



## Titbabbler

### Bosveldtjeriktik

#### *Parisoma subcaeruleum*

The Titbabbler is near-endemic to southern Africa, occurring elsewhere only in southern Angola and southwestern Zambia (Hall & Moreau 1970). It is widely distributed and common in the drier and semi-arid western and central thornveld areas of southern Africa but absent from the wetter eastern and northern areas, and the highlands of Lesotho. Its centre of abundance is in the Kalahari southwards to the Karoo. It occurs less commonly on the central plateau and in the south-west of Zimbabwe (Irwin 1981), and in the lowveld of the eastern Transvaal (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). An isolated population occurs in the dry (<900 mm rain annually) thornveld region in the interior of KwaZulu-Natal (Cyrus & Robson 1980) and Swaziland (Parker 1994). It is absent from open desert and high-lying areas, and from the Transkei. The three subspecies recognized by Clancey (1980b) show continuous ranges on the present map.

It occurs singly or in pairs, and is inconspicuous as it forages within thorn trees and thickets. It is vocal and its call invariably reveals its presence. Where it overlaps with Layard's Titbabbler *P. layardi*, misidentification is possible if the diagnostic vent is not seen, as there is some similarity in calls. It is not easily misidentified if clearly seen, and the atlas records are considered to be reliable and comprehensive.

**Habitat:** It occurs in scrub and thickets, particularly indigenous *Acacia*, in a range of vegetation types, most commonly in the Central and Southern Kalahari but also in scrub in valleys and on hillsides in the Karoo, and in thickets in savanna woodlands and thornveld. It has apparently not occupied alien *Acacia* thickets.

**Movements:** It is resident and apparently sedentary. There were minor seasonal changes in reporting rates in most regions; these are interpreted as reflecting slight changes in conspicuousness. It was recorded marginally more frequently in winter and autumn but there is no evidence for any regular seasonal movement, even on a local scale.

**Breeding:** There was a short concentrated peak in spring (September–December, later than Layard's Titbabbler) in the winter-rainfall areas (Zones 4 and 8) and although the season is more extensive throughout summer in Zimbabwe, it peaked at the same time (Irwin 1981). Breeding peaked later in the

intermediate eastern Zones 6 and 7, also illustrated by egg-laying data in Tarboton *et al.* (1987b). In semi-arid regions, breeding is probably determined by irregular rain (Maclean 1993b), making the 'season' longer. In Zone 2, breeding was recorded September–May, with a peak through midsummer, conforming with egg-laying data for Botswana and Namibia (Skinner 1995a; Brown & Clinning in press).

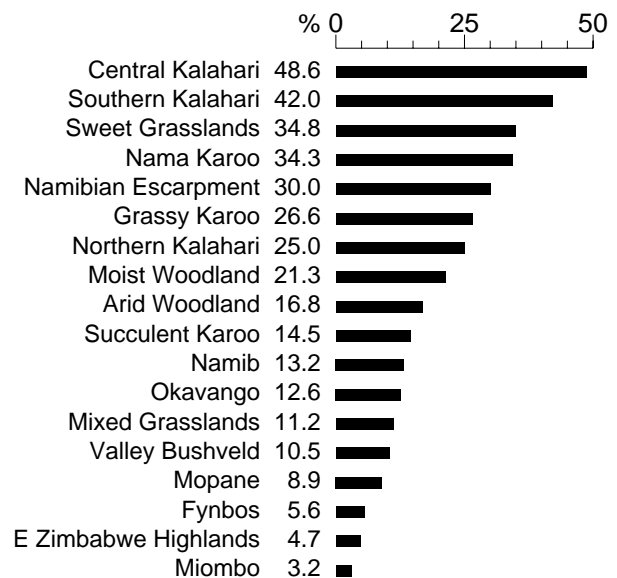
**Interspecific relationships:** It is similar in appearance to Layard's Titbabbler, and the two species occur in the same habitats in the Free State (Earlé & Grobler 1987) and in the strandveld of the western Cape Province (Hockey *et al.* 1989). Interspecific competition may be expected in these areas. In the Karoo where both species occur, the Titbabbler occupies riverine *Acacia* and Layard's Titbabbler scrubby slopes and ravines (pers. obs). The Titbabbler may compete for food and space with other warblers, e.g. Barthroated Apalis *Apalis thoracica* in the strandveld and in the riverine *Acacia* of the Karoo; and Barred Warbler *Calamanastes fasciolatus* and Greybacked Warbler *Cameroptera brevicaudata* in northern *Acacia* thickets.

