

Blackfaced Babbler

Swartwangkatlagter

Turdoides melanops

The Blackfaced Babbler occurs north of the atlas region in Kenya and Zaire and penetrates southern Africa only in the northwest. In Namibia it is frequently found in the lower layers of scrubby *Acacia* and *Commiphora* thickets in the north. It is also found in climax *Baikiaea* woodland in Kavango and the Caprivi. It is locally common in the eastern regions of Etosha where thickets of *Terminalia prunioides* are particularly favoured (C. Hines pers. comm.). In Botswana it only occurs west of the Okavango Delta where it occupies well-developed Camelthorn *Acacia erioloba* savanna within a few kilometres of the floodplain (Brewster 1991). Clancey (1980b) distinguished the Okavango and Caprivi birds subspecifically from the population further west.

It is the most secretive of the five babblers in the region. It is less vocal than the other species (M. Paxton pers. comm.) and confusion may have arisen particularly with the similar Arrowmarked Babbler *T. jardineii*, but probably also with Hartlaub's Babbler *T. hartlaubii*. The Blackfaced is best distinguished from the Arrowmarked Babbler by its yellow iris (orange in adult Arrowmarked, but yellow in juveniles) and scalloped white breast feathers (pointed white marks in Arrowmarked).

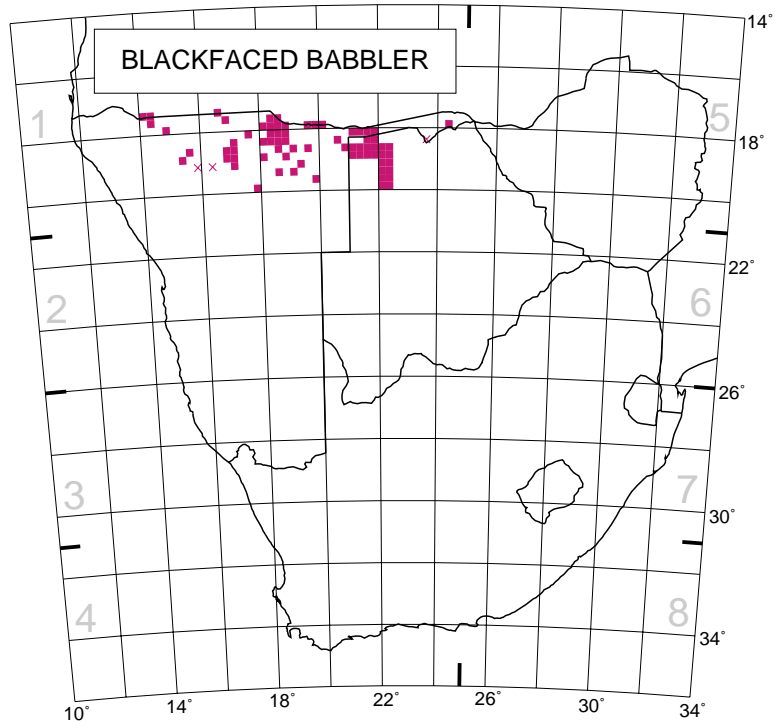
Its reporting rate averaged much lower than that of Arrowmarked and Hartlaub's Babblers, reflecting its secretive nature and relative rarity. Group size varies from 3–8 birds (Ginn *et al.* 1989) and it is probably a cooperative breeder. Breeding was reported October–November, while egg-laying data from four nests in Namibia span October–December (Brown & Clinning in press.).

It is regarded as resident (Maclean 1993b). The atlas data show higher reporting rates in winter, but this is probably due to better visibility in deciduous habitat in the dry season.

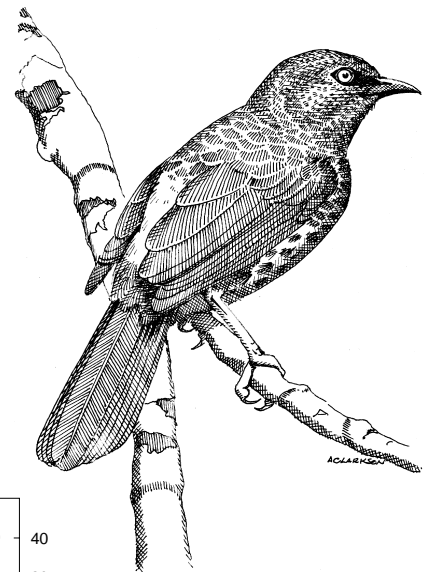
It seems to replace the Arrowmarked Babbler locally, e.g. at the western fringe of the Okavango Delta (Brewster 1991). At the scale of the present map, Blackfaced and Hartlaub's Babblers appear to overlap in the Okavango and Caprivi. However, the latter is confined to riparian and wetland habitat and the species are parapatric on the basis of different habitat preference.

The Blackfaced Babbler is localized and uncommon in the region, but is not under any known threat.

