



Arnot's Chat

Bontpiek

Thamnolaea arnoti

Arnot's Chat is confined to moist, broadleaved woodlands in the southern African tropics (Keith *et al.* 1992). In the atlas region it is restricted to the northeastern Transvaal, southern and northwestern Zimbabwe, northern Botswana and the Caprivi. The population in the Limpopo and Save drainages of northeastern Transvaal and southern Zimbabwe appears to be well isolated from the population in the Zambezi drainage to the northwest. The population east of the Makgadikgadi (2026–2127) in the Sua Pan drainage area might also be isolated. Despite the isolated populations, the species is considered monotypic within the atlas region (Clancey 1980b).

It has striking plumage and behaves conspicuously, frequently giving alarm in pairs or family parties when disturbed; the atlas data are therefore likely to be comprehensive.

Habitat: It occurs in climax broadleaved, deciduous woodland with open canopy, on flat country, and with little bush cover in the lower stratum. A poorly developed herbaceous stratum, leaving many patches of bare ground, is also needed. It is locally common in tall Mopane and lowland miombo on Kalahari sands, but it is very sparse in *Baikiaea* woodland, in miombo on granitic substrate and in *Julbernardia* woodland (Douthwaite 1992a). In northern Botswana, densities of 1 bird/1.2 ha were recorded from transect-counts in climax Mopane along the Khwai River (1923B), but it was absent from Mopane heavily damaged by elephants (Herremans 1995a). It was also unrecorded in Mopane scrub and tall *Baikiaea* woodland, which usu-

ally has undergrowth which is too dense (pers. obs). Its occurrence in Arid Woodland is dependent on the presence of Mopane *Colophospermum mopane*.

Movements: It is resident, and the tendency towards increased reporting rates in the dry season may have resulted from better visibility during winter in the deciduous habitat. It is not clear whether out-of-range records, such as a pair in 2227C (Brewster 1994c), pertain to occasional movements or low-density residence.

Breeding: Records in the atlas confirm that breeding is in spring/summer, September–April (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Douthwaite 1992a; Maclean 1993b; Skinner 1995a).

Interspecific relationships: There are many Turdidae in the region, but Arnot's Chat is a specialist of woodlands with open understorey on flat ground. In its preferred Mopane habitat, it frequently occurs side by side with the Kurri-chane Thrush *Turdus libonyana* and occasionally with the Groundscraper Thrush *T. litsitsirupa*. There is limited overlap with the ecologically rather similar Mocking Chat *Thamnolaea cinnamomeiventris*, Boulder Chat *Pinarornis plumosus* and Miombo Rock Thrush *Monticola angolensis*, all of which prefer denser woodland on hills and granite outcrops. Many other species with a somewhat similar feeding ecology,

such as the *Cossypha* robins, Terrestrial *Phyllastrephus terrestris* and Yellowbellied *Chlorocichla flaviventris* Bulbuls, and Yellowspotted *Nicator gularis*, all prefer much denser woodland, particularly with thickets in the undergrowth.

Historical distribution and conservation: It has lost considerable amounts of its habitat through the extensive clearing of miombo for agriculture in Zimbabwe, and probably more recently also by the impact of elephants on Mopane woodlands in Botswana (Herremans 1995a). Arnot's Chat is also sensitive to pesticides; massive use of DDT in Tsetse Fly *Glossina morsitans* control has affected it dramatically in Zimbabwe (Douthwaite 1992a,b, 1993) and possibly also in Botswana.

M. Herremans

Recorded in 302 grid cells, 6.7%
Total number of records: 1247
Mean reporting rate for range: 13.9%

Reporting rates for vegetation types



