

## Pallid Flycatcher

### Muiskleurvlieëvanger

*Melaenornis pallidus*

The Pallid Flycatcher is widespread in the woodlands of sub-Saharan Africa. In southern Africa it is limited to the north and northeast, including far northern Namibia, northern and eastern Botswana, most of Zimbabwe, the northern Transvaal, eastern Swaziland and northern KwaZulu-Natal. In the Transvaal lowveld it is relatively common along the base of the escarpment (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). In Zimbabwe it occurs principally on the central plateau and is largely absent from the major river basins (Irwin 1991). The absence of records from the southeastern lowveld of Zimbabwe is remarkable in the light of Irwin's (1981) statement that it is 'widespread although uncommon' there.

The four races described (Clancey 1980b) are thought to be clinal in nature (Irwin 1981), and the atlas data do not indicate discontinuities in the range along subspecific boundaries.

Although the reporting rates were relatively high in the lowveld of Swaziland (the result of particularly thorough coverage by an experienced observer), the species was nevertheless described as 'uncommon' in Swaziland (Parker 1994). This suggests that it is generally uncommon, a conclusion supported by surveys in Botswana and Zimbabwe (M. Herremans & A.J. Tree pers. comm.). Conversely, at Nylsvley (2428DA), breeding densities of 1 pair/30 ha have been recorded, which is comparable to other species generally thought of as common (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b).

It occurs in pairs or small family groups (Maclean 1993b). It is a quiet and unobtrusive species which was somewhat under-recorded; especially in Zimbabwe the patchy distribution is probably partly due to incomplete coverage. Lacking distinguishing markings, it is also prone to misidentification, especially for the Marico Flycatcher *M. mariquensis*, where these two species overlap.

**Habitat:** It is largely confined to broadleaved woodlands, particularly those with a well-developed understorey. It prefers open woodland or the edges of dense stands of trees (Irwin 1981). The vegetation analysis indicates Arid Woodland and Miombo vegetation types as having the highest reporting rates, followed by Eastern Zimbabwe Highlands, Northern Kalahari and Moist Woodland. The relevance of other vegetation types is dependent on the presence of patches of suitable woodland. It usually avoids *Acacia* woodlands, except where these are not occupied by the Marico Flycatcher (Maclean 1993b).

**Movements:** It is resident with no known seasonal movements, as indicated by the models. A bird ringed in Bulawayo (2028BA) was retrapped at the same locality more than four years later (Irwin 1981).

**Breeding:** Egg-laying has been recorded September–January (October–November peak) in KwaZulu-Natal, September–January (October peak) in the Transvaal, and August–January (September–November peak) in Zimbabwe (Dean 1971; Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). The atlas data conform to a pattern of slightly earlier breeding in Zimbabwe than further south. Late records probably refer to fledglings, particularly as young birds remain with their parents for an extended period (Maclean 1993b).

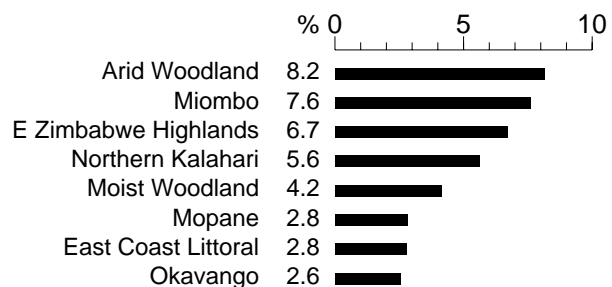
**Interspecific relationships:** It is the broadleaved woodland counterpart of its *Acacia*-savanna congener, the Marico Flycatcher. In areas where the two habitat types interdigitate, these species occur in close proximity (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; M. Herremans pers. comm.). It is allopatric with the dry-country Chat Flycatcher *M. infuscatus*, and largely sympatric with the Black Flycatcher *M. pammelaina*, although the latter is also found in denser and more mixed woodland.

