

Bleating and Greybacked Warblers

Kwê-kwêvoël en Gysrugkwê-kwêvoël

Camaroptera brachyura and *C. brevicaudata*

The Bleating Warbler is a common forest bird in which the southern African populations are geographically disjunct from East African populations (Hall & Moreau 1970). In South Africa it is common in the eastern Cape Province, KwaZulu-Natal and parts of the eastern Transvaal. It is also common in Swaziland, south-eastern Zimbabwe (Irwin 1981) and southern Mozambique south of the Save River (Clancey *et al.* 1991). The Greybacked Warbler occurs virtually throughout Zimbabwe and the northern parts of the Transvaal, northern and eastern Botswana and northern Namibia. It is widely distributed in woodlands throughout Africa (Hall & Moreau 1970).

The distribution map suggests that the Knysna Forest, at the southern extremity of the range, is a somewhat isolated stronghold for the Bleating Warbler, with markedly lower reporting rates in the areas immediately to the east; indeed the high coastal reporting rates show a sudden drop south of about 33°S at East London (3327BB). The high reporting rates for eastern Swaziland are also in marked contrast to areas just to the north in the eastern Transvaal lowveld. There is a marked stronghold for the Greybacked Warbler in the Okavango region and also in the upper Limpopo Valley along the South African–Botswana border. In Zimbabwe this form appears least common on the high-lying central watershed (see also Irwin 1981), and there is a curious absence from the Owambo region of northcentral Namibia.

The taxonomic status of the Bleating and Greybacked Warblers is controversial (Hall & Moreau 1970). Treated as a single species during the atlas period (Clancey 1980b; Irwin 1981), the two forms were split by Mayr *et al.* (1986) and Clancey *et al.* (1991). The situation is complex (Hall & Moreau 1970; Irwin 1981) because hybrids are known from Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique and the eastern highlands of Zimbabwe (White 1960; Irwin 1981), but the species mainly show sharp gradations in plumage and habitat choice where their ranges meet (White 1960; Hall & Moreau 1970; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). Earlier, birds attributed to the Greybacked Warbler were recorded from KwaZulu-Natal (Roberts 1932; Clancey 1964b), and Clancey (1980b) reported Greybacked Warbler-like birds from the eastern Transvaal and KwaZulu-Natal. Speciation in these two forms may not be complete, but the differentiation between them deserves recognition. Although Clancey (1980b) showed a line separating the two taxa in his distribution map, Tarboton *et al.* (1987b) stated that the two forms overlap broadly in their geographical range in the Transvaal. The Bleating Warbler there occurs along the escarpment and major lowveld rivers, extending westwards along the Limpopo as far as its confluence with the Shashe River (2229AB) and also westwards along the Olifants River as far as Marble Hall (2429CD). The Greybacked Warbler is widely distributed in the

woodlands of the central and eastern lowveld parts of the Transvaal.

Both forms are highly vocal and occur singly or in pairs. They are probably recorded most often on the basis of their distinctive calls. Misidentification with other species is unlikely and the two forms are easily distinguished from one another by the green back of the Bleating Warbler and the grey (breeding season) or olive-brown (nonbreeding season) back of the Greybacked Warbler.

Habitat: The Bleating Warbler is a bird of evergreen forests, occurring in lowland, riparian, montane and temperate forest, and may use small patches of forest or dense secondary growth and thickets. It also inhabits dense stands of alien trees (e.g. Parker 1994). The high reporting rates in East Coast Littoral, Afro-montane Forest and Valley Bushveld can be attributed to this form, but it can also be common in patches of suitable habitat in other vegetation types. The Greybacked Warbler occurs in thickets and dense cover in drier deciduous woodlands in southern Africa, and the high reporting rates in the Okavango, Northern Kalahari, Mopane and Miombo vegetation types can be largely or exclusively attributed to this form. Reporting rates were also relatively high in Arid and Moist Woodlands, but both species occur fairly widely in these vegetation types.

Movements: Both forms are regarded as resident (e.g. Irwin 1981). Modelled reporting rates show a slight winter decrease, probably a result of reduced vocalizations, in Zones 1, 5 and 6 which correspond largely with the range of the Greybacked Warbler. This pattern is not as distinct for Zones 4, 7 and 8 which largely correspond with the range of the Bleating Warbler. Clancey (1964b, 1971c) suggested that there was winter movement from higher altitudes to the lowlands of KwaZulu-Natal and southern Mozambique.

