

Pied Babbler

Witkatlagter

Turdoides bicolor

The Pied Babbler is a near-endemic resident of southern Africa, extending marginally into southern Angola (Clancey 1980b). It is one of the typical species of the Kalahari basin, with the core of its range in the central Kalahari. It also occurs in *Acacia* bushveld on granitic substrate in eastern Botswana, southern Zimbabwe, the northwestern Transvaal and northern Namibia. It is a fairly common resident in the Kalahari, but less common in the peripheral areas.

Pied Babblers occur in family parties, usually of 3–12 birds (Ginn *et al.* 1989; Maclean 1993b), and have more conspicuous plumage than other babblers in the region (except the Barecheeked Babbler *T. gymnogenys*), but are less noisy. The atlas data are considered reliable and comprehensive.

Habitat: It is a thornbush specialist. It does not need to drink (Skead 1975a). It avoids more open areas such as the southern Kalahari and the Karoo, and also the more mesic broadleaved woodlands. The vegetation analysis indicates the extent to which biomes are mixed with thornveld; the high reporting rates in predominantly broadleaved vegetation such as Mopane, Miombo, Okavango and Moist Woodland reflect extensive presence of *Acacia* thornbush within these biomes. Only in mosaic vegetation is it occasionally found in broadleaved habitat. It extends into the southern Kalahari and onto the Namibian escarpment where it occurs in pockets of dense thornbush.

Movements: It is sedentary within large home ranges and no movements are known. The atlas data do not suggest movements.

Breeding: Atlas data confirm that breeding is protracted throughout the wet summer season (mainly September–April), with a peak October–February (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Ginn *et al.* 1989; Maclean 1993b; Skinner 1995a; Brown & Clinning in press), but in the arid west, breeding occasionally occurs in the dry season (see also Maclean 1993b).

Interspecific relationships: Babblers form a morphologically and ecologically rather uniform group, and five species occur in southern Africa. Within the Kalahari, the Pied Babbler is the only representative of the group. It does, however, overlap widely with Arrowmarked Babbler *T. jardineii* in the eastern and northern part of its range. The Pied Babbler is the more common species in the Northern Kalahari biome, but it is outnumbered by the Arrowmarked Babbler in all other biomes where they overlap (Arid Woodland, Mopane, Miombo, Okavango, Moist Woodland). In most cases the two species occupy different habitats, Pied Babblers occurring in drier thornbush while the Arrowmarked Babbler prefers more lush riverine or broadleaved areas (Hines 1985–87; Brown 1990a; pers. obs). The apparent overlap of Pied Babbler and Hartlaub's Babbler *T. hartlaubii* in the atlas maps is an artefact of scale. These species are parapatric, Hartlaub's being restricted to the riparian woodland and swamp, and the two species only rarely meet. In the habitat mosaic of the Okavango Delta, Pied Babblers occur in coppicing acacias

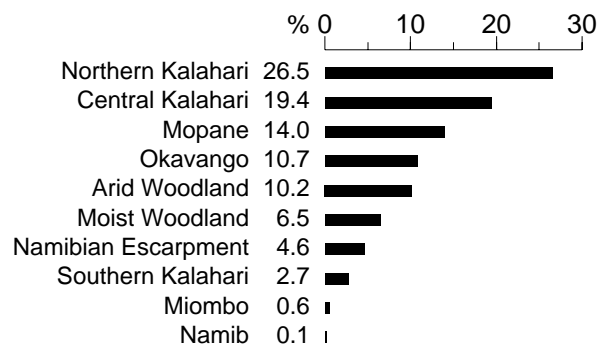
on dry floodplain, while Hartlaub's and Arrowmarked are in adjacent tall riparian woodland. In the area of overlap with the Blackfaced Babbler *T. melanops*, the Pied Babbler is generally the more widespread and Blackfaced the more localized species. However, the latter outnumbers the former locally in taller *Acacia* woodland west of the Okavango Delta (Brewster 1991) and is also more regularly found in broadleaved *Commiphora* woodland (Maclean 1993b). There is an area of overlap with the Barecheeked Babbler in northern Namibia, but the latter species prefers more arid, hilly country and Mopane (Ginn *et al.* 1989).

