

## Blackchested Prinia

### Swartbandlangstertjie

#### *Prinia flavicans*

The Blackchested Prinia is near-endemic to southern Africa, extending beyond the atlas region only into southern Angola and western Zambia. It is a species of the arid and semi-arid interior of southern Africa with its centre of abundance in the Kalahari. It is also abundant in the southwestern Transvaal, Free State and the northern Cape Province. It extends marginally into the eastern Transvaal and eastern Cape Province. It is widespread in Namibia, confined and local in the drier southwestern part of Zimbabwe (Irwin 1981), and occurs marginally in the lowlands of Lesotho. It is absent from eastern higher-rainfall areas such as Mozambique and KwaZulu-Natal (Clancey 1964b, 1971c), and temperate regions such as the southwestern Cape Province and Lesotho highlands (Hockey *et al.* 1989; Bonde 1993). The four subspecies recognized by Clancey (1980b) show continuous ranges on the present map.

It occurs at densities of 1 pair/8 ha in *Acacia* woodland, and 1 pair/21 ha in broadleaved woodland, at Nylsvley (2428DA) (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b) outside the core area, while densities in Botswana averaged 1 bird/0.7 ha in 11 thornveld habitats (M. Herremans unpubl. data).

It is active and conspicuous, occurring in pairs or family groups. It forages mainly low down but may feed at higher levels and call from perches on top of trees and bushes. In transitional plumage, the black band on the chest may be replaced by streaking, and it may then be easily confused with the Spotted Prinia *P. hypoxantha*, and possibly juvenile Karoo Prinia *P. maculosa*. The number of potential misidentifications involved is probably small. The atlas distribution pattern should be regarded as accurate.

**Habitat:** It occurs in scrub, rank grass, low bushes and secondary growth in open woodlands or grasslands, along drainage lines, on the edges of cultivated lands or in abandoned fields, and in gardens. It occurs in a wide array of low-rainfall vegetation types in the southern African thornbelt, but is most common in the Central and Southern Kalahari and the Sweet Grasslands.

**Movements:** The models show a tendency for a late-summer peak in the western Zones, and very little change in the lower reporting rates from the eastern parts of the range. It is resident, and there is no indication in the literature of any movements. Increased reporting rates probably resulted from increased conspicuousness during breeding.

**Breeding:** The timing of breeding is probably influenced mainly by rain. During the atlas, evidence for breeding was recorded August–May in the eastern Zones, and October–May in the northwest, and in most months (mainly October–April) in the southwest. Egg-laying has been recorded August–May in the atlas region, with a peak November–February in the Transvaal, but January–March in Namibia (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Skinner 1995a; Brown & Clinning in press).

**Interspecific relationships:** The ecology of the different *Prinia* species varies slightly, and the range of the Blackchested Prinia overlaps with the Karoo Prinia and Tawnyflanked Prinia *P. subflava*. The Karoo Prinia occurs in shorter scrubby vegetation and the Tawnyflanked Prinia prefers moister and taller woodland and thickets with taller grasses (including reeds). Hybridization or suspected hybridization between the Blackchested and Karoo Prinia has been reported twice (Rowan 1962b; Brooke 1993). The Blackchested Prinia frequently forages with the similarly shaped and sized Rufouseared Warbler *Malcorus pectoralis* which feeds more at ground-level than the prinia (Ginn *et al.* 1989).

