

Redheaded Quelea

Rooikopkwelea

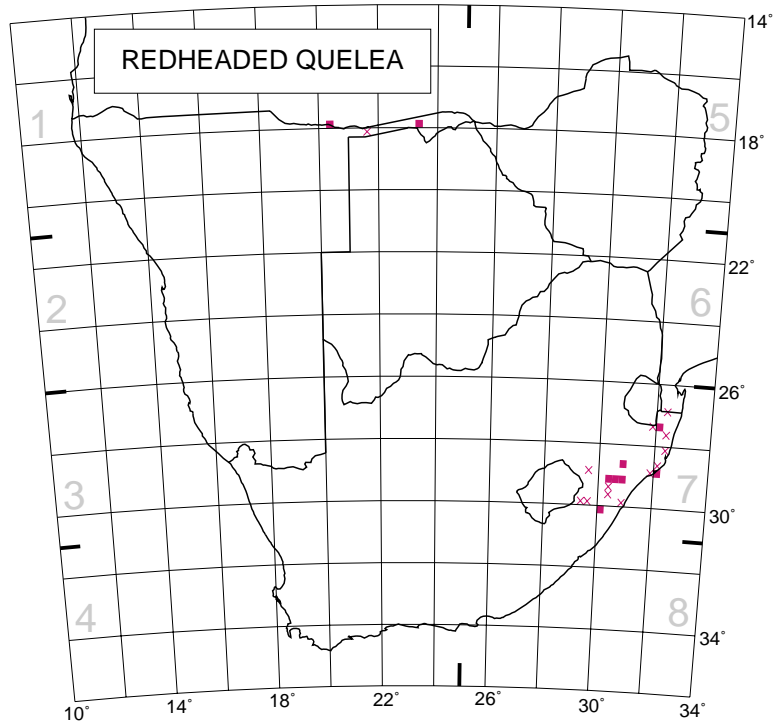
Quelea erythrops

The Redheaded Quelea is localized and uncommon in southern Africa. It occurs in the warmer parts of KwaZulu-Natal, but is also known from a few localities in the Caprivi Strip. There were no atlas records from Botswana where it was previously recorded near Mpandamatenga (1825A) (Skinner 1986a), and subsequently at Sedudu Island in the Chobe River (1725C) and along the Kwando River (1823B) (Randall 1993a, 1996a). It is not known from the Okavango Delta where suitable habitat seems to exist. Elsewhere it is widespread in equatorial Africa, the range extending continuously to southern Africa along the east coast.

It inhabits reedbeds and other rank waterside vegetation, rarely moving far from water. Breeding males are easily recognized but are absent for most of the year; females and young closely resemble female bishops and could easily be overlooked.

It is a summer migrant, arriving in October and departing in March. This appears to be the pattern throughout Africa south of the equator (Cyrus 1986b), but a few birds overwinter in KwaZulu-Natal (pers. obs). Breeding is colonial, the males arriving first. Females appear in late November and stay for the rest of the season. The males disappear early in January (pers. obs).

Formerly it penetrated further south and west, in 1953 to Kei Road (3227DA) (Skead 1956), but there have been no records from the interior of South Africa. Occurrences were apparently irregular, being noted in only 25 out of the 80 years prior to 1985 (Cyrus 1986b). During the Natal atlas project, 1970–80, there were only six records (Cyrus & Robson 1980), probably all representing breeding episodes because males in breeding plumage were present. Nesting was described twice in southern Africa: Clancey (1964b) referred to breeding near Durban (2931CC) in 1955 and McLean & Taylor (1986) gave an account of a breeding colony at St Lucia (2832AB). More recently, breeding has occurred every year since 1983 in



Recorded in 22 grid cells, 0.5%
 Total number of records: 57
 Mean reporting rate for range: 1.2%

Pietermaritzburg (2930CB), and ringing returns show that birds from the same population return each year. Breeding is regular at Ixopo (3030AA) (J.S. Morford pers. comm.) and is suspected at Umvoti Vlei (2930BA) and in Ndumu Game Reserve (2632CD). Thus it appears that the Redheaded Quelea may have expanded its breeding range in southern Africa.

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