

Palecrowned Cisticola

Bleekkopkloppie

Cisticola brunnescens

The Palecrowned Cisticola occurs from South Africa to Cameroon and Ethiopia, and is locally distributed in the eastern Cape Province, Transkei, KwaZulu-Natal, northeastern Free State, south-eastern Transvaal and on the Mashonaland plateau in Zimbabwe. There are three southern African subspecies (Clancey 1980b, 1992a): *C. b. cinnamomea* in Zimbabwe, *egregia* in upland KwaZulu-Natal and the Transvaal, and the newly described *taciturnus* in a coastal band from the Transkei to KwaZulu-Natal (Clancey 1992a). Clancey (1992a) suggested that the coastal race may prove to be a separate species.

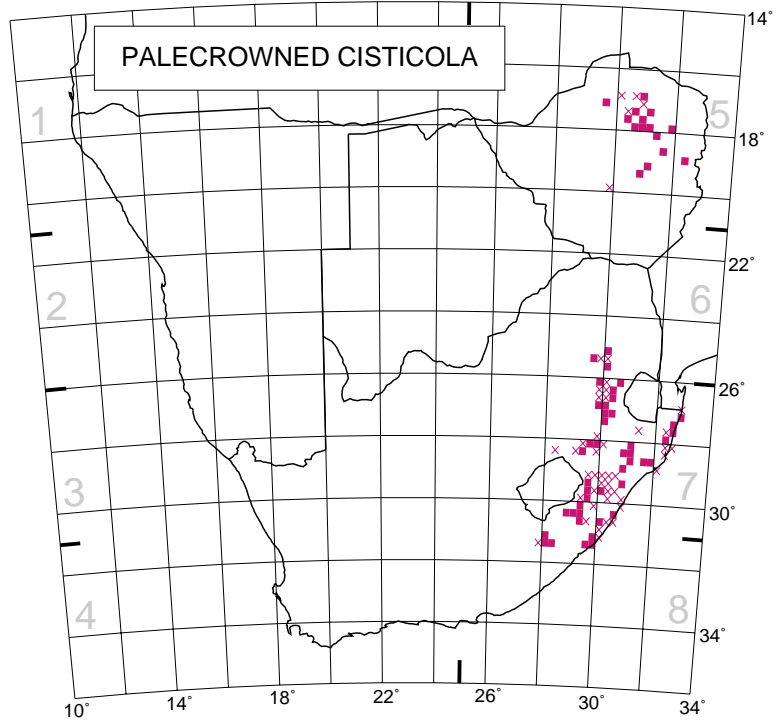
It occurs in dense short grasses and forbs, on the edges of vleis and seasonally moist grasslands and depressions, in woodland and grassland biomes. It was recorded mainly in the East Coast Littoral, Sour Grasslands and Miombo vegetation types. It does not occur within woodlands or forests, but in adjacent suitable habitats. It is identified by call, behaviour and breeding-male plumage, but there is a strong possibility of confusion with other small cisticolas. It often occurs alongside Fantailed *C. juncidis* and Ayres' *C. ayresii* Cisticolas. Females and nonbreeding males are essentially indistinguishable in the field from Ayres' Cisticola.

Seasonal changes in reporting rates may reflect the difficulty of identifying this species in winter. However, the KwaZulu-Natal midlands populations are regarded as altitudinal migrants, moving to coastal lowlands in winter (Clancey 1992a; Maclean 1993b). Seasonal movements have not been described for Zimbabwe (Irwin 1981) or the Transvaal (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). A clear definition of its seasonal movements is not currently possible.

Egglaying spans November–May (mainly December–January) (Dean 1971; Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). It is a host of the brood-parasitic Cuckoo Finch *Anomalospiza imberbis* (Maclean 1993b).

Compared to Earlé & Grobler (1987) and Skead (1967b), atlas records represent range extensions into the Free State and eastern Cape Province. The atlas did not confirm the species' presence in the Okavango, where ideal habitat exists, but its occurrence there has been authenticated by specimens (Penry 1994). It was rarely reported for the Natal atlas (Cyrus & Robson 1980); more frequent reports during the present atlas period probably reflect improved identification skills of observers. The Palecrowned Cisticola is not considered threatened in South Africa, but its status should be monitored (Brooke 1984b), particularly in the light of its dependence on moist grasslands which are under pressure from stock farming and afforestation.

A. Berruti



Recorded in 105 grid cells, 2.3%
 Total number of records: 433
 Mean reporting rate for range: 3.3%

Reporting rates for vegetation types

