



## Longbilled Crombec

### Bosveldstompstert

*Sylvietta rufescens*

The Longbilled Crombec is widespread in southern Africa and its range extends into Angola, Mozambique, Zambia and Zaire. It is absent from Lesotho and from much of the grassland biome, including the Transkei, southern KwaZulu-Natal, northeastern Free State and most of the Transvaal highveld. Reporting rates indicate strongholds in the woodlands of northern Botswana and on the eastern hardveld of Botswana, the Limpopo Valley, northern Transvaal, and the lowveld of the Transvaal and Swaziland. In most other regions its distribution appears discontinuous, presumably reflecting patchiness of suitable habitat. Seven subspecies are recognized (Clancey 1980b; Clancey *et al.* 1991); none are separated by clear breaks in distribution.

It usually occurs singly or in pairs, and it is fairly conspicuous in its behaviour. The tailless appearance makes it unmistakable; only in Zimbabwe may confusion with the Redfaced Crombec *S. whytii* sometimes have arisen. The atlas data are reliable and comprehensive.

**Habitat:** The vegetation analysis indicates its preference primarily for woodland and secondarily for scrubland habitats. Within these broad categories it is exceptionally catholic in its use of different wooded habitats, from sparse arid scrub in the Namib to the canopy of dense miombo woodland. It is not found in unwooded grasslands or forest interiors; in the Karoo it is usually associated with patches of taller scrub. Apparently it is not found in *Ouhout Leucosidea sericea* scrub on the slopes of the Drakensberg.

At Nylsvley (2428CB) breeding densities were 1 pair/12 ha in broadleaved woodland and 1 pair/5 ha in *Acacia* woodland (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). In Botswana it was found in all transect counts in woodlands and savannas (covering 1155 ha in total), except in tall Mopane woodland. Densities varied strikingly: on average 1 bird/5–6 ha in *Acacia*-dominated bushveld on the eastern hardveld, in the northern Kalahari, in Mopane scrub and in *Baikiaea* woodland; 1 bird/23 ha in central Kalahari savanna; 1 bird/2.6 ha in floodplain-fringing woodland in the Okavango, but 1 bird/11.7 ha in riparian vegetation along the Linyanti and Chobe rivers; peak density was 1 bird/1.8 ha in tall, mixed broadleaved woodland in the upper Shashe River catchment (2026D) (M. Herremans unpubl. data).

**Movements:** It is a resident species not known to undertake extensive movements. Minor fluctuations in reporting rates were probably caused by variable conspicuousness, possibly linked to relatively secretive behaviour during post-breeding moult.

**Breeding:** A spring–summer breeding season is indicated by the data. The pattern is fairly consistent in the east (Zones 5–8), but in the west the effect of different rainfall seasons is apparent with earlier breeding in the south (Zones 3 and 4) under the influence of winter rainfall, and later breeding in the north (Zones 1 and 2) where late-summer rains are usual. Peak egg-laying months have been documented as September–December in Zimbabwe, October–January in the Transvaal, October–November in KwaZulu-Natal, but September–October in the south-western Cape Province and September–March in Namibia (Winterbottom 1968a; Dean 1971; Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Brown & Clinning in press).

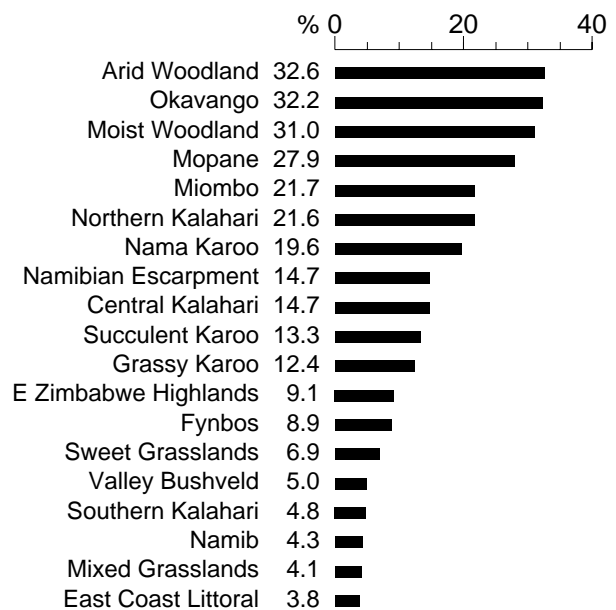
**Interspecific relationships:** It is parasitized by Klaas's Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx klaas* (Maclean 1993b). It is found alongside the Redfaced Crombec in *Baikiaea* woodland in Zimbabwe, but with clear vertical zonation, the Longbilled Crombec occupying the understorey (Irwin 1981). It joins mixed bird parties in woodland (Maclean 1993b).

