



Levaillant's Cisticola Vleitinkinkie

Cisticola tinniens

Levaillant's Cisticola is widespread in South Africa, Lesotho and western Swaziland, and occurs above 1200 m in Zimbabwe (Irwin 1981). It is also found in Angola, Zambia and Kenya. It is common throughout parts of southern Africa with a relatively temperate climate, being replaced by the Black-backed Cisticola *C. galactotes* in the subtropical north and east. In South Africa it is most abundant in the western Cape Province, Free State, southern Transvaal and high-lying areas of KwaZulu-Natal. There is a single record from Botswana (Penry 1994). There is a wide gap between the Zimbabwean population (*C. t. shiwaee*) and birds south of the Limpopo River (nominant race) (Clancey 1980b).

This is one of the dark-backed cisticolas which is more easily identified than most other cisticolas because of the combination of its dark plumage, voice and habitat. The male is more vocal and conspicuous during the breeding season.

Habitat: It usually inhabits rank grass and weeds, sedges and edges of reedbeds, on marshy ground, or emergent vegetation in water. It is also found in rank vegetation on drier ground, usually when wetlands have dried out, but may also occur in rank vegetation next to wetlands, even occurring in maize fields (pers. obs). It occurs in wetlands in any of the major vegetation types within its distribution range.

Movements: The reporting rates show no or little seasonality in two Zones and a small winter decline in other Zones. Most cisticolas show a marked winter decline in reporting rates, but this species is comparatively easy to locate and identify even when not breeding. It is resident throughout its range, although it does appear to show local movement or simply micro-habitat shifts away from wetland vegetation to drier adjacent vegetation during the nonbreeding season.

Breeding: Breeding begins in July in the winter-rainfall area of the southwestern Cape Province, with the peak of egg-laying August–October (Winterbottom 1968a). Further east and north, breeding is later, spanning October–April, with peak egg-laying November–February (Dean 1971; Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b).

Interspecific relationships: The three dark-backed cisticolas in southern Africa, Levaillant's, Blackbacked and Chirping *C. pipiens* Cisticolas, are all associated with wetlands and

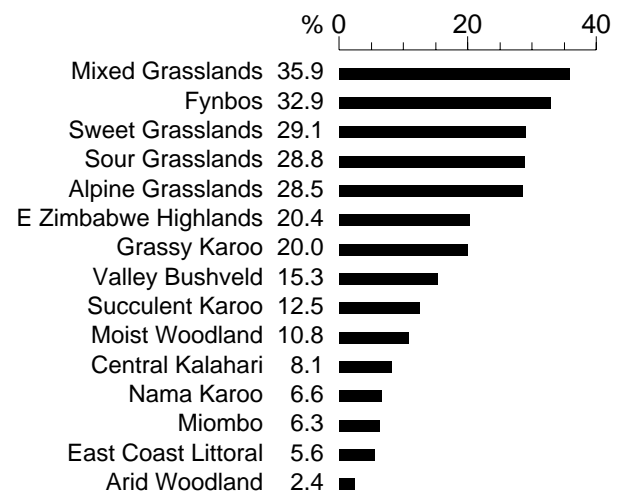
more or less replace one another. The Chirping (confined to the Okavango basin in southern Africa) and Blackbacked Cisticolas occur in subtropical areas, whereas Levaillant's Cisticola occurs in regions of southern Africa with more temperate climate. The only area where Levaillant's and Blackbacked Cisticolas occasionally occur together appears to be on the coast of KwaZulu-Natal, although Levaillant's and Chirping Cisticolas occur in the same areas in Zambia (Benson *et al.* 1971). It uses the upper stratum of the vegetation more than other warblers in the same habitat (*viz.* mainly Cape Reed *Acrocephalus gracilirostris*, African Marsh A. *baeticatus* and African Sedge *Bradypterus baboecala* Warblers).

