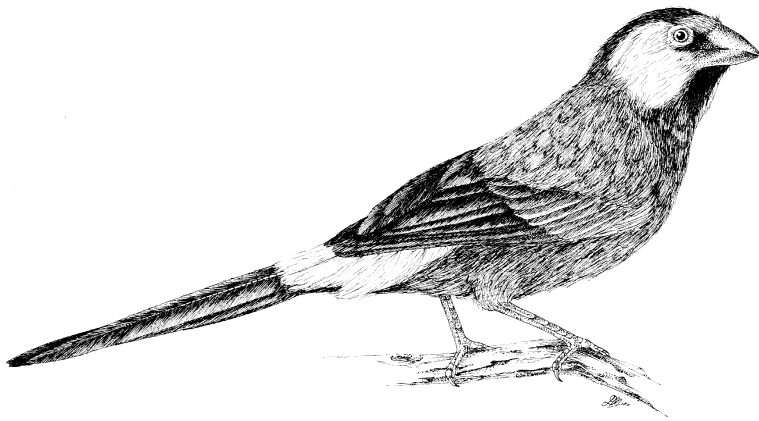




Violeteared Waxbill

Koningblousysie

Uraeginthus granatinus

The Violeteared Waxbill is one of the more arid-tolerant African estrildids, with a near-endemic southern African distribution strongly linked to that of the southern African thornbelt and deep Kalahari sands. Centred on Botswana, its range extends westwards to the Namibian escarpment and Atlantic Ocean coast via the west-flowing Namib rivers, southwards into the Transvaal, northern Cape Province and Free State, eastwards into Zimbabwe towards the highlands, and beyond the atlas region into southern Angola, Zambia and Mozambique. The two subspecies recognized by Clancey (1980b) in the region show entirely continuous ranges on the present map.

Skead (1975b) showed that it was resident in very low densities (1 pair/49 ha) in *Acacia-Dichrostachys* thorn savanna in the central Transvaal, and Tarboton *et al.* (1987b) estimated densities at Nylsvley (2428CB) of 1 pair/17 ha in thornveld and 1 pair/50 ha in broadleaved woodland. These estimates are from the periphery of the range, and densities in the Kalahari in Botswana are higher, at just over 1 bird/ha in 210 ha in three Kalahari woodlands in the core of the range. However, on the periphery of the Kalahari in Botswana where the Violeteared Waxbill overlapped with the Blue Waxbill *U. angolensis*, an average density of only 1 bird/13 ha in 350 ha was found in five arid woodland types (M.H. unpubl. data).

It is shy, but because of its extraordinary plumage, particularly in males, it is unlikely to be mistaken for any other species, although confusion could arise with Black-cheeked Waxbills *Estrilda erythronotos* in poor light. The atlas data are therefore reliable.

Habitat: It prefers shrubland (e.g. *Acacia*, *Grewia* and *Catophractes* thickets) in open Kalahari and *Acacia* woodland, but extends into open broadleaved woodland with thickets (e.g. Mopane scrub), particularly on deep Kalahari sands (e.g. *Baikiaea* woodlands with *Bauhinia* and *Baphia* scrub). It also occurs in mosaics of agricultural and secondary thorn savanna, especially where thickets exist alongside preferred grasses such as *Panicum*, *Aristida* and *Eragrostis*, or the herbaceous *Portulaca* spp. (Skead 1975b; P.B. unpubl. data). Although it drinks when water is available, the distribution suggests that it is independent of surface water, contrary to most other estrildids (Skead 1975b). It has its strongholds in the arid Kalahari on deep sandy soils with poor water retention.

Movements: It is resident in most areas where it breeds (e.g. Skead 1975b), although it may possibly make small-scale nomadic movements from more arid areas in dry years (e.g. Tree 1972c). It is unclear whether the higher and more variable reporting rates for the western Zones during the late summer, autumn and winter reflect increased conspicuousness due to breeding activity or nomadic movements. Although good population data are not available from the arid west, it seems probable that western birds are more likely to be seasonal nomads than eastern ones.

Breeding: The atlas provided relatively few breeding records, as this species is sparsely distributed in areas where observers are concentrated, and nests are difficult to find (Skead 1975b). Egg-laying has been recorded in all months of the year (except September), but peaks December–May (Irwin

1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Skinner 1995a; Brown & Clinning in press), when grasses suitable for nestbuilding and in the nutritious ‘milk-seed’ stage are available a few months after the main rains (Skead 1975b; P.B. unpubl. data; D.G. Noble unpubl. data).

Interspecific relationships: In the peripheral areas of the Kalahari basin where permanent water is available, it overlaps widely with its closest relative in the region, the Blue Waxbill, but the Violeteared Waxbill is less common in the area of overlap. It is the only proven host of the Shafttailed Whydah *Vidua regia* (Maclean 1993b), and their distributions coincide.

Historical distribution and conservation: It has long been recognized as linked to the Kalahari and southern African thornbelt (Stark 1900; Roberts 1940), and the present map is a refinement of, but not dramatically different to, previously indicated ranges. The Violeteared Waxbill is widespread and common in the Kalahari basin and it is not threatened. As with other colourful estrildids, and probably more so with this beautiful species, populations may be locally depressed by trapping for the cage-bird trade. They tend to fare badly in captivity (Goodwin 1982).

P. Barnard and M. Herremans

Recorded in 1770 grid cells, 39.0%

Total number of records: 8524

Mean reporting rate for range: 18.6%

Reporting rates for vegetation types

