



Bennett's Woodpecker

Bennettse Spig

Campethera bennettii

Endemic to the Afrotropical region, Bennett's Woodpecker is the southern member of a superspecies which extends across the savanna belt of the continent, from South Africa into eastern and western Africa. The taxonomic relationships between Bennett's Woodpecker and others within the same superspecies have not been wholly resolved. This relates particularly to the Specklethroated or Tanzanian Woodpecker *C. scriptoricauda*, a taxon that occurs within the southern African subregion (Clancey 1980b). Contrary to Clancey (1980b), Short (1973, 1982) treated this taxon as a race of Bennett's Woodpecker.

It is widespread in the savanna biome in southern Africa, from areas of low annual rainfall (<300 mm) in Namibia to eastern Zimbabwe with high rainfall (>800 mm). It is encountered as single birds, in pairs or in family groups. In good habitat in the northern Transvaal, a density similar to that of the Goldentailed Woodpecker *C. abingoni* (about 1 pair/75 ha) was found (Tarboton 1980) in an area where the two species occur side by side. It is superficially similar to the Goldentailed Woodpecker in size, shape and plumage, and the two are easily confused in the field.

Habitat: The highest reporting rates were from the Okavango and from the miombo and Mopane woodlands. Brewster (1991) found Bennett's to be more common than the Goldentailed Woodpecker at the western side of the

Okavango. In a core area of its distribution in northern Botswana, peak densities were found in tall Mopane woodland (1 bird/3.5 ha), but densities were much lower in the Okavango fringing woodland (1 bird/60 ha) and particularly in the Arid and Kalahari *Acacia* woodlands (1 bird/200 ha) (M. Herremans unpubl. data). Its southern limit is at about 27°S and it does not extend into the woodlands of KwaZulu-Natal as does the Goldentailed Woodpecker. It favours mature woodland and parkland dominated by broadleaved trees or by acacias, and woodlands underlain by sandy soils. It does not range into Afromontane or coastal forest nor commercial monocultures of exotic trees.

Movements: The suggestion that populations of this species may be subject to local migration (Clancey 1965b; Fry *et al.* 1988) is not borne out by observations in the northern Transvaal, where pairs were resident and occupied breeding territories throughout the year (pers. obs); nor do the models provide reliable evidence for seasonal changes in reporting rates.

Breeding: Atlas data indicate spring/summer breeding September–March. Egg-laying in Zimbabwe occurs September–January, with an October–November peak (Irwin 1981), and in the Transvaal, September–February with a November–December peak (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b).

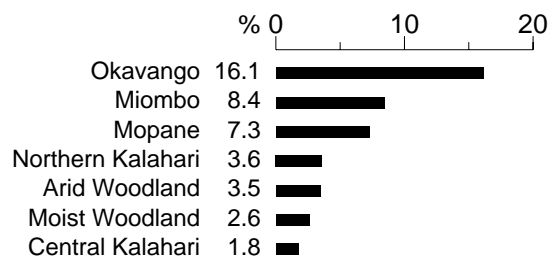
Interspecific relationships: Bennett's and Goldentailed Woodpeckers often occur alongside each other in the same habitats, despite their similar size, shape and overall morphology, and therefore their ecological relationship has been debated. It has been suggested that there is interspecific competition between the two and this has led to one replacing the other in parts of their respective ranges (Benson *et al.* 1971; Irwin 1978a). However, Short (1971) noted that the two species have quite different foraging methods and that competition for food between them is unlikely to occur.