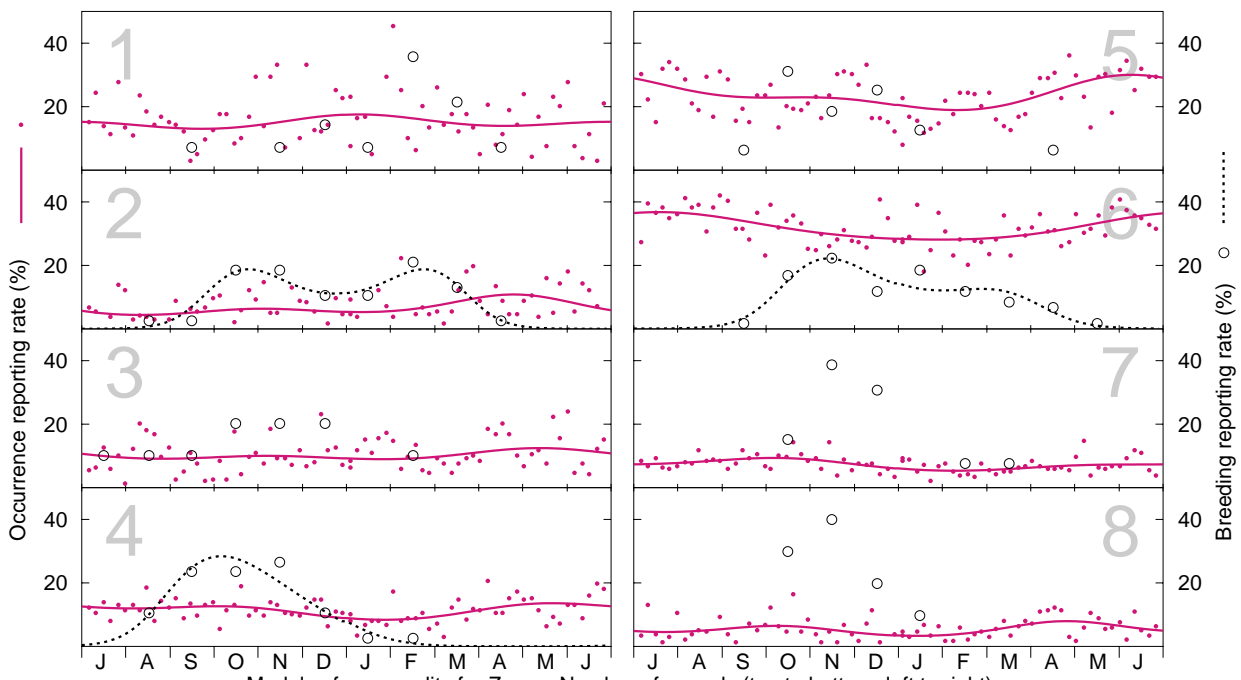
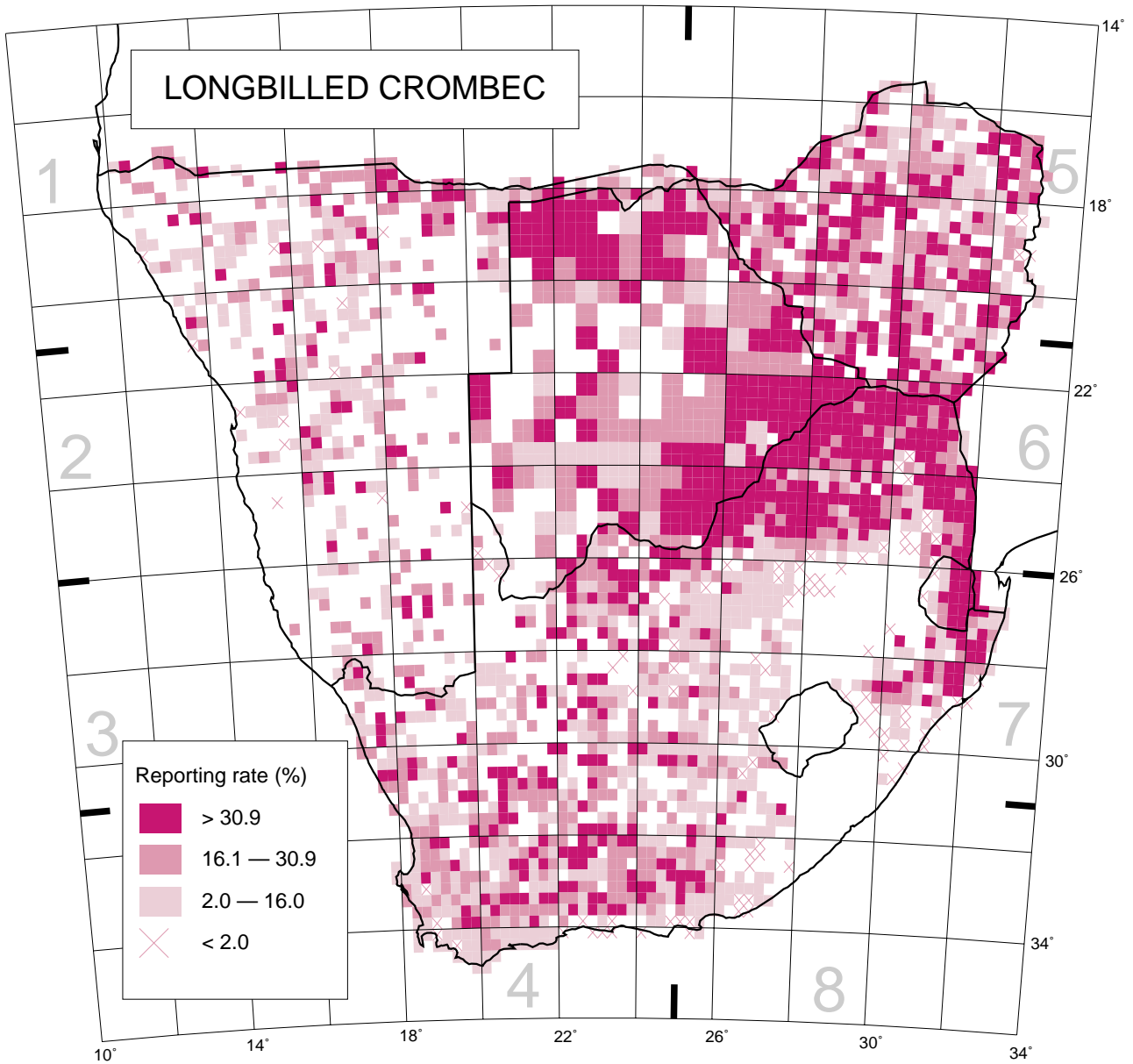
**Historical distribution and conservation:** There are differences between this and previously published distribution maps (Earlé & Grobler 1987; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Penry 1994) but these are believed to be the result of differences in coverage. The distribution is not likely to have changed significantly in historical times. The Longbilled Crombec is widespread and relatively unspecialized in its habitat requirements, and hence not threatened.

J.A. Harrison

Recorded in 2728 grid cells, 60.1%  
Total number of records: 20 912  
Mean reporting rate for range: 18.4%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 488, 252, 570, 1007, 2078, 3630, 1416, 302; Breeding: 14, 38, 10, 38, 16, 59, 13, 10.