

Orange Thrush

Oranjelyster

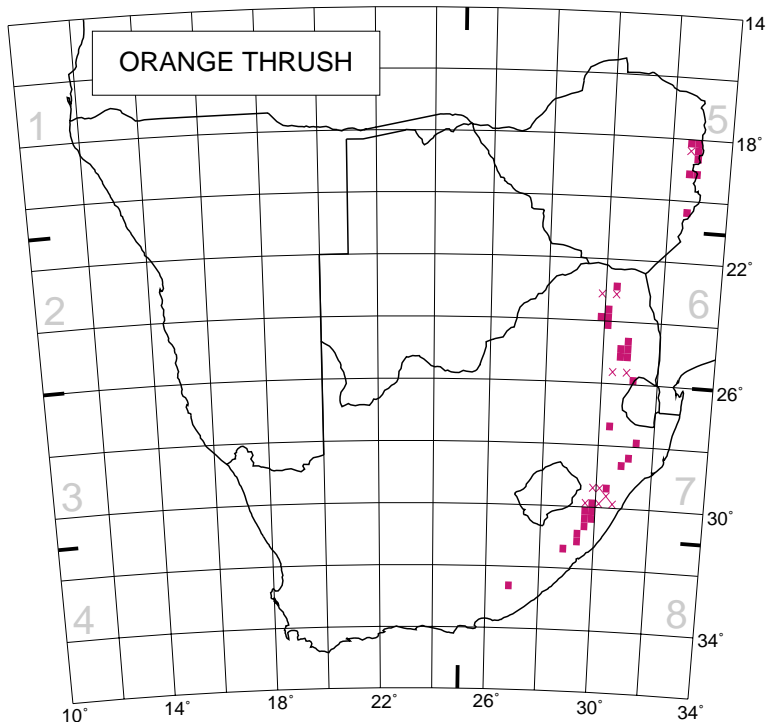
Zoothera gurneyi

Extending north to Mount Kenya, with an isolated population in the Angolan highlands, this is the most wide-ranging member of a mainly look-alike group of species that comprise the Afrotropical ground-thrush assemblage (Prigogine 1985b). The Orange Thrush is an obligate moist evergreen forest dweller of shy disposition, foraging mostly on the ground where its coloration and subtly disruptive plumage pattern helps it to blend with the leaf litter of the forest floor. The low reporting rates probably resulted from this crypsis rather than from rarity since it is not uncommon in favoured habitat; a density of 4 pairs/4.5 ha has been recorded (Earlé & Oatley 1983). Birds of highland forest in the northern Transvaal and Zimbabwe are considered sub-specifically distinct (*Z. g. disruptans*) from the nominate birds further south (Clancey 1980b).

During breeding it is confined to Afromontane forest, especially small forest patches in deep, narrow kloofs. The vegetation analysis over-emphasizes the importance of the Eastern Zimbabwe Highlands, probably because of its accessibility, but the species is no more common there than in the escarpment forests of the Transvaal and KwaZulu-Natal. In southern Africa it favours forests at altitudes of 500–1800 m. It does not forage in or frequent woodlands or plantations as do Olive *Turdus olivaceus* and Kurrichane *T. libonyana* Thrushes. Recaptures of marked birds in KwaZulu-Natal midland forests have shown it to be sedentary, but some altitudinal movements occur in the eastern Cape Province where birds frequent the coastal forests during the winter months, when most Spotted Thrushes *Z. guttata* are absent (Quickelberge 1989; Clancey 1992–93).

Egg-laying in southern Africa occurs October–January (Dean 1971; Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). Earthworms are an important food resource, especially for their dependent young; their availability is linked to adequate moisture levels in surface soils and is probably important in discouraging the birds from foraging outside the confines of forests (Earlé & Oatley 1983). The Orange Thrush is dependent on preservation of the Afromontane forests for its survival.

T.B. Oatley



Recorded in 44 grid cells, 1.0%
 Total number of records: 244
 Mean reporting rate for range: 4.7%

Reporting rates for vegetation types



Also marginally in East Coast Littoral.

