

Bluegrey Flycatcher

Blougrysvlieëvanger

Muscicapa caerulescens

At the southern limit of its range, in the eastern Cape Province, the Bluegrey Flycatcher is essentially coastal and this limit coincides with the boundary of subtropical climates. It gradually extends inland in northern KwaZulu-Natal, through Swaziland, eastern and northern Transvaal and along the Limpopo Valley, all predominantly in subtropical lowlands. In Zimbabwe, it is widespread but sparse, and may be found up to 1400 m (Irwin 1981). It is common again further west in the Okavango, but it was, rather remarkably, only poorly reported from riparian vegetation in adjacent drainages, such as along the Kwando, Linyanti and Chobe rivers. The apparently isolated records from the Kunene River in northwestern Namibia are the southern edge of a range that extends through Angola. Further north it extends to just north of the equator in East Africa, and to 10°N in West Africa (Hall & Moreau 1970).

Three subspecies are recognized in the atlas region (Clancey 1980b). There is a clear break between a population of *M. c. impavida*, which occupies strictly riparian vegetation along the upper Limpopo, and *vulturina*, which is more widespread to the southeast in the broadleaved woodlands of the eastern Transvaal. In northern KwaZulu-Natal, there appears also to be a break between *caerulescens* along the coast and inland *vulturina*, to the west of the Lebombo Mountains.

It is a locally common species, reasonably easy to find and identify. The atlas records adequately represent its status.

Habitat: Atlas reporting rates were highest in the Okavango, Eastern Zimbabwe Highlands and East Coast Littoral vegetation, but other woodland types are also used. Habitat preference varies regionally: in KwaZulu-Natal the race *caerulescens* occupies coastal forests, a feature also noted by Clancey (1964b) and by Cyrus & Robson (1980), while in the Transvaal, with reference to the race *vulturina*, Tarboton *et al.* (1987b) emphasized that it is *not* found in forest. Throughout its range it favours riverine strips and, in drier country, dense thickets. Skead (1967b) placed it in valley bushveld and thornveld in the eastern Cape Province. Alien vegetation is rarely used.

Movements: A small decrease in reporting rates occurred during and shortly after breeding. These changes probably

reflect changes in conspicuousness. Seasonal movements are not apparent in the Natal atlas (Cyrus & Robson 1980), but other authors consider that partial migrations occur on a local scale: Clancey (1964b) mentioned 'post-breeding movements in the cool months', without being more specific. Clancey (1971c) also suggested that *caerulescens* is largely a nonbreeding winter visitor to southern Mozambique from further south. On the Transvaal escarpment there is evidence for altitudinal migration, with birds moving downhill in winter (Hall 1983). There is similar evidence from KwaZulu-Natal (Berruti *et al.* 1994a). In Swaziland it may be only a winter visitor to the southern part of the lowveld and Lebombo Mountains, but resident elsewhere (Parker 1994).

Breeding: Breeding is during the wet season, with a peak September–November in Zimbabwe (Irwin 1981), and somewhat later (October–December) further south (Dean 1971; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). The atlas data confirm that breeding is later with increasing latitude. Breeding has been recorded September–December in the Okavango (Skinner 1995a).

Interspecific relationships: It has several close relatives which have similar niches, all with ranges overlapping to various extents. The Dusky Flycatcher *M. adusta* is probably the nearest ecologically, but it is more or less confined to evergreen vegetation, especially inland, where the Bluegrey Flycatcher occurs in other woodland types. The former also makes extensive use of alien vegetation. The Fantailed *Myioparus plumbeus* and Pallid *Melaenornis pallidus* Flycatchers are more typical of drier woodland, although in KwaZulu-Natal the former is considered typical of riverine forest (Cyrus & Robson 1980).

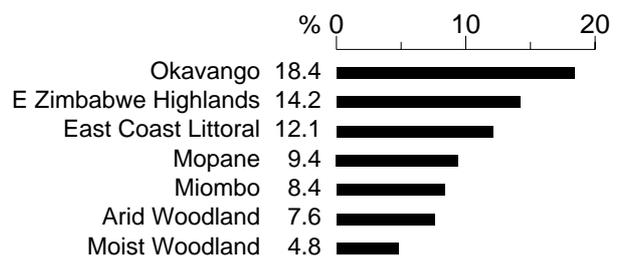
This species is a host of Klaas's Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx klaas* (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Maclean 1993b).

