



Yellowspotted Nicator

Geelvleknikator

Nicator gularis

The Yellowspotted Nicator is a tropical species ranging as far north as Somalia and reaching its southernmost breeding limits at St Lucia Estuary (2832CB). It is commonly encountered from there northwards, especially in the low-lying bushveld areas. Two geographical races have been described (Clancey *et al.* 1987), the nominate race inhabiting the southeastern sector of the subcontinent and *N. g. phyllophilus* occurring in the dry riparian forests of the middle Zambezi Valley.

The relationships of this genus have long been a matter of contention, with opinion swinging between shrikes and bulbuls. Behaviourally this species shows some similarity to both of these groups. It is here placed close to the bulbuls but Keith *et al.* (1992) included it with the shrikes, following anatomical evidence cited by Olson (1989).

Its long tail exaggerates its true size and is a distinctive character along with the diagnostic cream-coloured spots on the wing-coverts. The male advertises his territory in the summer months from a well-concealed songpost in the top of some small tree. The frequently repeated, bulbul-like, bubbling cadence of notes is loud and far-carrying, but it is seldom easy to see the singing bird because it slips down into the dense undergrowth at the first sign of approach by an observer. On the other hand, one may come across one of these birds foraging low down near a footpath and watch

it from close quarters, the bird jerking its long tail and uttering single 'chuck' notes when it is suspicious.

Habitat: It occurs in dense, tangled undergrowth and the ecotones of lowland and riverine forest; also in thicket formations in woodland and secondary scrub communities. It freely ascends to midstratum and canopy and is not confined to the undergrowth. It occurs commonly on mountain ranges such as the Lebombos (2632C, 2732A) at altitudes approaching 700 m.

Movements: It is not subject to any migration or local movement as far as is known. The summer peak in seasonal reporting rates can best be explained in terms of its vocal conspicuousness during the breeding season.

Breeding: There were few records of breeding activity in the atlas data. Maclean (1993b) gave the breeding season as November–January without regional qualification. The South African nest record scheme contains details of three nests from within the atlas region. Two of these were contributed by H.W. Bell-Marley in 1935 and 1938 for two eggs and three eggs respectively, both in the third week of November and both from the Sihangwane area (2732AB) of Maputoland where the nicator is a common resident. The third record comes from the lowland Rusitu River (2033AA), eastern Zimbabwe, and contained two eggs on 16 January 1966. In KwaZulu-Natal, Dean (1971) reported four cases of egg-laying in November and one in January. If territorial vocalizations are closely associated with breeding, the models suggest that breeding could be earlier in Zone 7 than in Zone 5.

Interspecific relationships: Maclean (1993b) stated that females may join mixed bird parties, but males do not. It is not known how this was determined, because the nicator is sexually monomorphic in plumage pattern and coloration, and although males are larger than females, the size difference is best seen when both sexes are together. Nicators seem normally to be solitary and little is known about their behaviour or interactions with other species.

Historical distribution and conservation: There is no historical evidence of range expansion or contraction. The Yellowspotted Nicator is widespread in the Afrotropical region.

T.B. Oatley

Recorded in 138 grid cells, 3.0%

Total number of records: 1492

Mean reporting rate for range: 15.6%

Reporting rates for vegetation types



