



Cutthroat Finch

Bandkeelfink

Amadina fasciata

Mainly a bird of northeastern southern Africa, the Cutthroat Finch is widely but sparsely distributed in Zimbabwe and occurs throughout the northern Transvaal, extending as far south as 26°S, the southern limit of the bushveld. It is found throughout the hardveld of eastern Botswana, with scattered records from the northern half of the country (e.g. Randall 1994c) and the Caprivi Strip of Namibia, which link up with some scattered records in northern Namibia. To the north of the atlas region it is widespread in the drier savannas and woodlands of Africa south of the Sahara (Hall & Moreau 1970).

This inconspicuous species is mainly a ground-feeder and usually occurs in pairs or small parties (Maclean 1993b). It is often uncommon, and is erratic in its occurrence (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b); it is therefore probably regularly overlooked, and is likely to have been under-reported. It could be more widespread in Botswana and northern Namibia than shown, though it is unlikely to occur when surface water is not available. Gaps in its range in Zimbabwe, especially in the drier lowland areas, correspond with areas less well covered. It may occasionally have been confused with the Redheaded Finch *A. erythrocephala*, but outlying records on the Swaziland/KwaZulu-Natal border (2731BD) (not shown), and in Namibia, have been formally accepted.

Habitat: From the vegetation analysis, the drier broad-leaved woodland and savanna vegetation types in the subregion are its main habitat, with the thornveld of the Central and Southern Kalahari apparently largely avoided. Its indicated presence in Northern Kalahari is probably due to broadleaved patches in this biome and because of overlap with Moist Woodland and the Okavango.

Movements: It is generally reported to be nomadic and erratic in southern Africa (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Maclean 1993b); the seasonal patterns in the models for Zones 5 and 6 are likely to be related to variations in conspicuousness. Parallel increases in reporting rate are seen in Zones 5 and 6 during breeding, and may be associated with an increase in the total population or with breeding birds becoming more conspicuous when visiting old weaver or sparrow nests in towns and close to homesteads at that time. Four recoveries from adult birds ringed in Bulawayo (2028BA) show recovery distances ranging from 30 to 285 km (Irwin 1981).

Breeding: Breeding was reported throughout the year in Zones 5 and 6, with a clear late-summer peak in Zone 6, and a less clear late-summer to early-winter one in Zone 5. A late-summer peak was previously reported for Zimbabwe (Irwin 1981), but the data presented by Tarboton *et al.* (1987b) and Skinner (1995a) suggested a somewhat earlier peak in the Transvaal and Botswana. Breeding was not recorded in Namibia. Because it occupies disused weaver and sparrow (Ploceidae) nests throughout the year for roosting, as well as for breeding (Maclean 1993b), and because these nests are not usually accessible for close inspection, there may be a degree of inaccuracy in the breeding data.

Interspecific relationships: Most of its range in Botswana and South Africa, and partly in Zimbabwe, overlaps that of the closely related Redheaded Finch which, however, prefers more open, drier areas (Goodwin 1982; Maclean 1993b). They occur locally in mixed flocks and it seems likely that they would compete, both for food and for nest sites.

Historical distribution and conservation: Stark (1900) did not mention this species, while Roberts (1940) suggested that 'its appearance in [Zimbabwe] and later in the Transvaal seems to be comparatively recent'. It is more likely that this inconspicuous and generally sparsely distributed species was initially overlooked.

While not generally common in southern Africa, its preference for drier woodland and savanna probably means that most of its habitat is relatively safe from excessive exploitation through agriculture. The Cutthroat Finch is in high demand for the cage-bird trade and the legal quota in Botswana for capturing wild birds should be closely monitored.

B.D. Colahan

Recorded in 609 grid cells, 13.4%
Total number of records: 3309
Mean reporting rate for range: 13.6%

Reporting rates for vegetation types



