



## Whitethroated Robin

### Witkeeljanfrederik

#### *Cossypha humeralis*

This southern African endemic has a distribution centred on the Limpopo River drainage system. In the north it extends over the plateau region of Zimbabwe and is found along the headwaters, above 900 m, of some watercourses that feed into the Zambezi River, but is not known from within the Zambezi Valley (Irwin 1981), except for a January 1994 report from Mashumbi Pools (1630BA) (Tree 1994c). The southern limits of its range lie in the Tugela River basin of KwaZulu-Natal, extending southwest as far as the Bushmans River valley at Estcourt (2929BB). It occurs in the woodlands of the eastern hardveld in Botswana but is absent from the Kalahari sandveld.

It can easily be confused with the cinnamon-flanked Southern Boubou *Laniarius ferrugineus*. Its relatively high reporting rate in the Eastern Zimbabwe Highlands is misleading because it occurs commonly only in the low-lying areas of that region, such as the Save River valley. The map provides a good picture of its distribution in the sub-continent.

**Habitat:** It is characteristically a bird of thickets that line dry watercourses in the bushveld and thornveld of hot, dry river valleys. In more open woodland, it haunts closed thickets such as occur – in the absence of stock or big game – under large shade trees, or on termite mounds and in fire-free places on rocky hills. It may be found in the fringes of the sand forests of northern KwaZulu-Natal and on the inland edges of coastal dune scrub. It frequents the gardens of homesteads and ventures into the more open suburbs of large towns or cities.

**Movements:** It is sedentary; the dip in reporting rates in high-summer months is probably due to its covert behaviour when attending young in or out of the nest and its subsequent silence during moult which takes place January–March. A post-breeding dispersal in March, of what are probably mainly young birds, can result in this species appearing in places, such as gardens or bushy koppies, where it was absent in the preceding months.

**Breeding:** Egg-laying starts in early September and extends to January with peak breeding activity October–

November (Dean 1971; Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Skinner 1995a). The July atlas record is questionable. Egg-laying from November onwards is usually representative of replacement broods (Keith *et al.* 1992). Different timing of breeding, as shown in Zones 5 and 6, is not confirmed by published egg-laying data (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b).

**Interspecific relationships:** In moist woodland habitats of the southeast, it shares its breeding habitat with the Natal Robin *C. natalensis*. Overlap with breeding populations of the more closely related Cape Robin *C. caffra* is much more restricted but occurs, for example, in the Muden area (2830CD). It has been recorded as a host of the Red-chested Cuckoo *Cuculus solitarius* but such records comprise less than 5% of records for all known hosts of this cuckoo (Rowan 1983).

**Historical distribution and conservation:** In Zimbabwe it has extended its range northwards in Mashonaland almost to the Zambezi escarpment; this may have been assisted by the spread of alien *Lantana camara* thickets (A.J. Tree *in litt.*). The Whitethroated Robin is not considered to be under threat; however, wide-scale denudation of woody growth at the hand of burgeoning human populations in rural areas must diminish its habitat.

T.B. Oatley

Recorded in 637 grid cells, 14.0%  
Total number of records: 6704  
Mean reporting rate for range: 17.5%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types



