



Streakyheaded Canary

Streepkopkanarie

Serinus gularis

This quiet, unobtrusive canary is widespread in sub-Saharan Africa, from Cameroon and Ethiopia southwards to southern Africa, but it is absent from the central African forests (Ginn *et al.* 1989). The Streakyheaded Canary's distribution is concentrated around mountainous escarpment areas, and in coastal and moister eastern regions further south (Skead 1960; Cyrus & Robson 1980; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b); in Zimbabwe it occurs on the central plateau and in the eastern highlands, from 900 m to 1750 m altitude (Irwin 1981). Regions with uniformly high reporting rates representing core distribution areas lie in Zimbabwe, the escarpment in the eastern Transvaal and Swaziland, and the eastern Cape Province.

Although widespread, large flocks are uncommon; pairs and small parties are more frequently encountered (Skead 1960). There may be some confusion with the similar-looking Protea Canary *S. leucopterus* in fynbos, and with the Black-eared Canary *S. mennelli* in miombo.

Habitat: In many areas, vegetation associated with mountainous and hilly topography is favoured, including fynbos in the southwest, and wooded valleys in the moist, eastern regions. Well-wooded regions are preferred, while Karoo and open grassland are largely avoided. It favours drier, deciduous woodland and miombo in the northern interior (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b), and clearly avoids the open, arid *Acacia* woodlands of the Kalahari. It frequents edges of evergreen forests, and scrub on mountain slopes (Cyrus & Robson 1980) where it is also characteristic of *Protea* stands (Clancey 1964b; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; De Swardt 1993). Associations with grasslands are spurious and refer to the wooded areas which occur within grassland biomes. It feeds on floral parts and nectar, and is often attracted to gardens (Irwin 1981). Its absence along the upper reaches of the Limpopo River, in apparently suitable woodland habitat, is peculiar. Similarly, it is remarkable that it is absent from the mixed riparian woodlands of the Okavango.

Movements: The increased reporting rate in winter and spring in Zone 8 may result from increased conspicuousness of birds feeding at aloes flowering at this time; it may also

indicate increased singing. There is some evidence of localized seasonal and altitudinal movement (Skead 1960; Clancey 1964b; Donnelly & Donnelly 1983); nomadism and vagrancy also occur (Macdonald & Birkenstock 1980; Maclean 1993b); this is supported by Karoo records outside the contiguous range. However, it is largely sedentary (Irwin 1981; Ginn *et al.* 1989); comparatively uniform reporting rates in the seasonality analysis support this.

Breeding: Activity was recorded in all months of the year, with most records falling within a September–April breeding season, with an October–December peak. A higher proportion of birds appears to breed during the late summer in the north than further south. These data agree with published egg-laying months (Skead 1960; Dean 1971; Day 1975; Cyrus & Robson 1980; Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Maclean 1993b).

Interspecific relationships: Where it is sympatric with the Black-eared Canary in Zimbabwe, the two remain ecologically or altitudinally separated (Irwin 1981); the Streaky-headed Canary is usually the more abundant (Skead 1960). It associates with other canary species, mainly the Bully Canary *S. sulphuratus* (Maclean 1993b).

Historical distribution and conservation: Very few historical records exist. Where localized changes have occurred, these have possibly resulted from changes in the availability of preferred food, e.g. *Lopholens coriifolia*, a plant which spread in the Melville Koppies Nature Reserve (2627AB) during two very wet summers (Bunning 1977). The distribution map is similar to that presented by Skead (1960) but is more detailed and shows a more continuous distribution.

The Streakyheaded Canary is under no obvious threat, although its attractive song may result in its being sought after as a cage bird. Clearance of its preferred bush habitat for agriculture, particularly in the eastern Cape Province, may be a cause for concern in the future.

R.J. Nuttall

Recorded in 1157 grid cells, 25.5%
Total number of records: 15 956
Mean reporting rate for range: 16.3%

Reporting rates for vegetation types