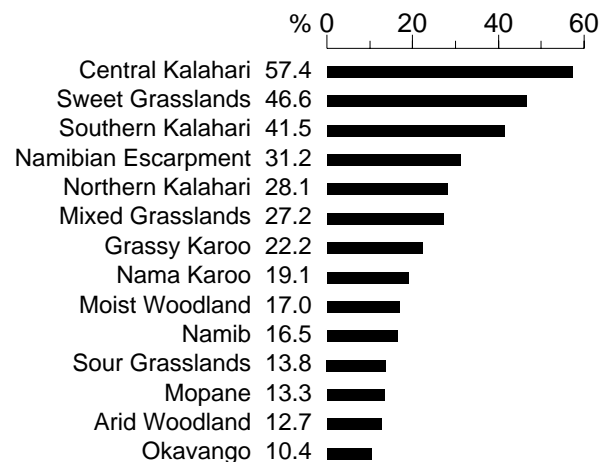
It is a host of the brood-parasitic Cuckoo Finch *Anomalouspiza imberbis* (Maclean 1993b).

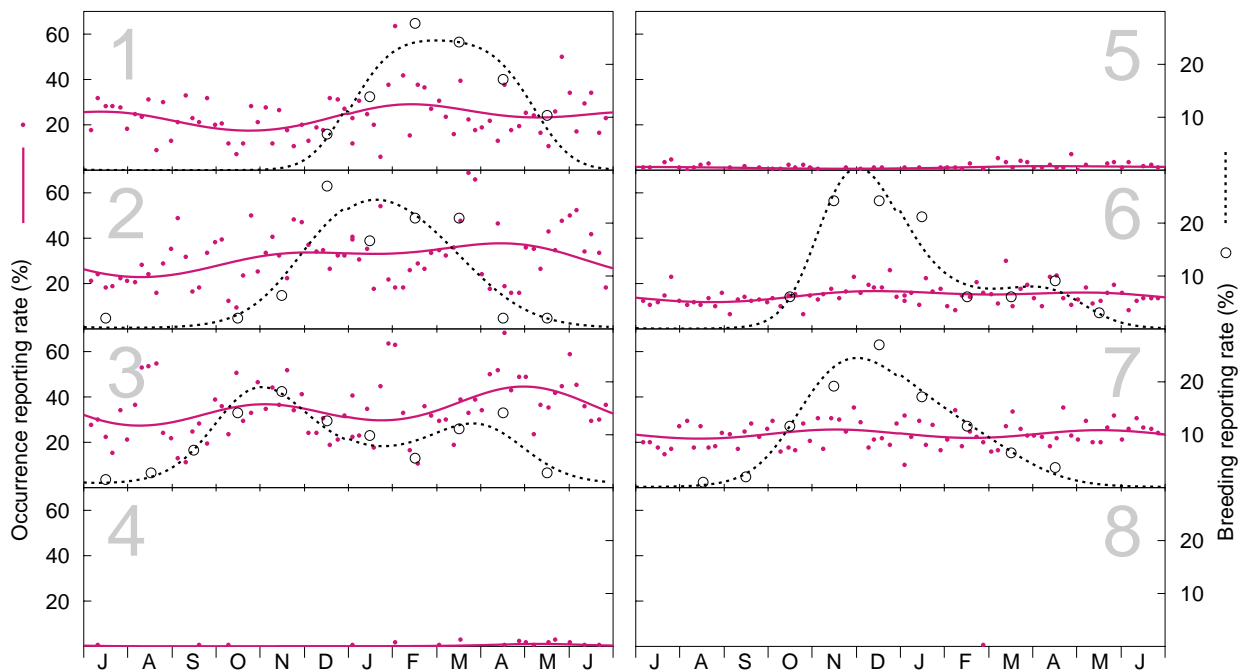
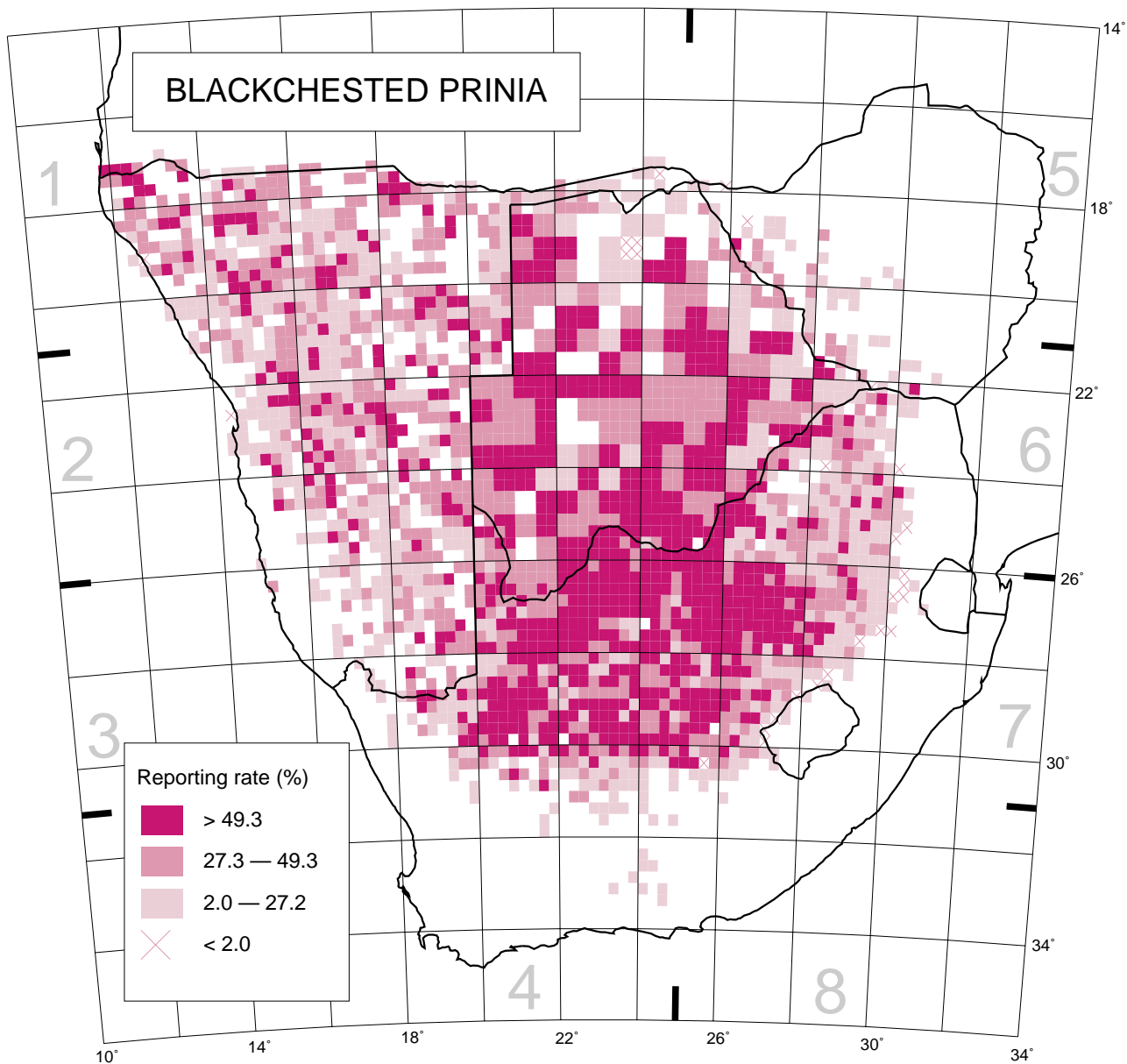
**Historical distribution and conservation:** The historical distribution is not known to have differed from that of the present. The Blackchested Prinia is common and widely distributed; it occurs in areas unsuitable for intensive agriculture or development and adapts to suburban gardens, and is therefore not threatened.

A. Berruti

Recorded in 2467 grid cells, 54.4%  
Total number of records: 21 913  
Mean reporting rate for range: 33.4%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 785, 1137, 1931, 28, 106, 1687, 4622, 1; Breeding: 29, 48, 71, 0, 0, 33, 104, 0.