



## Rattling Cisticola

### Bosveldtinkinkie

#### *Cisticola chiniana*

The Rattling Cisticola is common and widespread in southern, southcentral and eastern Africa, and is abundant in woodland savannas and bushveld of the northern and eastern parts of southern Africa. It is one of the commonest birds in southern Mozambique (Clancey 1971c). In South Africa its southernmost distribution limit in the east lies in the Transkei. It occurs in open woodlands from KwaZulu-Natal northwards, and in the Transvaal, northern Free State and northwestern Cape Province. It is absent from the grasslands of the central highveld in South Africa, and largely absent from the central and southern Kalahari, with a scattered distribution in Namibia from the central regions northwards. Six subspecies are described for the region (Clancey 1992a); all appear to have continuous ranges on the present map. It occurs as densely as 1 pair/4 ha at Nylsvlei (2428DA) (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b).

It is conspicuous with a distinctive call. Within southern Africa it is most likely to be confused with the Tinkling Cisticola *C. rufilata*, which has a different call and plumage and is confined mainly to relatively dry woodlands.

**Habitat:** It occurs in tree savanna, particularly *Acacia* woodland, where grassland is interspersed with trees and thickets or scrub. It also occurs on the fringes of dense woodland, and in coastal scrub patches. In the Okavango it is typical of edge habitats between riparian woodland and wet floodplains. It reached its highest reporting rates in a variety of woodland types, including Arid Woodland, Miombo, Okavango, Moist Woodland, Mopane and Northern Kalahari.

**Movements:** It is resident. The models show clear winter troughs in reporting rates in Zones where it is common, presumably because it is less vocal at this time.

**Breeding:** It breeds during the wet season in spring and summer. The atlas data suggest earlier breeding in KwaZulu-Natal (Zone 7) than in the Transvaal (Zone 6) or Zimbabwe (Zone 5). A similar time-shift of about a month between KwaZulu-Natal and the Transvaal can be inferred from peak egg-laying dates (Dean 1971; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b), but Irwin (1981) reported egg-laying in Zimbabwe October–April (peak November–January), which is much earlier than in the smaller atlas sample. Egg-laying in Botswana and Namibia appears to

be late in the wet season, October–April (peak December–March) (Skinner 1995a; Brown & Clinning in press.).

**Interspecific relationships:** It is similar in size and shape to the Tinkling, Greybacked *C. subruficapilla* and Wailing *C. lais* Cisticolas. The Wailing Cisticola occurs in hilly grasslands, while the Greybacked Cisticola is a western species of fynbos and scrub. The Tinkling Cisticola occurs in drier woodlands, often on sandy soils, and prefers arid deciduous woodland to *Acacia* woodland. The Rattling Cisticola widely overlaps with the Tawnyflanked *Prinia subflava* and Black-chested *P. flavicans* Prinias, but to what extent they compete is unknown.

**Historical distribution and conservation:** The historical range is not known to have differed from the present, but clearing of trees and overgrazing has probably caused local declines in abundance. It was previously regarded as absent from the Transkei (Clancey 1980b, 1994b; Quickelberge 1989), although it was shown to be present by Maclean (1993b). It was confirmed from that region in the atlas, but it is possible that the species was merely overlooked there in the past.

The Rattling Cisticola is the most common cisticola of woodlands in southern Africa, occurring in a range of vegetation types, and it is not threatened.

A. Berruti

Recorded in 1445 grid cells, 31.8%  
Total number of records: 14 671  
Mean reporting rate for range: 21.6%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types