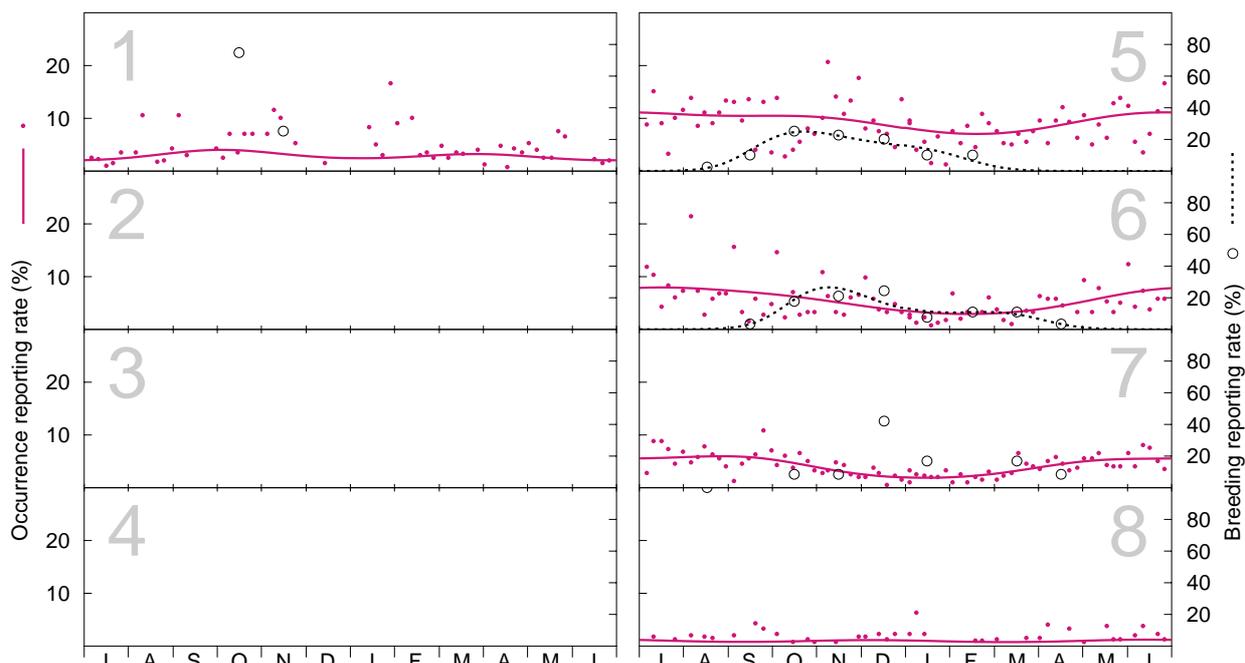
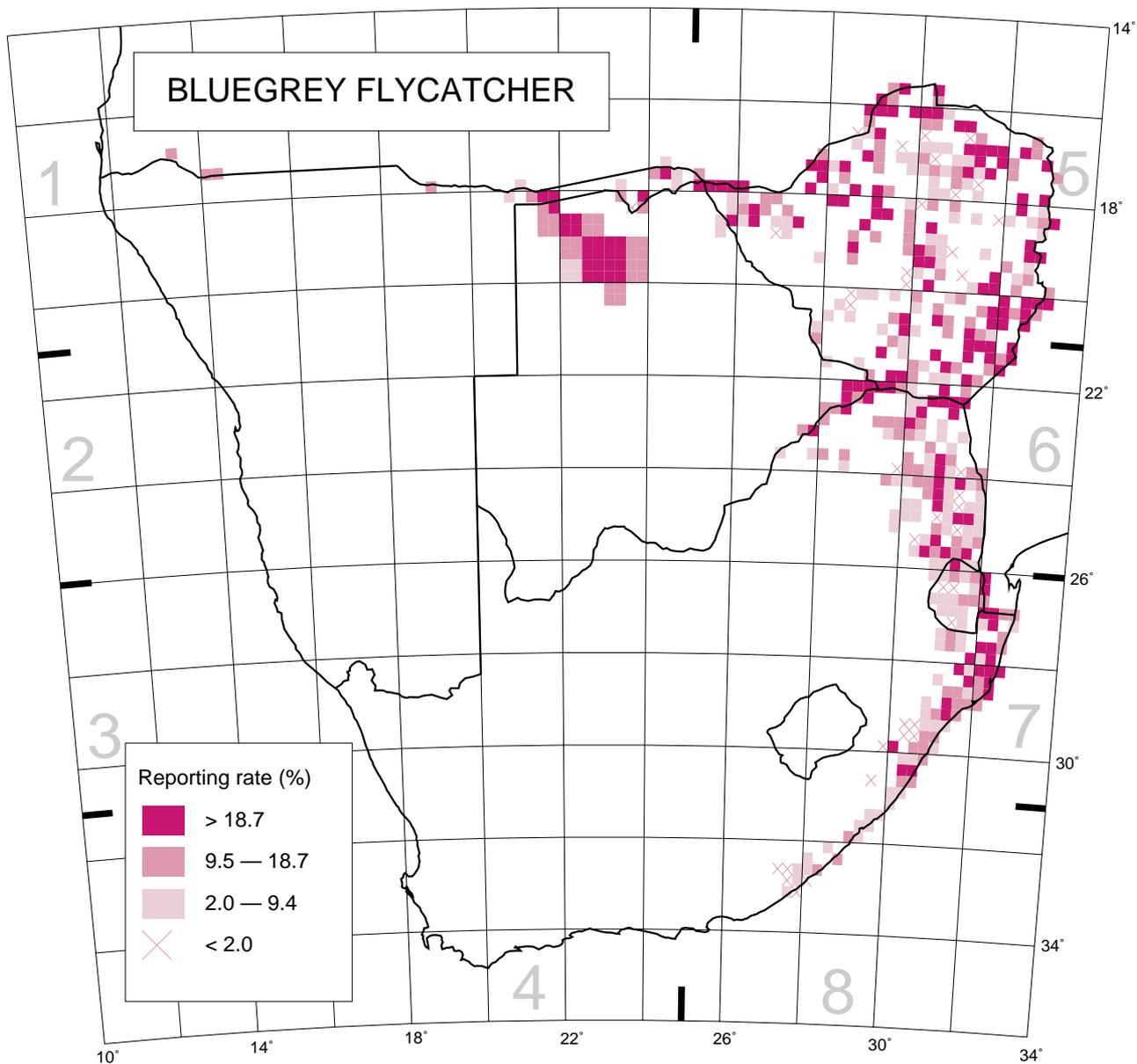
Historical distribution and conservation: The distribution has probably changed little. For example, it was recorded at two different extremities of its range in earlier works: at Kei Road (3227DA) (Skead 1956), and in the upper Limpopo Valley (Day 1987). The Bluegrey Flycatcher is under no particular threat.

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Recorded in 524 grid cells, 11.5%
Total number of records: 4784
Mean reporting rate for range: 13.4%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 97, 0, 0, 0, 831, 620, 811, 53; Breeding: 4, 0, 0, 0, 40, 28, 12, 1.