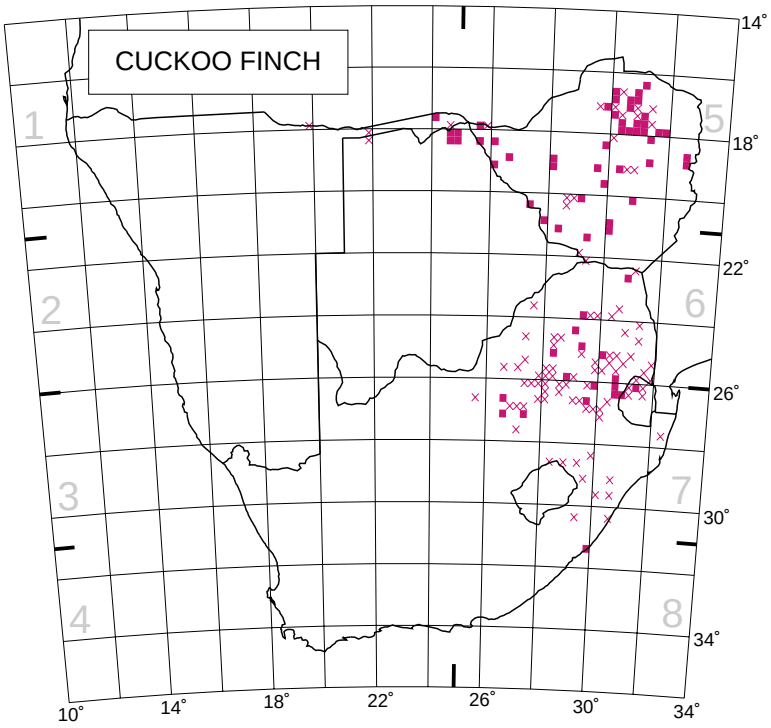
Cuckoo Finch

Koekoekvink

Anomalospiza imberbis



The Cuckoo Finch is found widely in suitable habitat south of the Sahara, but in southern Africa it is restricted mainly to Zimbabwe and the Transvaal, spreading marginally into the Caprivi Strip, northern Botswana, the Free State, Swaziland and KwaZulu-Natal. The species was only recently confirmed from northern Botswana, but may be more widespread in this area, where prime habitat is plentiful, than is suggested by the three present records (Herremans *et al.* 1993c). The low reporting rates indicate that it is not common. The only area in which it is known to be numerous is the vicinity of Harare (1731CC) where vleis and dams apparently constitute a stronghold in the region.

It favours open grassland and extensive, heavily vegetated vleis, although it does occur in lightly wooded savanna (Vernon 1964; Irwin 1981).

Benson *et al.* (1971) and Irwin (1981) suggested that it is subject to considerable seasonal movement and this appears to be supported by atlas data. In Zimbabwe it is found throughout the year; the model for Zone 5 shows highest reporting rates during the rains and lowest reporting rates during the winter months. This should be viewed with caution because birds tend to aggregate into large dry-season flocks of up to 1000 birds, thus reducing the number of encounters and reporting rates.

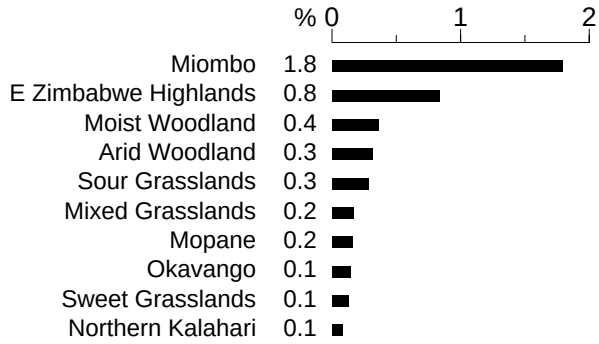
Ringing studies at a winter roost site in Harare indicated continuous turnover of individuals (J. & D. Dalziel pers. comm.). In South Africa the population is small. In the Transvaal it is considered migratory, occurring mainly September–May (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b); records in KwaZulu-Natal occurred November–March (Cyrus & Robson 1980). These observations are supported by the atlas data; records for KwaZulu-Natal (Zone 7) occurred mainly November–May, and mainly October–May in the Transvaal (Zone 6).

It is parasitic on small *Cisticola* and *Prinia* species, predominantly those that prefer grassveld; it breeds September–April, but rarely before December (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Skinner 1995a). There is unlikely to have been much change from the historical distribution, but this is difficult to assess because overall numbers and distribution must fluctuate considerably between periods of good rainfall and drought.

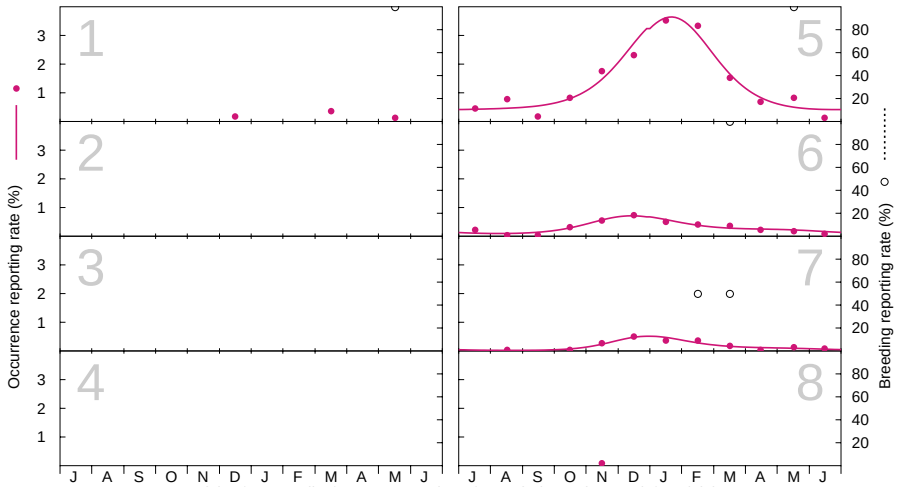
A.J. Tree

Recorded in 160 grid cells, 3.5%
Total number of records: 314
Mean reporting rate for range: 1.3%

Reporting rates for vegetation types



Also marginally in East Coast Littoral.



Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
Occurrence: 5, 0, 0, 0, 153, 76, 75, 1; Breeding: 1, 0, 0, 0, 1, 1, 2, 0.