



Black Flycatcher

Swartvlieëvanger

Melaenornis pammelaina

The Black Flycatcher is common in the moister woodlands in the east and north of southern Africa. Its regular southern limit is Port Elizabeth (3325DC). It extends from the eastern Cape Province, through KwaZulu-Natal and Swaziland to the Transvaal where it skirts the highveld. The range includes the whole of Zimbabwe, the moister parts of eastern and northern Botswana, and northeastern Namibia. It is thinly distributed in the Transkei. The apparently isolated records along the Kunene River in northwestern Namibia are part of a distribution which extends through Angola. North of the atlas region, it extends to Kenya (Maclean 1993b).

The nominate subspecies occurs in the lowlands and is to some extent separated by a break in the range along the Transvaal escarpment and through southeastern Zimbabwe, from *M. p. diabolicus* to the west and northwest.

It is conspicuous but can be confused with the Forktailed Drongo *Dicrurus adsimilis*, and more especially with the Squaretailed Drongo *D. ludwigii* and male Black Cuckoo-shrike *Campephaga flava*. Careful vetting has been applied and the data presented can be considered reliable and comprehensive.

Habitat: Atlas reporting rates were highest in Miombo, East Coast Littoral, Moist and Arid Woodlands. It is notably absent from the dry Kalahari, and its distribution may be limited to woodlands near surface water. It is less particular about habitat structure than many other species (D.N.J. pers. obs). The essential features are some taller vegetation, not necessarily clumped, with a view of open space, especially at ground-level where most food is caught by pouncing. Closed forest is not used, but alien scrub and gardens are acceptable. Skead (1967b) noted it in valley bushveld, thornveld and karroid brokenveld in the eastern Cape Province; Winterbottom (1971c) observed it to be a dominant in Kalahari sandveld in western Zimbabwe, in an area where water was present. It also favours freshly burnt veld (Dean 1987).

Movements: Although it is generally considered to be resident (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Maclean 1993b; Penry 1994), the atlas data suggested substantial regular movements within southern Africa. Reporting rates in the Caprivi and the Okavango (Zone 1) decreased in winter, at a time when reporting rates rose in the three northeastern Zones (5–7). This population shift neatly fits into the nonbreeding period, and most likely constitutes migration of part of the population into the moister eastern part of the subcontinent during the dry winter. Clancey (1964b) mentioned ‘post-breeding movement’, without being more specific.

Breeding: Egg-laying is in spring and early summer, ranging August–January with a September–October peak in Zimbabwe (Irwin 1981), but about a month later (September–February, October–November peak) further south in the Transvaal and KwaZulu-Natal (Dean 1971; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). Allowing for some bias towards later dates because of inclusion of records of fledglings, the atlas data confirm that breeding is about a month earlier in Zimbabwe (Zone 5) compared to all Zones further south (Zones 6–8) where breeding appears to be more synchronous.

Interspecific relationships: It has three close relatives with similar ecological requirements. The Pallid Flycatcher *M. pallidus* has a similar range and is probably closest in requirements. The ranges of Fiscal *Sigelus silens* and Marico *M. mariquensis* Flycatchers also overlap considerably with that of the Black Flycatcher, and all three forage mainly by ‘pouncing’ (Fraser 1983), using elevated perches to find food on the ground. Fiscal and Marico Flycatchers, however, have ranges more centred in the relatively dry bushveld to the west and south, being least common in the zone of overlap with the Black Flycatcher. Most significant ecological interactions may be with the taxonomically unrelated Forktailed Drongo, which it resembles closely in plumage and may be mimicking (Herremans 1992a; Maclean 1993b); they frequently associate during foraging (Maclean 1993b).

