



Plumcoloured Starling

Witborsspreu

Cinnyricinclus leucogaster

This small, sexually dimorphic starling is mainly a summer breeding visitor to our region. It is widespread in KwaZulu-Natal, the Transvaal and Swaziland, with occasional records from the northern Cape Province and the Transkei. It occurs throughout Zimbabwe, in northern and eastern Botswana, and in Namibia, except for the southern parts. The Plumcoloured Starling is also widely distributed in southern Mozambique (Clancey 1971c). To the north, it is found throughout the savanna areas of Africa south of the Sahara, and is a breeding visitor to the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula (Hall & Moreau 1970). Male birds are unmistakable, but the dull, streaked females and juveniles could be overlooked or mistaken for species other than starlings.

Habitat: It is typical of open woodlands, and is especially frequent in miombo woodlands and mixed broadleaved woodlands.

Movements: It is a well-known intra-African migrant (Traylor 1971) with most records in the atlas region coming from October–May, although some birds do overwinter (Cyrus & Robson 1980; Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b;

Herremans 1994d). It arrives later with increasing latitude. Migrating birds generally associate in flocks, and it is clear from Traylor's (1971) studies of moult that the birds present in the nonbreeding season may not be from the same population which nests locally.

Breeding: As is to be expected for a breeding migrant, nesting activity is restricted to the months during which large numbers of birds are usually present, with all atlas records being October–March. Peak egg-laying months appear to be October–November in Zimbabwe, November–December in the Transvaal, and possibly February–March in Namibia (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Brown & Clinning in press).

Historical distribution and conservation: At the southern limit of the range, Skead (1967b) mentioned possible sightings from Kei Road (3227DA), while Quickelberge (1989) listed only old records in the Transkei. However, groups of 1–5 birds were seen during the summers of 1989–93 in the Kei and Kubusi river valleys (M.A. du Plessis pers. comm.), suggesting that Plumcoloured Starlings visit this area regularly in small numbers. There were no records from the atlas of the Free State (Earlé & Grobler 1987) but the current map shows a tongue of southward penetration down to 2727AA. In KwaZulu-Natal and the Transvaal, the current range is in agreement with past information, and there are few records south of the Transvaal grid cells bordering on the Vaal River (cf. Cyrus & Robson 1980; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). There were some records from the Kalahari in southwestern Botswana, but it is clearly less common there than in other parts of the country (cf. Smithers 1964).

The Plumcoloured Starling is widespread and common with an extensive breeding range, and does not appear to require conservation measures.

A.J.F.K. Craig

Recorded in 1437 grid cells, 31.7%

Total number of records: 11 052

Mean reporting rate for range: 16.2%

Reporting rates for vegetation types