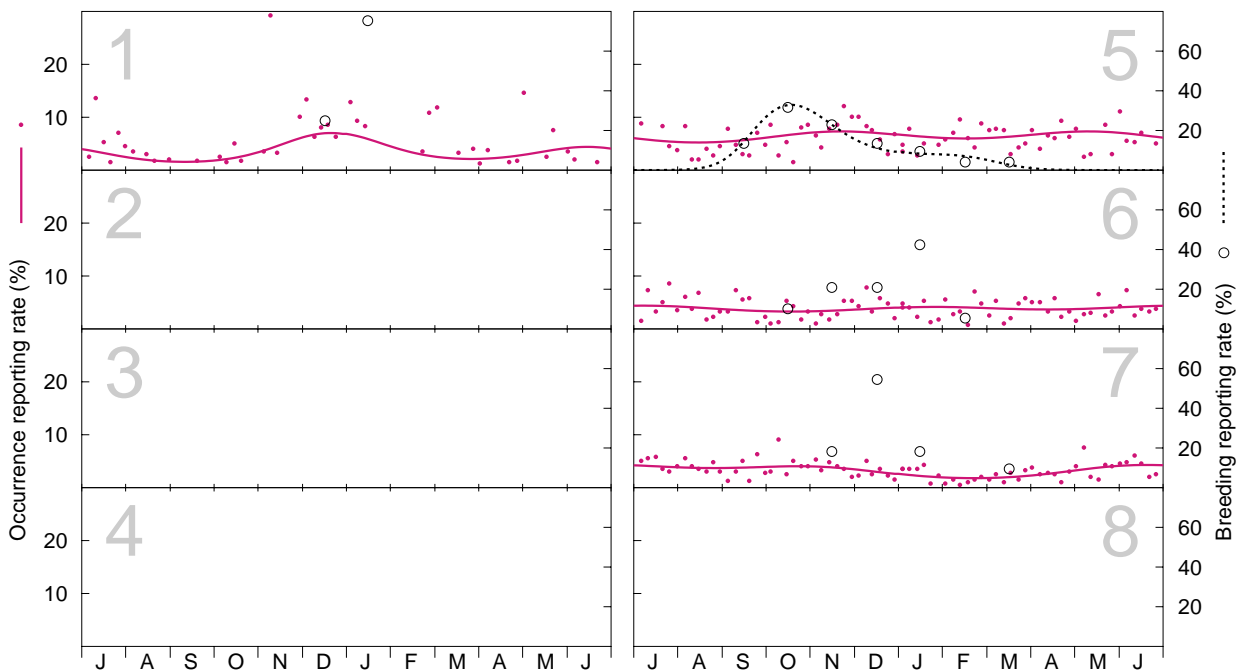
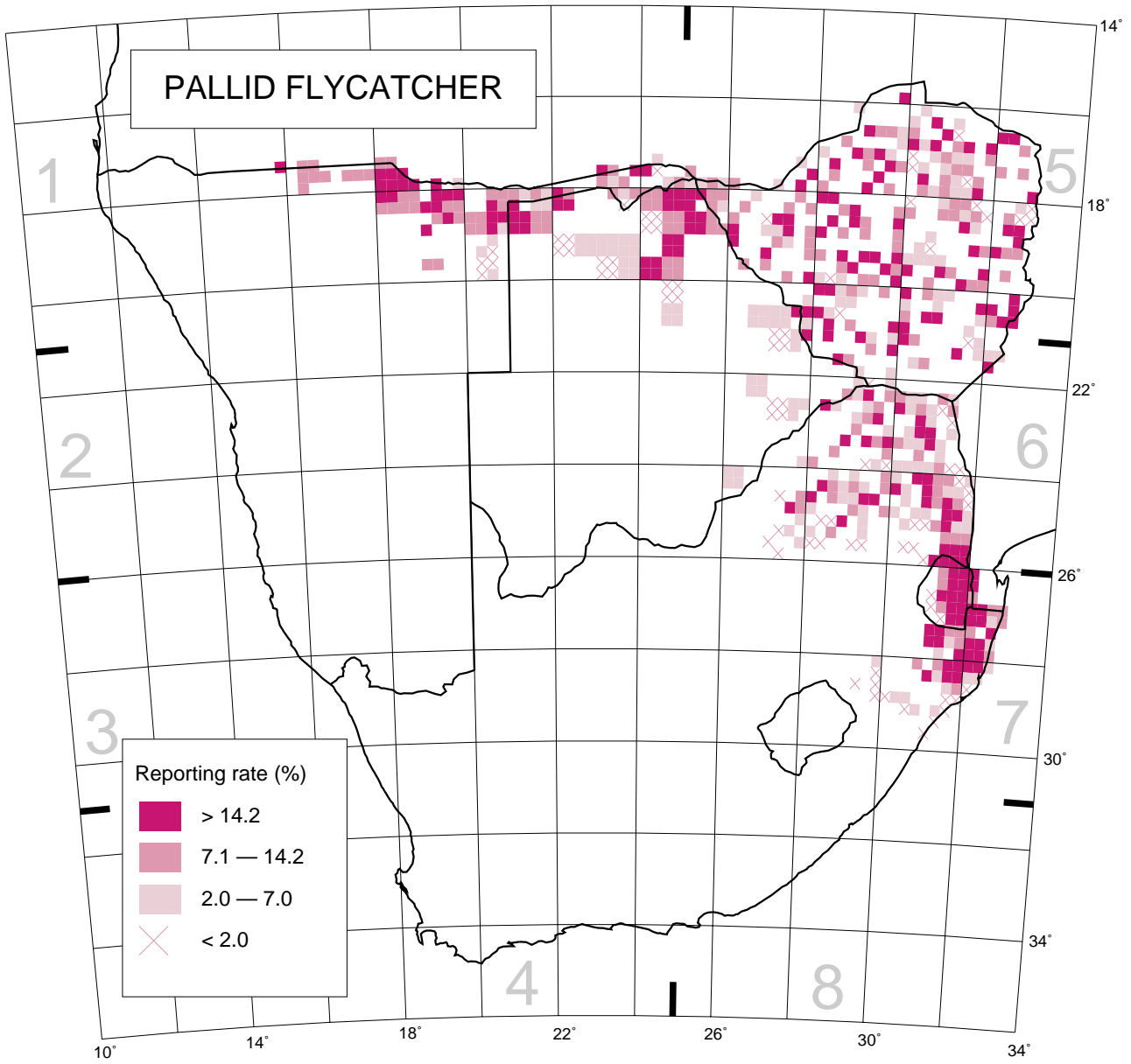
**Historical distribution and conservation:** Evidence of changes in range is not known, but some of the gaps in distribution, particularly in Zimbabwe, may be the result of destruction of its woodland habitat for agriculture and the overall fragmentation of miombo woodland. Although the Pallid Flycatcher is not immediately threatened, as with all relatively specialized woodland species, protection of its habitat is vital to the maintenance of viable populations.

J.A. Harrison

Recorded in 648 grid cells, 14.3%  
Total number of records: 3155  
Mean reporting rate for range: 9.8%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 108, 0, 0, 0, 559, 440, 638, 0; Breeding: 4, 0, 0, 0, 22, 19, 11, 0.