



Bush Blackcap

Rooibektiptol

Lioptilus nigricapillus

This little-known species is endemic to a restricted area of South Africa and western Swaziland, occurring mainly in isolated forest and *Ouhout* *Leucosidea sericea* scrub forest patches along the southeastern and eastern escarpments. Within its preferred habitat it is quite common. The Bush Blackcap is often solitary but may be seen in pairs in the breeding season. The coral pink bill, together with the distinctive black cap and nape, and the soft grey underparts, make this an easy bird to identify. The atlas map bears witness to its limited and somewhat disjunct distribution.

Opinion on its taxonomic relationships is divided between the babblers (Timaliidae) and the bulbuls (Pycnonotidae). Current weight of taxonomic opinion places it with the babblers (Clancey 1980b; Dowsett & Forbes-Watson 1993), but in behaviour, ecology and size it has more in common with bulbuls than with most Afrotropical babblers. The species is considered monotypic (Clancey 1980b).

Habitat: The most characteristic habitat is *Leucosidea* and *Buddleja* thickets fringing montane forest pockets in narrow ravines which provide a degree of protection from grass fires. Small and often isolated forest and *Leucosidea* tree patches are usually surrounded by sour grasslands, and together they characterize the slopes of the Drakensberg escarpment. The low reporting rate is doubtless due, in part, to the fact that many of its favoured haunts are far from roads, tracks or foot-paths, and were difficult for observers to reach. Skead (1967b) recorded it from Valley Bushveld in the eastern Cape Province but pointed out that it was a forest bird and not common anywhere except in the very highest, relict forests at Maclear (3128AB) and Ugie (3128AA).

Movements: It is a partial altitudinal migrant from the highest Afromontane forests along the Drakensberg, appearing in moderate numbers mainly March–October in lower mistbelt forests and sometimes even in river valley bushveld (Skead

1967b). At the lower edge of the mistbelt forests at 1100 m in Winterskloof (2930CB), it was observed in every month of the year, but most frequently during autumn and winter, the numbers varying from year to year (Oatley & Pinnell 1968). It is possible that some individuals bred there occasionally (no nest was ever found but food-carrying was once seen). The models do not indicate a marked altitudinal migration pattern, perhaps because of the very low reporting rate which seems to have been highest in the summer months when the species is most vocal (it seems not to sing at all during the non-breeding season). For a cover-loving species such as this, leaving and returning to isolated forest patches in high-altitude grasslands may pose problems, especially for first-year birds; this may account for its being described as 'locally nomadic' (Maclean 1993b).

