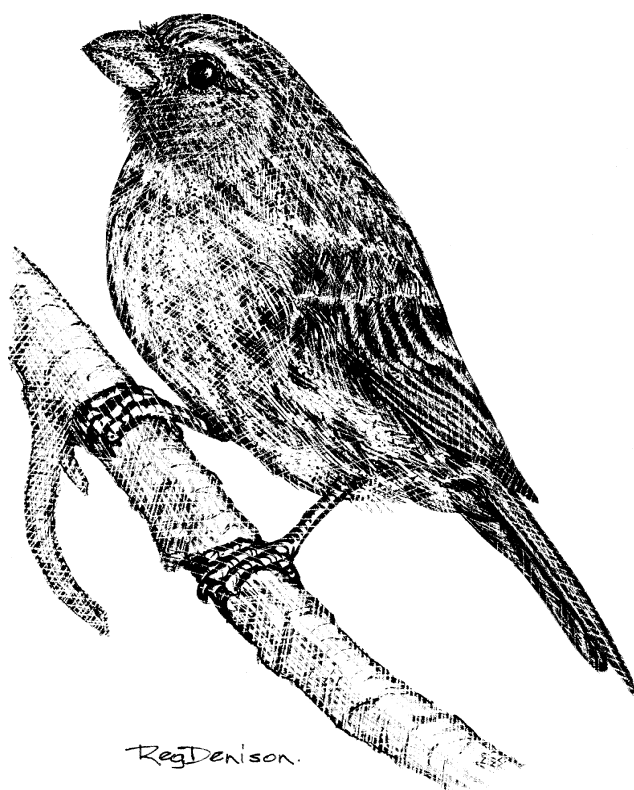




Forest Canary

Gestreepte Kanarie

Serinus scotops

This small canary is virtually endemic to South Africa, marginally extending into Swaziland (Parker 1994) and Lesotho. It is found in evergreen forests from the Soutpansberg (c. 23°S) southwards along the Drakensberg escarpment and westwards along the southern coast to the southwestern Cape Province. Although restricted to south of the Limpopo River, it is one of a complex of closely related species, including the African Citril *S. citrinelloides*, which are widespread in Central and East Africa (Hall & Moreau 1970).

Three subspecies are recognized in southern Africa: *S. s. umbrosus* from the southern and eastern Cape Province appears continuous with the nominate race in the Transkei and lowland KwaZulu-Natal, while *transvaalensis* occupies mountain forests along the escarpment (Clancey 1980b; Clancey *et al.* 1987).

Because of its preferred habitat, distinctive calls and general coloration, it is easily identified. However, the distinctive dark streaking on its underparts can lead unwary observers to mistake it for juveniles of the Cape *S. canicollis* or Yelloweyed *S. mozambicus* Canaries which look similar. It is normally encountered in pairs or in small groups numbering up to 12 birds. Like most seedeaters, it drinks regularly and is also fond of bathing, so it is a regular visitor to bathing sites on forest streams.

Habitat: Afromontane evergreen forest and its edges is the preferred habitat. In the eastern Cape Province it is com-

mon in the dry, *Euphorbia*-dominated communities on the upper south-facing slopes of the river valleys, termed 'Valley Bush Forest' by Skead (1967b). It readily ventures into open habitats such as gardens and orchards, scrub habitats, exotic tree plantations and even maize fields (Skead 1960), probably attracted by seeding grasses or herbs, but does not usually move far from a forest patch. Within forest it prefers the canopy and midstratum and is not restricted to the ecotonal areas, being encountered often in the interior of large forests.

Movements: It is generally considered to be resident (Skead 1960; Maclean 1993b). A ringing study near Grahamstown (3326BC) showed the local population to be sedentary with no augmentation by winter visitors (A.J. Tree *in litt.*). Vernon (1989), commenting on populations in the East London area (3327BB), classified it as resident in all forests but subject to local movements in winter in search of food. The models provide general support for a largely sedentary lifestyle.

Breeding: Atlas data show breeding September–May. On the basis of nest-building records in October, flying juveniles in January and eggs in March, Skead (1960) considered that it has a long breeding season. In fact there are too few records to draw firm conclusions.

Interspecific relationships: It co-occurs with Cape Canaries in plantations of alien trees (Hockey *et al.* 1989).

Historical distribution and conservation: Skead (1960) gave the western limits of the range as Caledon (3419AB). In 1981, it was observed almost 100 km further to the west in the Kirstenbosch National Botanical Gardens (3318CD) (*pers. obs.*). It has subsequently been confirmed as inhabiting the forested eastern slopes of Table Mountain on the Cape Peninsula and it is considered that this western extension of its range may have been facilitated by the invasion of much of the fynbos by alien *Acacias* (Hockey *et al.* 1989).

As a seedeater, it is sought after by aviculturists, who call it the Natal Linnet. It does not thrive in captivity, however, and so is not common in collections. Fortunately, because of its forest canopy habitat, the Forest Canary is not easily trapped and therefore is not known to be under serious threat from the bird trade nor, currently, from any other factor.

T.B. Oatley

Recorded in 215 grid cells, 4.7%
Total number of records: 3303
Mean reporting rate for range: 10.6%

Reporting rates for vegetation types