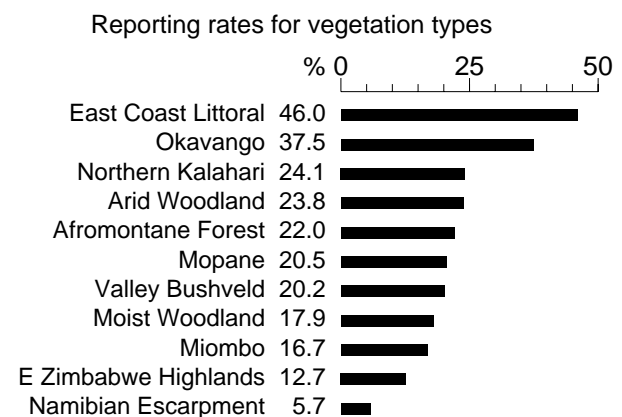
Breeding: During the atlas period, breeding was recorded for both forms during the wet summer, September–April, confirming existing information (Dean 1971; Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Skinner 1995a; Brown & Clinning in press).

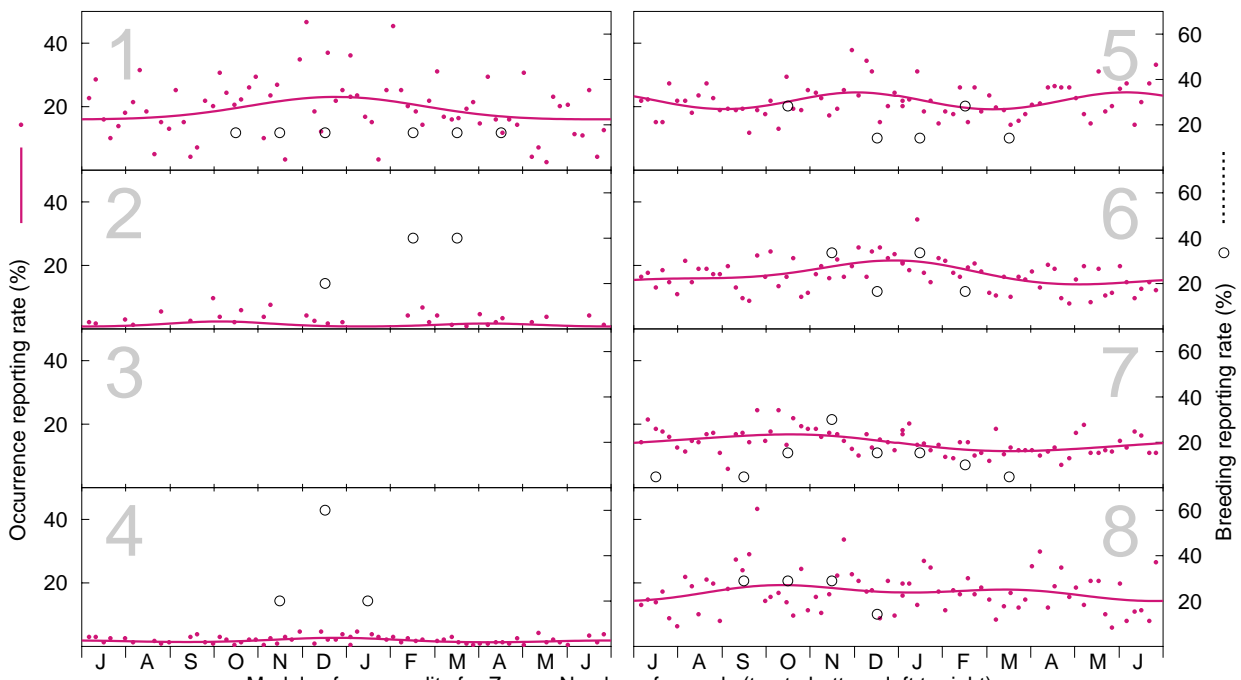
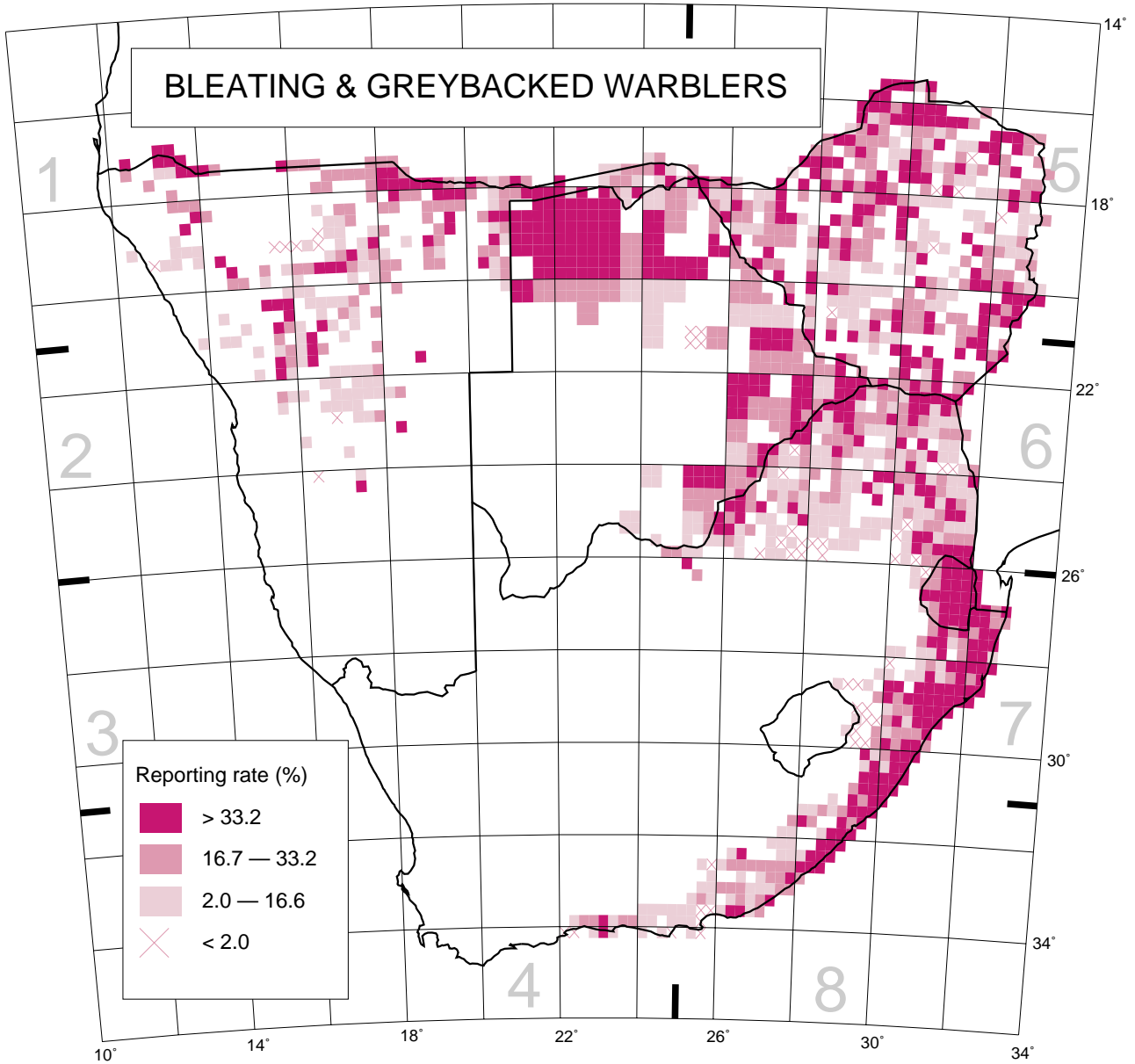
Interspecific relationships: The details of the ecology and distribution of each form, and of hybrid zones, warrant study to resolve their taxonomic relationship in the northern and eastern Transvaal, eastern Zimbabwe and southern Mozambique, where the Greybacked Warbler reaches the coast at Beira and possibly further south in the interior (White 1960; Clancey 1971c).

Historical distribution and conservation: The historical distributions of the two forms are not known to have differed from the present. Both are widely distributed, common and able to utilize secondary growth and alien vegetation, and there is no long-term threat to their survival.

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Recorded in 1463 grid cells, 32.2%
Total number of records: 17 611
Mean reporting rate for range: 24.9%





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 604, 47, 0, 154, 1894, 1953, 2758, 939; Breeding: 6, 5, 0, 5, 7, 6, 20, 7.