



Cloud Cisticola

Gevlekte Klopkloppie

Cisticola texrix

The Cloud Cisticola is near-endemic to southern Africa and occurs in South Africa, Lesotho and sparsely in Swaziland. A widely separated relict population occurs in Zambia and southern Zaire (Benson *et al.* 1971; Maclean 1993b). It occurs in the western and southern Cape Province and from 22°E through the eastern Cape Province and Transkei (where it is sparse), to the Free State, Transvaal, Lesotho lowlands and inland KwaZulu-Natal. It is most abundant in the southern Transvaal and the southern and eastern Free State. There is a remarkable cut-off west of 25° E. Clancey *et al.* (1987) included southeastern Botswana in its range, but it was not recorded there during the atlas period, nor does there seem to be any other confirmed record from that country (Borello 1992b; Penry 1994).

Easily confused with four other small grass cisticola species, it is identified mainly on the basis of its call, except for the isolated nominate race in the western Cape Province, which can be identified by its ventral streaking. This race is sometimes considered to be a separate species (Hockey *et al.* 1989).

The atlas records primarily reflect the summer distribution and the map is probably fairly accurate, although some misidentifications are inevitable in this group.

Habitat: It occurs in short grasslands with relatively low basal cover, mainly in the grassland biome and in the Grassy Karoo; it is absent above 2000 m. It requires open

grassland and does not tolerate invasion by scrub and trees. In the western Cape Province it occurs in restioid fynbos, but has colonized and breeds in fields of winter cereal crops. It was reported from estuarine marshland near Port Elizabeth (3325DC) by Lynes (1930). It is common in *Themeda triandra* grassland on the highveld where it overlaps mainly with Ayres' Cisticola *C. ayresii* (Dean 1976; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b).

Movements: There is strong seasonality in reporting rates with a drop in winter when the species behaves unobtrusively and is difficult to identify without the help of diagnostic calls and displays. Records from the western Cape Province show no seasonality, presumably because this population can be identified year-round on plumage. Droughts, overgrazing and burning affect its habitat and must prompt local movements. There is apparently no record of regular seasonal movements in the literature.

Breeding: Atlas records confirm that breeding occurs earlier (July–December) in the nominate race in the western Cape Province than elsewhere, where egg-laying spans late spring and summer (September–March) (Winterbottom 1968a; Dean 1971; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Maclean 1993b).

Interspecific relationships: It is most closely related to Ayres' and Palecrowned *C. brunescens* Cisticolas. It overlaps extensively with all four similar small cisticolas.

It is a host of the brood-parasitic Cuckoo Finch *Anomalospiza imberbis* (Maclean 1993b).

Historical distribution and conservation: It has almost disappeared from the Cape Flats (3418BA) where it was displaced by alien vegetation, and development for agriculture and housing (Hockey *et al.* 1989). Cyrus & Robson (1980) suggested that it is more widely distributed in KwaZulu-Natal than described by Clancey (1964b) or than recorded in this atlas, but there was some confusion between this species and Ayres' Cisticola in Cyrus & Robson (1980). It expanded its Transvaal range westwards during the years of good rain in the 1970s (Ginn *et al.* 1989).

The Cloud Cisticola is not threatened. The ability of the western race to adapt to agriculture means that it was not displaced on a large scale by the loss of indigenous fynbos.

A. Berruti

Recorded in 596 grid cells, 13.1%
Total number of records: 3995
Mean reporting rate for range: 6.2%

Reporting rates for vegetation types



