocalizations peak. It is resident and there is no evidence in the literature that it undertakes movements.

Breeding: Published data show the breeding season to be extended (Brooke & Dean 1990; Maclean 1993b). Atlas data indicate a spring–summer season.

Interspecific relationships: Its habitat is also frequented by the Titbabbler *Parisoma subcaeruleum* and the Karoo Prinia, and it may associate loosely with them in mixed species flocks (pers. obs). However, those species also occur in habitats where the Namaqua Warbler is never found.

Historical distribution and conservation: There is no evidence that there have been recent changes in the distribution (Brooke & Dean 1990). However, it may have become more abundant in certain areas, particularly along the Orange River, and it will be worth noting whether it is extending its range up the large rivers in the east. It is not considered to be threatened and it does not appear to be under any systematic threat. However, the construction of impoundments and the abstraction of water for irrigation are widespread practices which alter riverine habitats, probably sometimes to the advantage and sometimes to the disadvantage of the Namaqua Warbler.

W.R.J. Dean and J.A. Harrison

Recorded in 364 grid cells, 8.0%

Total number of records: 2489

Mean reporting rate for range: 23.7%

Reporting rates for vegetation types