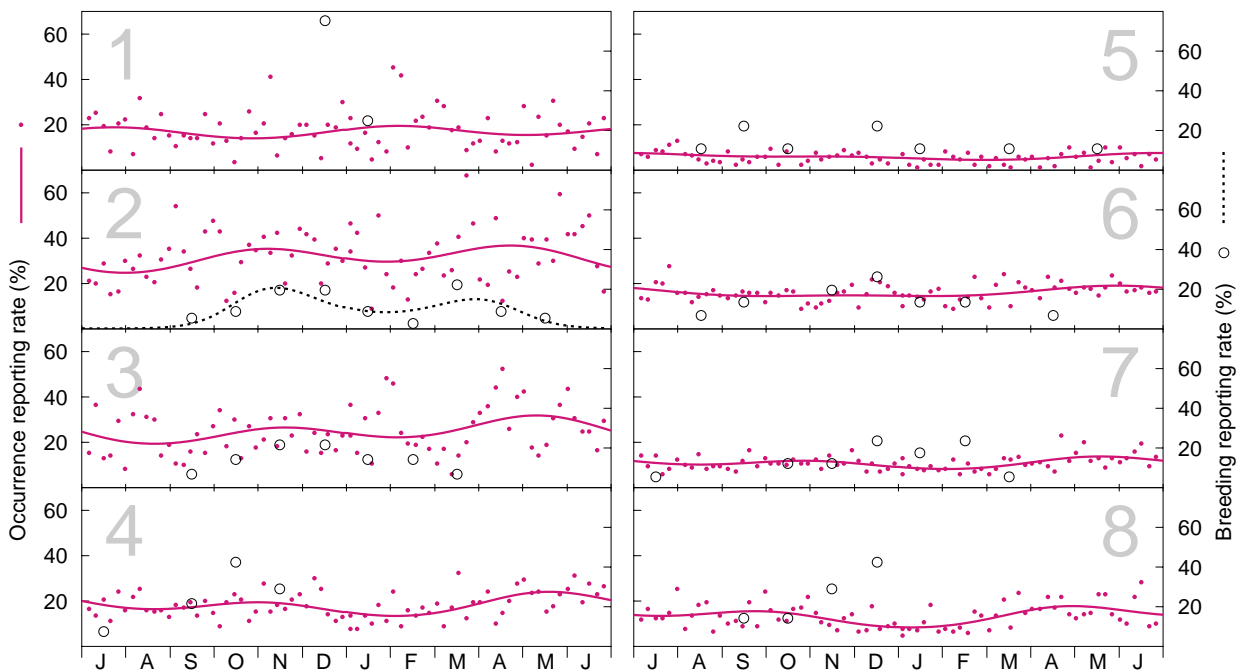
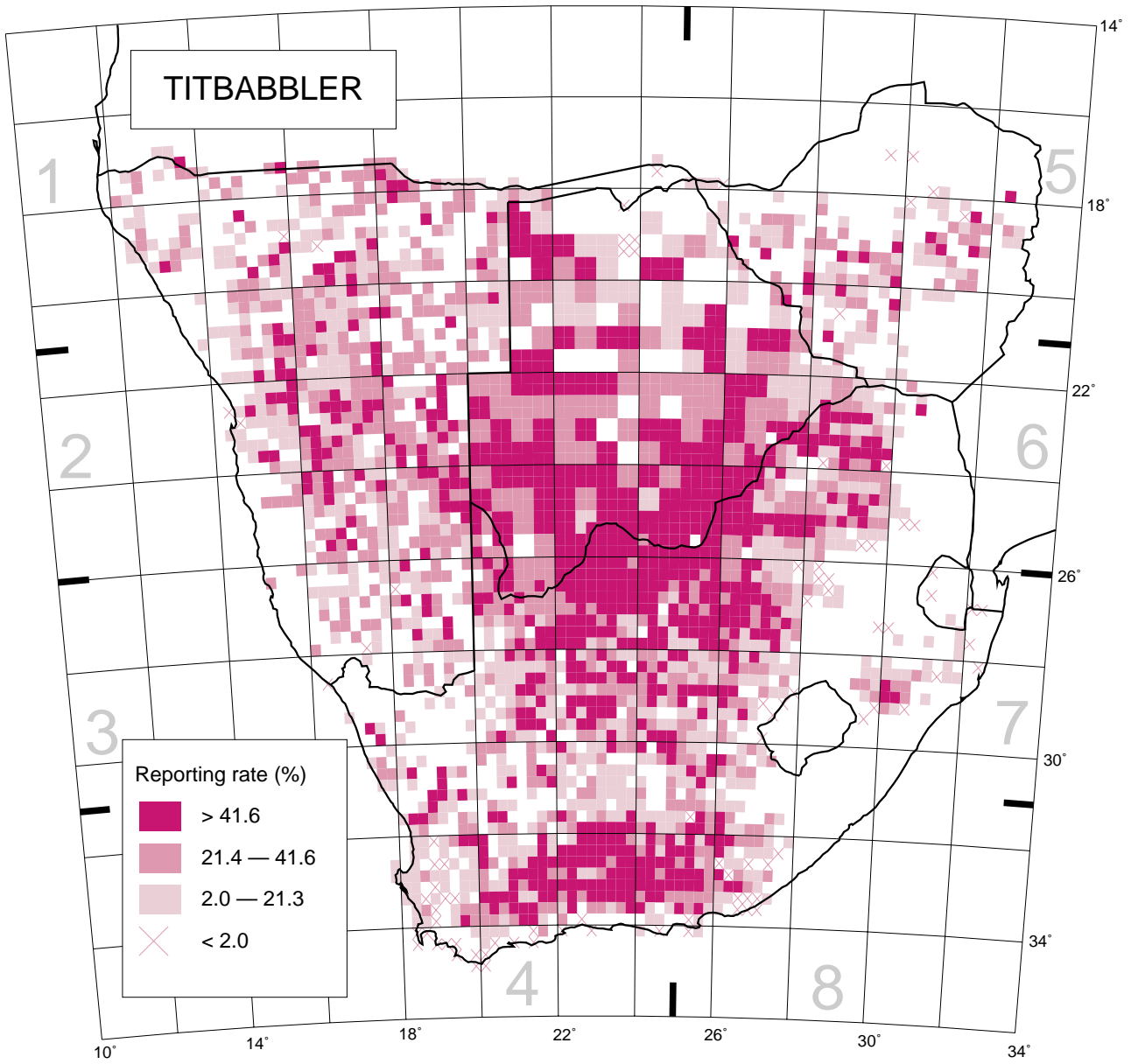
**Historical distribution and conservation:** The distribution is not known to have differed from the present, and is unlikely to have changed significantly. At the northeastern edge of the range it has declined in Mashonaland, Zimbabwe, with the clearing of large areas of *Acacia* woodland for agriculture (A.J. Tree *in litt.*). It was not regarded as threatened in South Africa by Brooke (1984b). Although it is near-endemic, its wide distribution in the dry and semi-arid areas suggests that the Titbabbler is unlikely to be under threat in the foreseeable future.

A. Berruti

Recorded in 2676 grid cells, 59.0%  
Total number of records: 20 867  
Mean reporting rate for range: 23.0%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 559, 1135, 1386, 1608, 523, 1823, 2131, 742; Breeding: 4, 36, 14, 14, 9, 15, 17, 7.