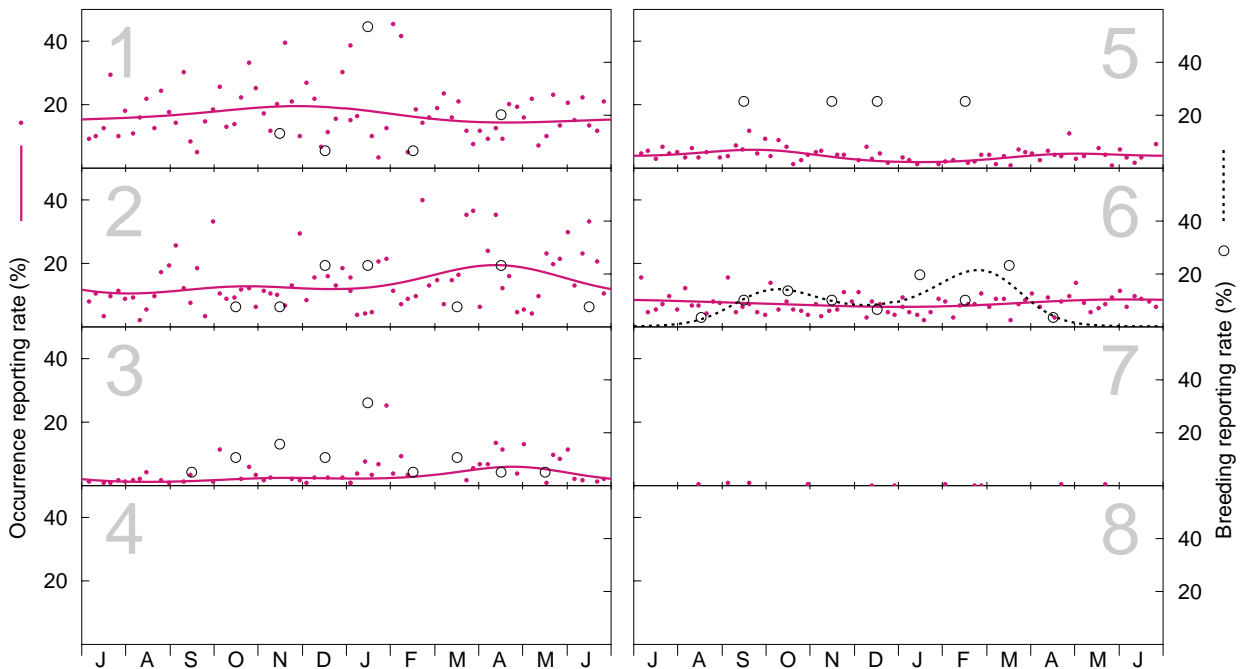
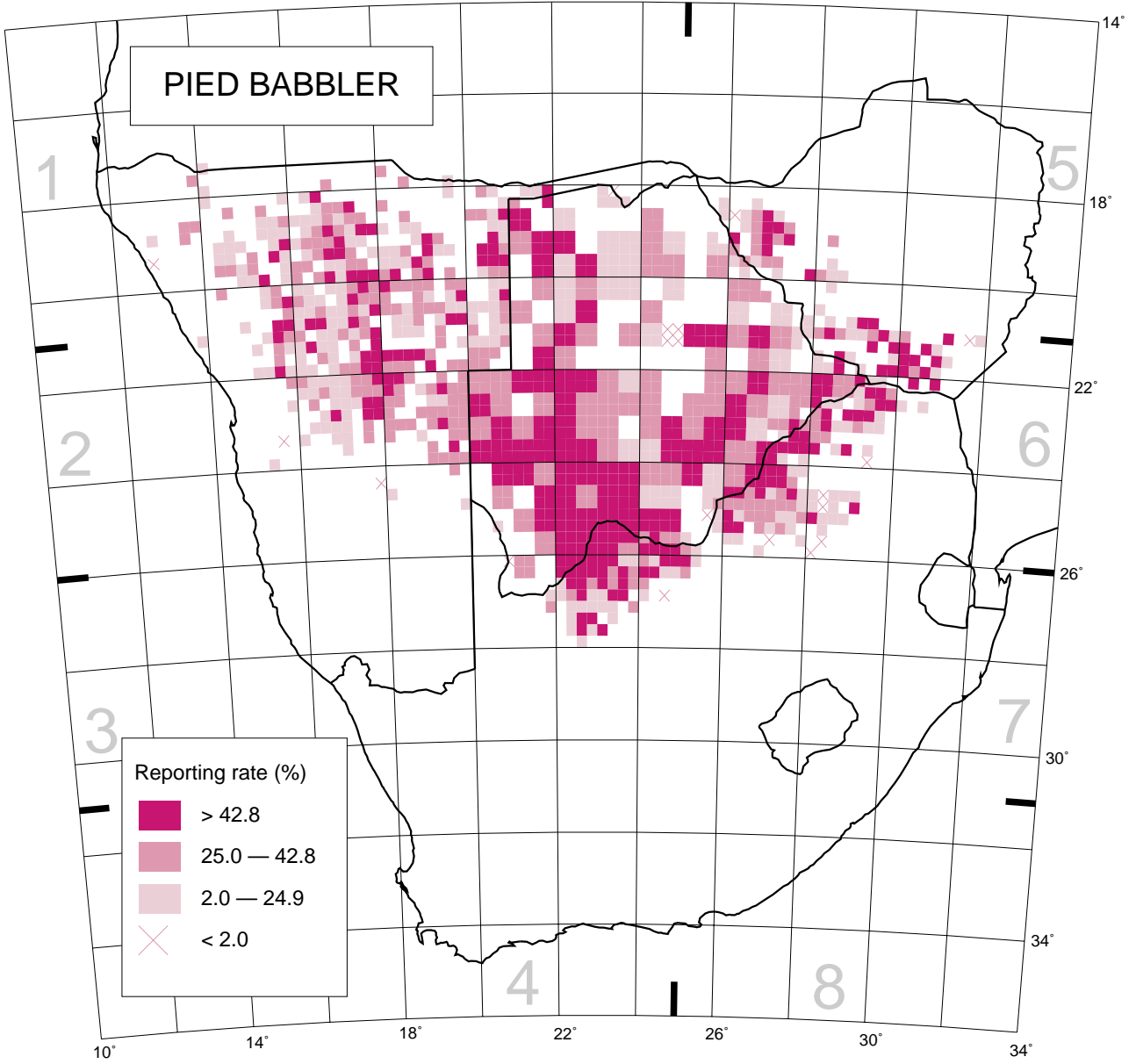
Historical distribution and conservation: The Pied Babbler is a widespread and fairly common endemic, responding positively to thorn-bush encroachment resulting from overgrazing (the main habitat transformation in the Kalahari), and is subject to no obvious threats.

M. Herremans

Recorded in 1204 grid cells, 26.5%
Total number of records: 5396
Mean reporting rate for range: 25.6%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 538, 515, 164, 0, 346, 853, 13, 0; Breeding: 15, 13, 19, 0, 4, 30, 0, 0.