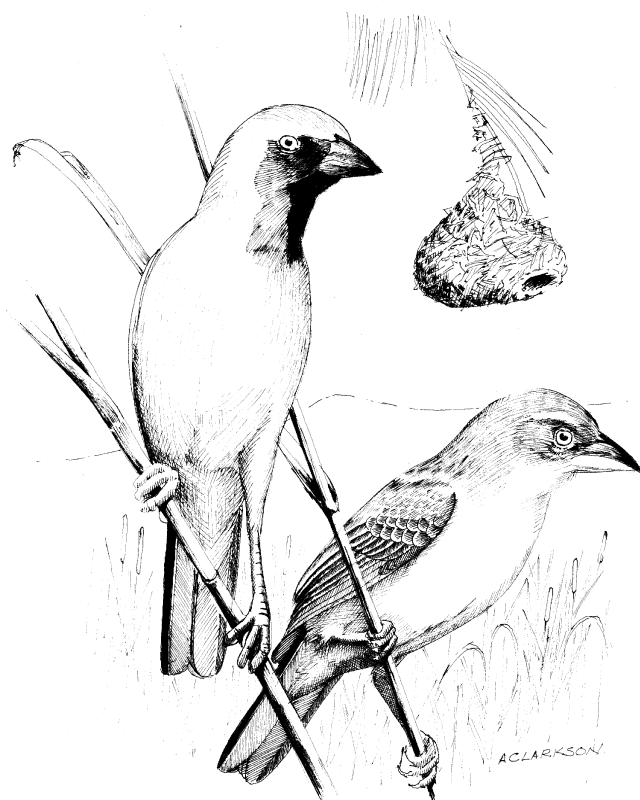




Brownthroated Weaver

Bruinkeelwewer

Ploceus xanthopterus

The Brownthroated Weaver occurs in permanent wetlands and has a restricted distribution. In southern Africa it occurs primarily in the Okavango basin and adjacent river systems in the Caprivi (Kwando, Linyanti, Chobe), and along the Zambezi River upstream from Victoria Falls (1725DD). Elsewhere in northern Zimbabwe it was recorded from tributaries to the Zambezi, along the Mazoe River (1632C) and Panhame River (1630BC) (Irwin 1978b). It is also present in the coastal belt of KwaZulu-Natal. In Mozambique, it is locally common along the coast and in the Zambezi River valley (Clancey 1971c). Outside of southern Africa, it is restricted to the Zambezi River and its tributaries in Zambia (Hall & Moreau 1970), and to the Shire Valley northwards along the lake shore in Malawi (Benson & Benson 1977). There are apparently no records from Angola, and although Hall & Moreau (1970) mapped a record from Tanzania, it has not been reported from there subsequently (Britton 1980).

The three isolated populations in the region represent three subspecies: *P. x. castaneigula* occupies the Okavango and Caprivi, *xanthopterus* just penetrates northern Zimbabwe along tributaries of the Zambezi, and *marleyi* is the form in coastal KwaZulu-Natal.

This weaver is likely to be unfamiliar to many observers in southern Africa and it can be confused with the brown-faced Cape Weaver *P. capensis*, the Yellow Weaver *P. subaureus*, and Golden Weaver *P. xanthops*, or even with other species. It is therefore likely to have been under-reported.

Habitat: It prefers permanent swamps and rivers with papyrus and reedbeds, where it nests and roosts, but it also forages in adjacent thickets, woodlands and grassland, especially in the nonbreeding season (Irwin 1978b; Hanmer 1984b).

Movements: Reporting rates are low, and the models show only the fluctuations typical of seasonally colonial weavers. It appears to be strictly resident; birds remained within 8 km of the breeding site throughout the year in Malawi (Hanmer 1984b).

Breeding: It breeds in colonies in papyrus, reeds or trees over deep water. During the atlas period, breeding activity was recorded August–March, with a peak November–January in the subspecies *marleyi* in KwaZulu-Natal (Zone 7), which agrees with Dean (1971). Breeding records of the two subspecies further north are scarce, but they appear to breed later, mainly from December onwards, though a November record exists for Zimbabwe (Irwin 1981) and an active colony was found in the Okavango in October (Skinner 1995a).

Interspecific relationships: Associations with other species have not been published, and it occurs primarily in monospecific flocks during breeding, but mixes with several other *Ploceus* species when foraging in riparian vegetation during the dry season (M.H. pers. obs).

The breeding range overlaps with seven other *Ploceus* species in the region. Only the similar-sized Yellow Weaver also prefers permanent wetland and they overlap in KwaZulu-Natal, but the Brownthroated Weaver is less common here than elsewhere in its range. There is no evidence from the distributions for complementarity or competitive exclusion with any of the other *Ploceus* species.

Historical distribution and conservation: Tarboton *et al.* (1987b) admitted a single breeding record from the Transvaal, but the species was not recorded there during the atlas period. At the periphery of the Okavango in Botswana, it was recorded at Lake Ngami (2022B) during the 19th century, and along the Boteti River as far downstream as Makalamabedi (2023B) (Smithers 1964; Penry 1994). It disappeared along with the water from Lake Ngami well before the atlas period, and from the Boteti River when all swamp vegetation was destroyed by overgrazing during the 1994–95 drought (M.H. pers. obs). The main strongholds are the Okavango and the Zambezi River system, where it seems secure at present. However, it has a very limited total distribution and is vulnerable to loss of habitat in these areas, e.g. to grazing and burning of tall swamp vegetation; this is becoming alarmingly frequent and extensive in the Okavango Delta.

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Recorded in 99 grid cells, 2.2%
Total number of records: 618
Mean reporting rate for range: 7.8%

Reporting rates for vegetation types

