



## Tinkling Cisticola

### Rootinktinkie

#### *Cisticola rufilata*

The Tinkling Cisticola is a woodland species of southcentral Africa, occurring from the northern regions of southern Africa northwards to Angola and across to western Malawi. Its centre of abundance is in the Kalahari in Botswana, although it is widely but more thinly distributed in Zimbabwe and northern Namibia, and with a scattered distribution in the central northern parts of South Africa (northern and western Transvaal and northern Cape Province). Birds on Kalahari sands in Namibia, Botswana and South Africa belong to the nominate race, while those to the northeast on the plateau in Zimbabwe belong to the race *C. r. vicinior* (Clancey 1980b; Irwin 1981).

It occurred at densities of 1 pair/12 ha in favourable habitat at the edge of its range at Nylsvlei (2428DA) (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). In the core of its distribution in Botswana, 81 birds were counted in transects covering 140 ha (1 bird/1.7 ha) of Central Kalahari habitat, but none were encountered in 70 ha of the Northern Kalahari (M. Herremans unpubl. data).

It is most readily confused with the Rattling Cisticola *C. chiniana*, but it has a distinct voice and orange-rufous tail, and generally prefers different habitat. Lynes (1930) regarded this species as one of the most secretive of the cisticolas and it may have been under-reported during the atlas. It occurs singly, in pairs, or in family groups.

**Habitat:** It prefers scrub in open woodland, particularly in association with arid deciduous woodland on sandy soils. In the northern Transvaal the habitat is described as broadleaved deciduous savanna or scrub with open areas of rank grass between scattered low trees such as *Terminalia sericea* and *Burkea africana* (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). In Botswana it uses stunted bushes or secondary growth in grassland and edges of pans in semi-desert bush and scrub savanna; it also occurs on the edge of woodland and in tree savanna in sandy areas in the north of Botswana, and in scrubby Mopane and disturbed

areas with secondary growth (Penry 1994). In the Okavango it occupies dry, sandy floodplains with regenerating scrub. In Zimbabwe it occurs in scrub in savanna, in Kalahari sand areas and on the edges of *Baikiaea* and *Brachystegia* woodland (Irwin 1981).

The overall reporting rate in the Northern Kalahari was much higher than in the Central Kalahari, but this results from the species' absence from a substantial part of that biome in the northern Cape Province; it is almost certainly most abundant in the Central Kalahari of Botswana.

**Movements:** It is resident. It shows a marked late-summer (December–March) peak in reporting rates, with very low reporting rates in winter. This trend is apparent even in regions where it is not common, and reflects the secretive nature of this species which is seldom recorded when not calling.

**Breeding:** Egg-laying has been recorded throughout summer, October–March, with a peak December–February (Irwin 1981; Skinner 1995a; Brown & Clinning in press).

**Interspecific relationships:** It is grouped in a superspecies with the Greybacked *C. subruficapilla* and Wailing *C. lais* Cisticolas in southern Africa (Hall & Moreau 1970); neither of these overlap in range with the Tinkling Cisticola. It is similar in size and shape to the Rattling Cisticola, which also occurs in woodlands, but the latter prefers moister woodlands, particularly dense *Acacia* savannas; the complementarity of the ranges is clear in eastern Botswana, along the Kalahari sandveld/eastern hardveld boundary. The ranges overlap more widely in northern Botswana. The two species appear to be ecological equivalents in different types of woodlands. The Tinkling Cisticola also overlaps widely with the Black-chested Prinia *Prinia flavicans*, but it is not known to what extent they may compete.

It is a host of the brood-parasitic Sharp-billed Honeyguide *Prodotiscus regulus* (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b).

**Historical distribution and conservation:** The historical range is not known to have differed from the present. The species is widespread in dry woodlands which are unsuitable for intensive agriculture, but it may be vulnerable to bush-clearing and overgrazing. The Tinkling Cisticola is currently not threatened.

*A. Berruti*

Recorded in 601 grid cells, 13.2%  
Total number of records: 664  
Mean reporting rate for range: 6.1%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types