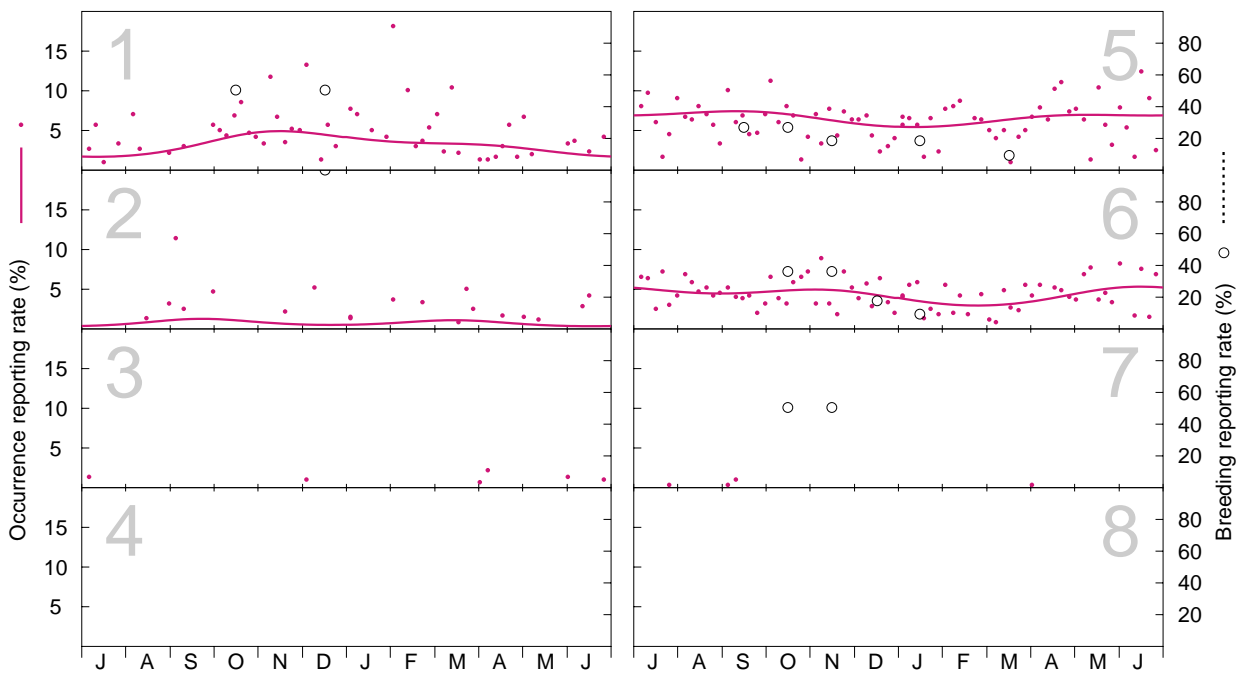
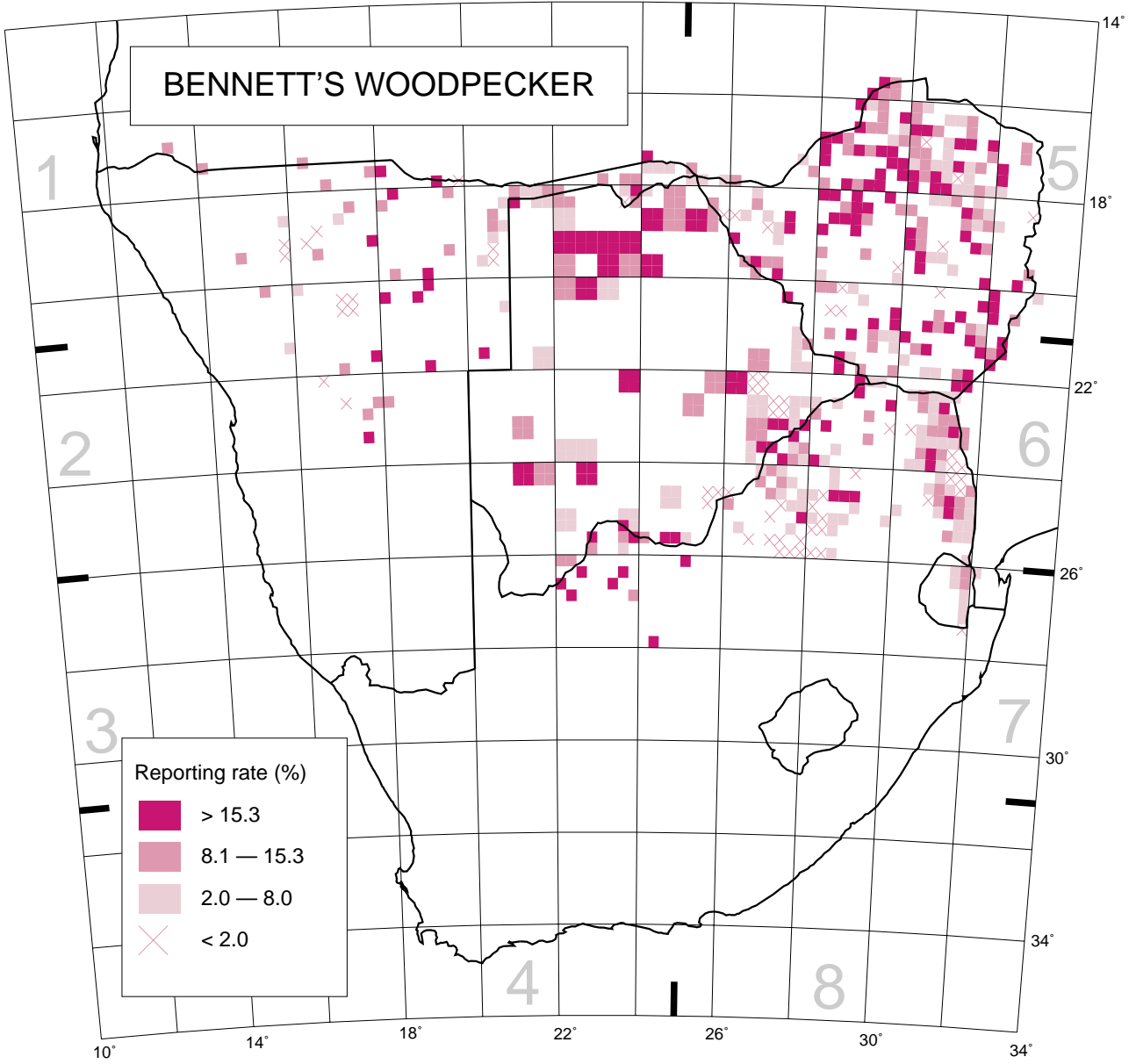
Historical distribution and conservation: The distribution is not known to have changed. The type specimen was collected near Zeerust (2526CA), as was that of the Goldentailed Woodpecker, and it still occurs in this area. The extensive clearance of mature woodland for agriculture, e.g. for tobacco crops in Zimbabwe (Brooke 1963c) and for maize and watermelons in the northern Transvaal, has led to some fragmentation of the range of Bennett's Woodpecker in these areas.

W.R. Tarboton

Recorded in 598 grid cells, 13.2%
Total number of records: 2230
Mean reporting rate for range: 8.4%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 101, 27, 7, 0, 580, 491, 5, 0; Breeding: 2, 1, 0, 0, 11, 11, 2, 0.