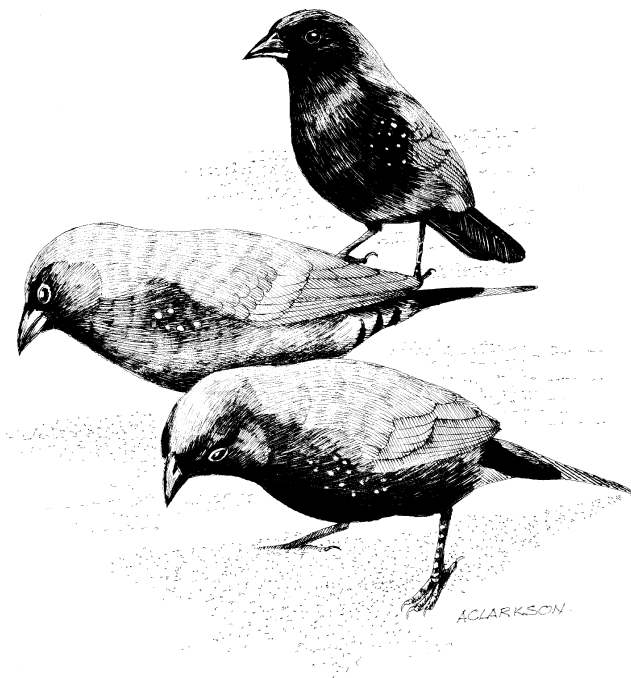




Jameson's Firefinch

Jamesonse Vuurvinkie

Lagonosticta rhodopareia

This Afrotropical species occurs in southern Africa in the moister broadleaved savannas in the north and east. Jameson's Firefinch is widespread in the Transvaal, Zimbabwe and the Okavango basin. It occurs in lowland Swaziland and sparsely in northern KwaZulu-Natal, parts of the Limpopo River catchment in the hardveld of eastern Botswana, and along the Kunene River in northwestern Namibia. Birds in northwestern Namibia are of the subspecies *L. r. ansorgei*, which continues further north into Angola; the two other races in the region (Clancey 1980b) appear to have continuous ranges at the scale of the present map.

It is frequently confused with the Bluebilled Firefinch *L. rubricata*. With experience, the two species may be distinguished by call, and Jameson's Firefinch favours drier woodland habitats (Irwin 1981; Wilson 1984).

Habitat: The vegetation types with highest reporting rates indicate that it prefers broadleaved woodlands where it occupies open grassy areas with thickets (Clement *et al.* 1993). It is often associated with watercourses (Davidson 1986; Day 1987), particularly in more arid savannas (Irwin 1981; Herremans *et al.* 1995a), and this is clearly reflected in the distribution. Although frequently recorded from riparian fringing vegetation in the Okavango (Randall 1989a), it is also common in thornveld (Wilson 1984).

Movements: Information is contradictory on the mobility of this species. It is generally considered resident throughout its range (Maclean 1993b) and some ringing studies indicate this (Manson 1986; SAFRING). It has been reported as nomadic in some eastern areas (MacDonald & Birkenstock 1980), and late-summer, autumn and winter influxes were noted over a three-year period (1991–93) in southeastern Botswana (Herremans *et al.* 1995a). In the latter study at the edge of its range, fluctuations were influenced by previous rainfall and the resulting state of the vegetation, specifically the availability of suitable cover

and sufficient grass seed as food. It was widely distributed after a wet year, but when rains failed it became scarce and concentrated around available water where suitable habitat existed. Such concentrations are conspicuous, and could contribute to the higher reporting rates shown during the dry season in Zone 6. Birds would, however, also be more conspicuous following recruitment after late-summer breeding; this would also be true of birds during winter in deciduous woodland. Overall, seasonal movements are probably localized or erratic, and not on a scale to affect the present models.

Breeding: Breeding activity was recorded September–June, with a peak February–April. Firefinches use dry grass blades and inflorescences for nest construction (Maclean 1993b), and are thus not constrained by the availability of green nesting material. Availability of insect prey to feed young (Goodwin 1982) is probably more important in determining the timing of breeding. Egg-laying has been recorded throughout the year in Zimbabwe with a peak in late summer (Irwin 1981), but only December–April in the Transvaal (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b).

Interspecific relationships: It is widely sympatric with the Bluebilled Firefinch but is usually ecologically separated, the latter species preferring moister habitats. It also overlaps with the Redbilled Firefinch *L. senegala* and, though it occurs regularly alongside that species, there are small differences in habitat preference, the former choosing moister and denser thickets. At a particular locality, however, it is not unusual that both replace each other chronologically, during wet and dry cycles respectively (M. Herremans pers. comm.). Jameson's Firefinch may feed on fallen seeds in mixed flocks with other small granivorous birds (Clancey 1964b).

It is the exclusive host of the Purple Widowfinch *Vidua purpurascens* (Maclean 1993b).

Historical distribution and conservation: Atlas data do not differ noticeably from previous distribution patterns (Hall & Moreau 1970). Because of dramatic fluctuations in local populations (Herremans *et al.* 1995a), and the potential threat from the cage-bird trade, the population dynamics of Jameson's Firefinch deserve monitoring.

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Recorded in 830 grid cells, 18.3%
Total number of records: 6816
Mean reporting rate for range: 15.5%

Reporting rates for vegetation types