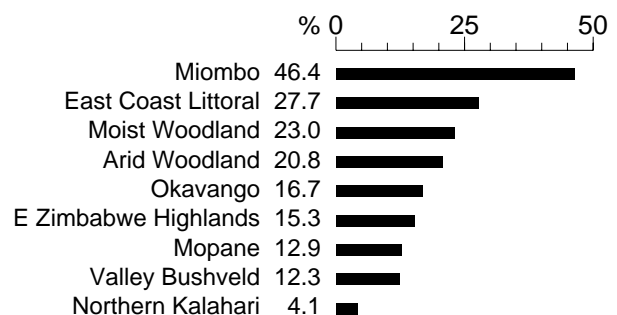
It may use the nests of other species such as the Redheaded Weaver *Anaplectes rubriceps* (Beasley 1985), Kurrichane Thrush *Turdus libonyana* (Hall 1983) or bulbuls (Maclean 1993b). There is no evidence, however, that it depends upon these species to provide nests.

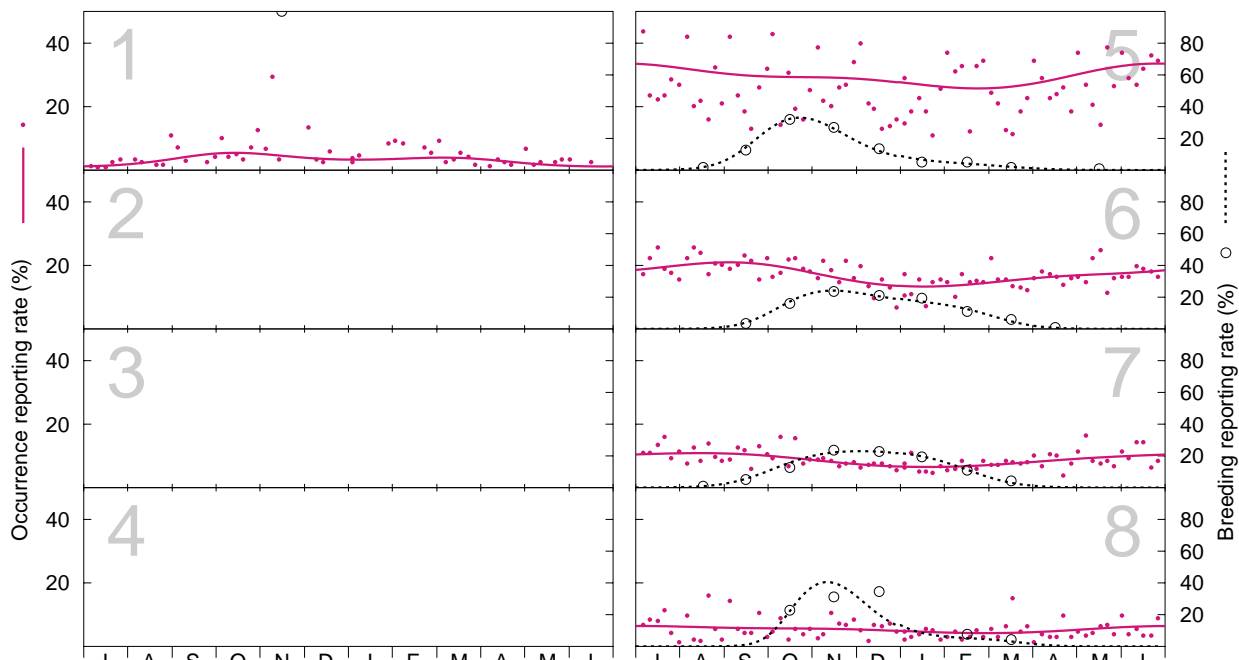
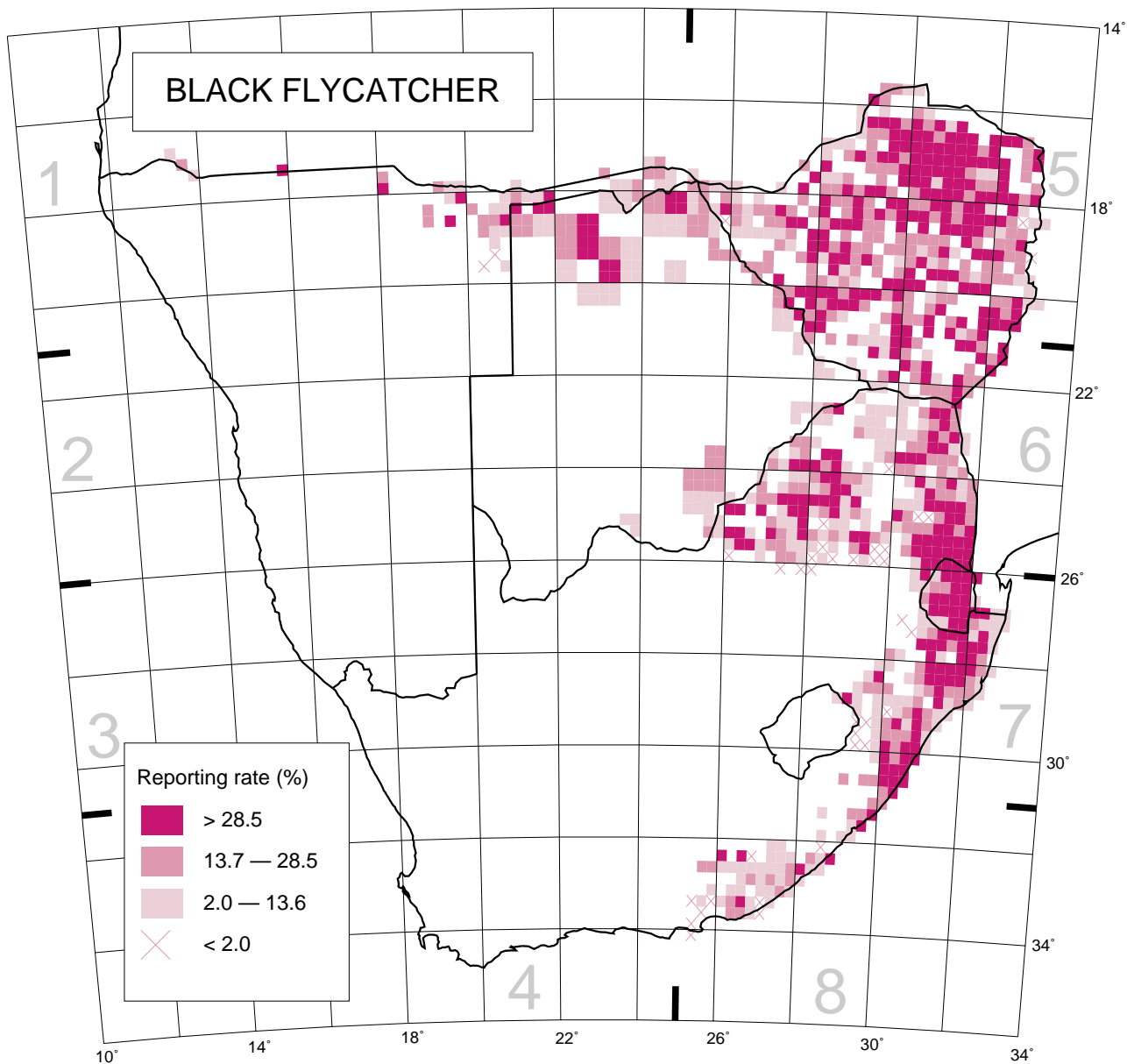
Historical distribution and conservation: There is no reliable evidence suggesting a recent change in range and the Black Flycatcher is under no particular threat.

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Recorded in 1034 grid cells, 22.8%
Total number of records: 15 053
Mean reporting rate for range: 23.4%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 103, 0, 0, 0, 2580, 1940, 1717, 295; Breeding: 1, 0, 0, 0, 143, 111, 93, 26.