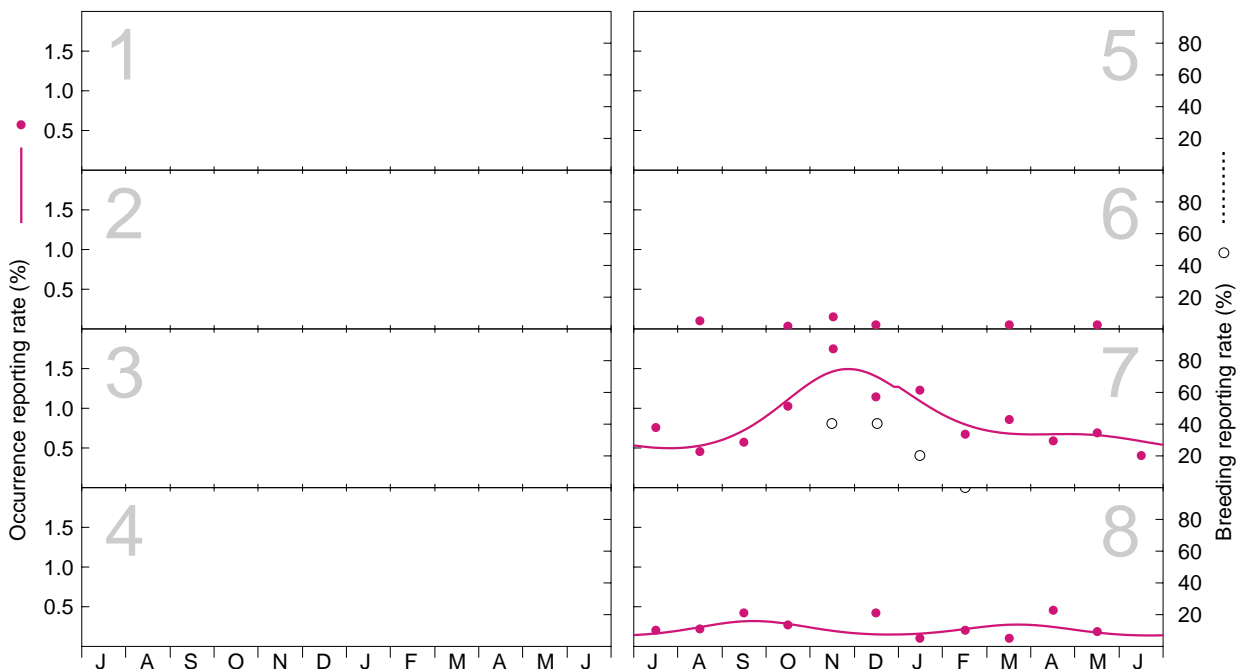
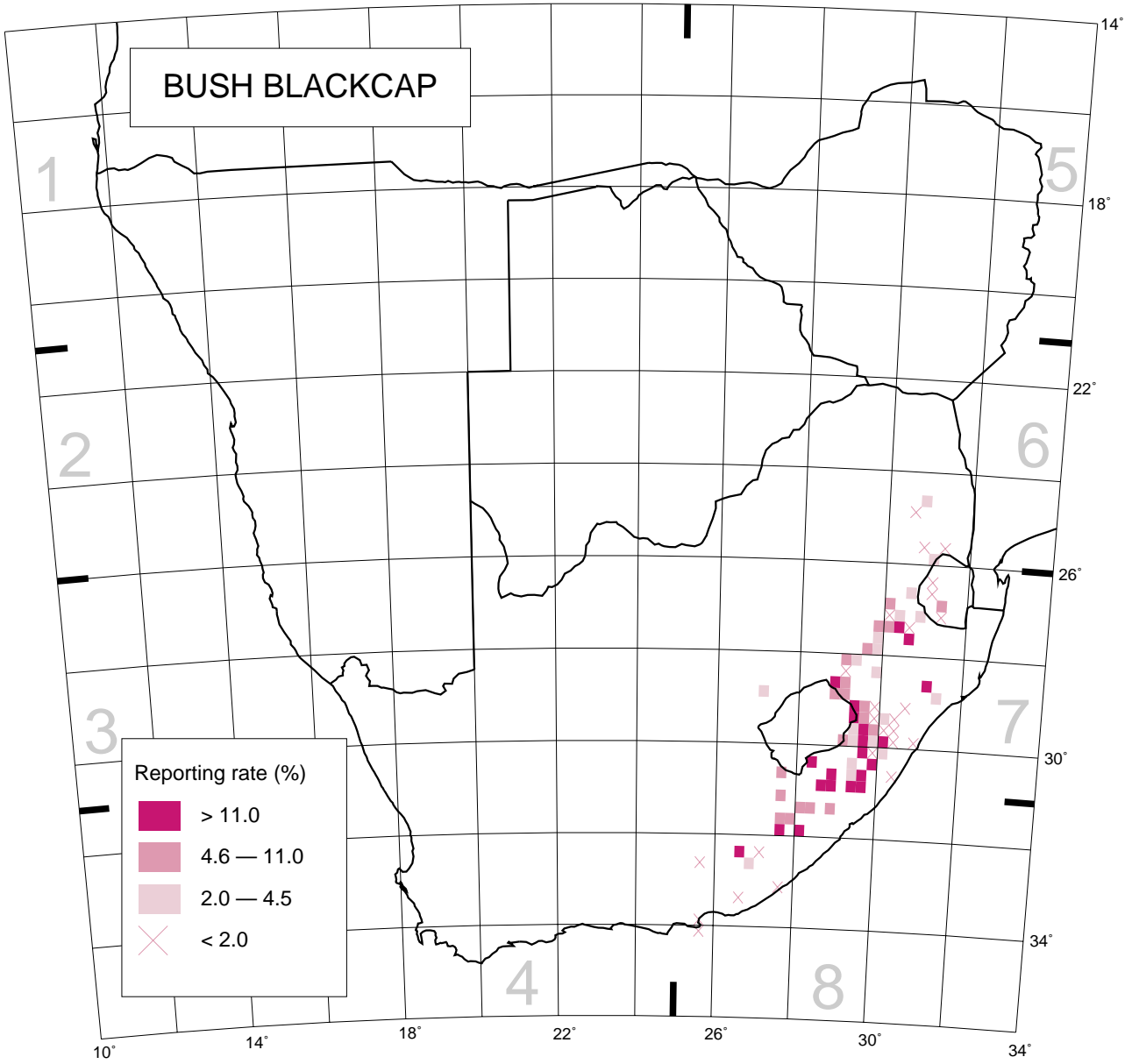
Breeding: Maclean (1993b) gave the breeding season as November–January. Because it is an altitudinal migrant, its breeding distribution is almost certainly less extensive than its overall distribution as reflected in the atlas map.

Interspecific relationships: It has no close relative in southern Africa. As a fruit-eater it is not unusual to find it with other frugivores in the canopy of berry-bearing trees, but it keeps to itself and seems not to react to the presence of other species.

Historical distribution and conservation: The distribution is not known to have altered within historic times. The Bush Blackcap is not currently considered to be under any conservation threat, much of its habitat being within State-controlled forest reserves.

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Recorded in 84 grid cells, 1.9%
Total number of records: 419
Mean reporting rate for range: 3.8%



Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 9, 380, 25; Breeding: 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 5, 1.