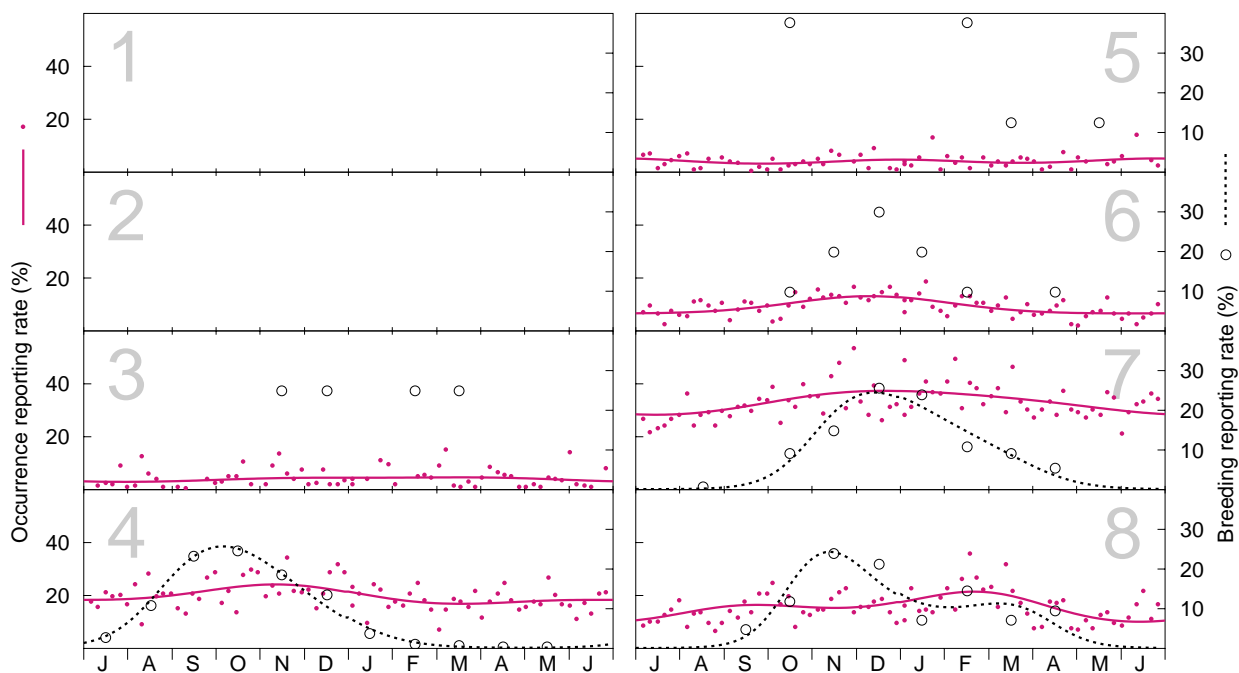
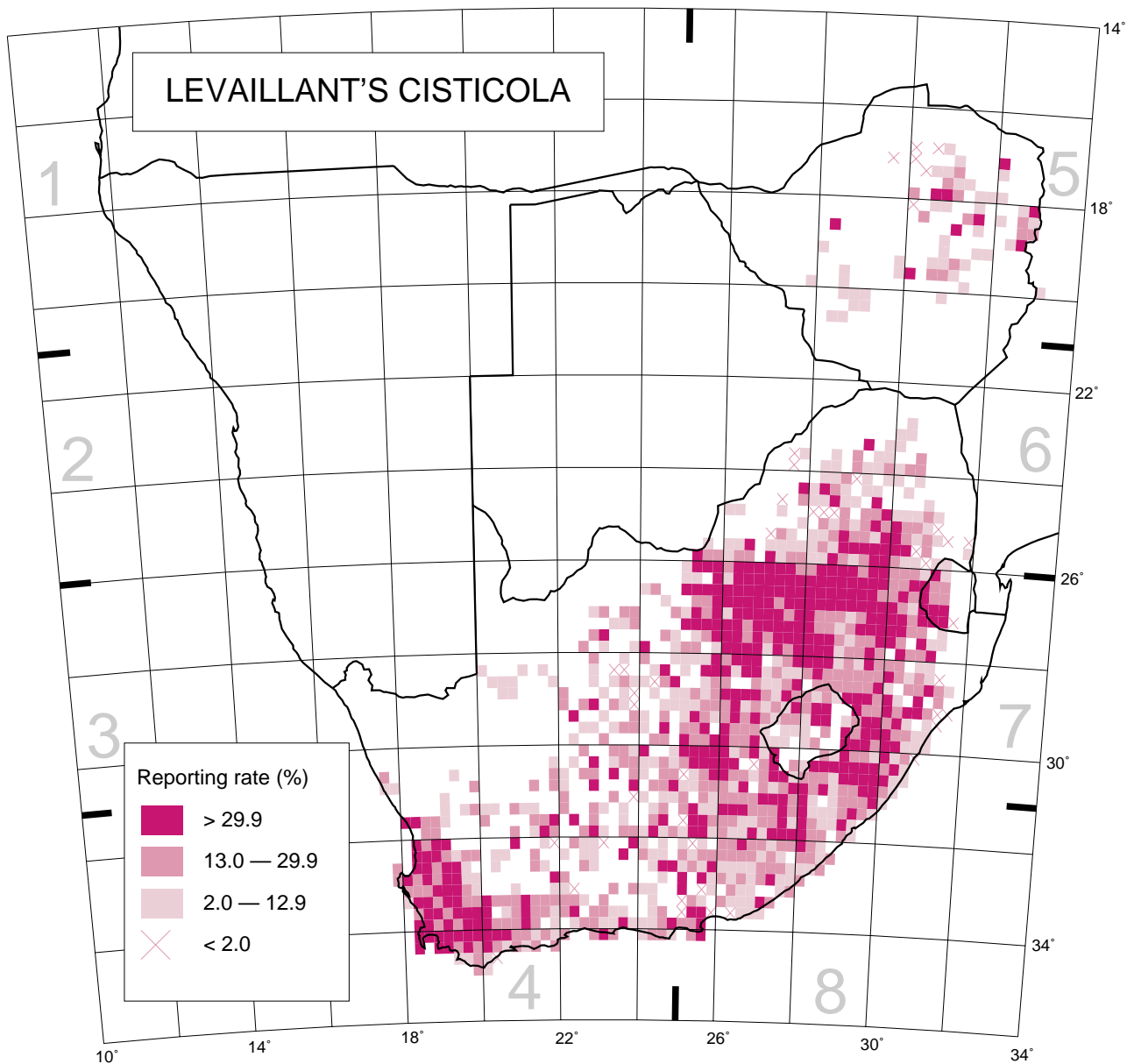
Historical distribution and conservation: The distribution is not known to have differed from the present, although the construction of dams has presumably created much new habitat in areas where it did not previously occur. Levaillant's Cisticola is not threatened. The loss of natural wetland habitats has been offset, for this species, by the creation of numerous dams.

A. Berruti

Recorded in 1182 grid cells, 26.1%
Total number of records: 25 048
Mean reporting rate for range: 25.9%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 0, 0, 218, 1719, 357, 1030, 6490, 857; Breeding: 0, 0, 4, 259, 8, 10, 109, 42.