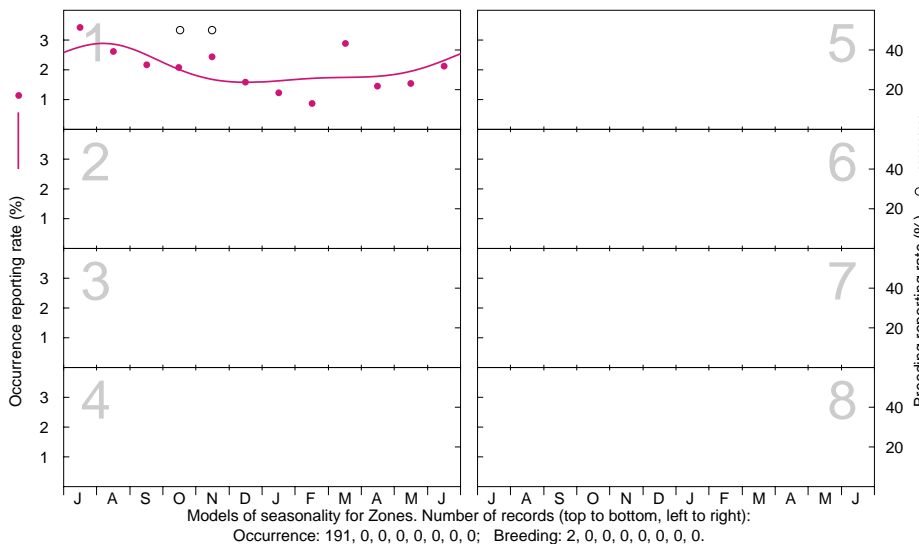
R.E. Simmons and M. Herremans



Recorded in 73 grid cells, 1.6%
 Total number of records: 196
 Mean reporting rate for range: 10.4%



Hartlaub's Babbler



Hartlaub's Babbler

Witkruiskatlagter

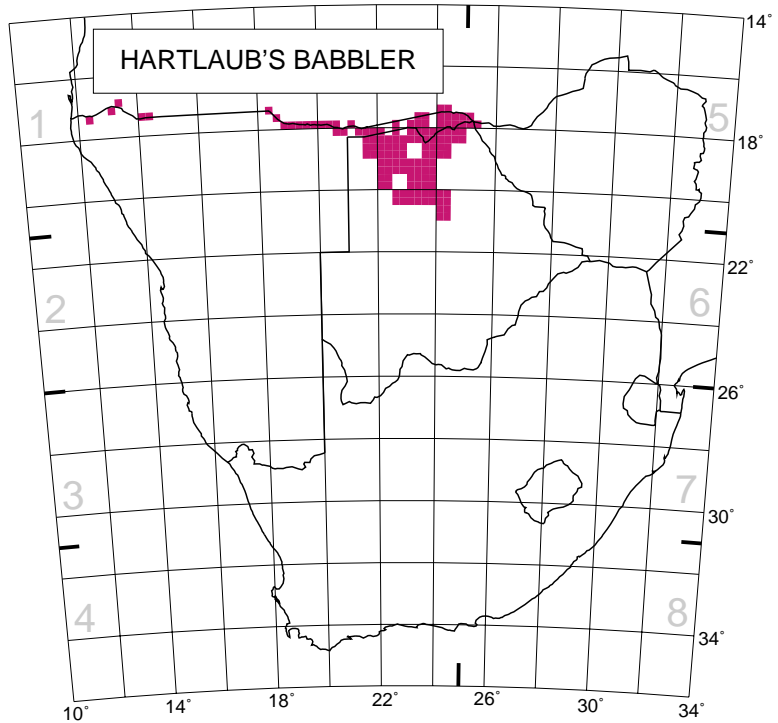
Turdoides hartlaubii

Previously appropriately known as the White-rumped Babbler (Clancey 1980b), southern African birds are now given species status (Clancey *et al.* 1987). Hartlaub's Babbler is a specialist of riparian woodland and adjacent permanent swamp, confined in southern Africa to the Okavango River and particularly the swamps of the Okavango Delta, and along rivers in eastern Caprivi (Kwando, Linyanti, Chobe and Zambezi). It enters extreme western Zimbabwe along the Zambezi River upstream from the Katombora Rapids (1725CD) (Irwin 1981). The records in far northwestern Namibia, along the lower Kunene River, are an extension of the known range (cf. e.g. Clancey 1980b; Maclean 1993b), confirmed by trapped birds (S. Braine pers. comm.). These are not isolated records but represent the southern limit of a range in Angola.

It is resident, but the range expands in wet cycles when more wetland habitat becomes available, e.g. into northeastern Namibia's omurumbas (C. Hines pers. comm.). Clancey (1980b) distinguished two subspecies in the region, birds from the southeastern part of the Okavango Delta, Chobe and eastern Caprivi being slightly different from populations further west in the same drainage systems.

This is the only brown babbler with a white rump, hence confusion with other babblers is unlikely and the present map is reliable.

Skinner (1995a) reported four breeding records from Botswana, with egg-laying in April, August (2) and October. Egg-laying in Namibia has been recorded in December and January (2) (Brown & Clinning in press). Unpublished records are a nest with chicks in August near Maun (1923D) (D.G. Allan pers. comm.) and two groups feeding recently fledged young in September near Shakawe (1821B) (M. H. pers. obs), a nest with eggs in October from the Kavango River (M. Paxton pers. comm.) and three from the Mahango Reserve in the Caprivi in December–January (C. Hines pers. comm.). Two atlas records are September–October. The overall picture may be one of breeding mainly in the wet season in Namibia, but mainly in the dry season during peak flooding



Recorded in 132 grid cells, 2.9%
 Total number of records: 760
 Mean reporting rate for range: 40.4%

in the Okavango Delta. This difference, if substantiated, may be evidence for reproductive isolation of the subspecies.

In the Okavango and Caprivi, Hartlaub's and Arrow-marked *T. jardineii* Babblers overlap in riverine woodland and, although the former is usually aggressive and dominant over the latter, they occasionally form mixed flocks (Herremans & Herremans-Tonnoeyr 1995). Active nests have been found within 50 m on the Okavango River in Namibia (M. Paxton pers. comm.).

Hartlaub's Babbler has a restricted range in the region but is common (Brewster 1991) and under no current threat. Deforestation and increasing pressure on riparian habitats could become problematic in the future.

M. Herremans and R.E. Simmons

