

Coppery Sunbird

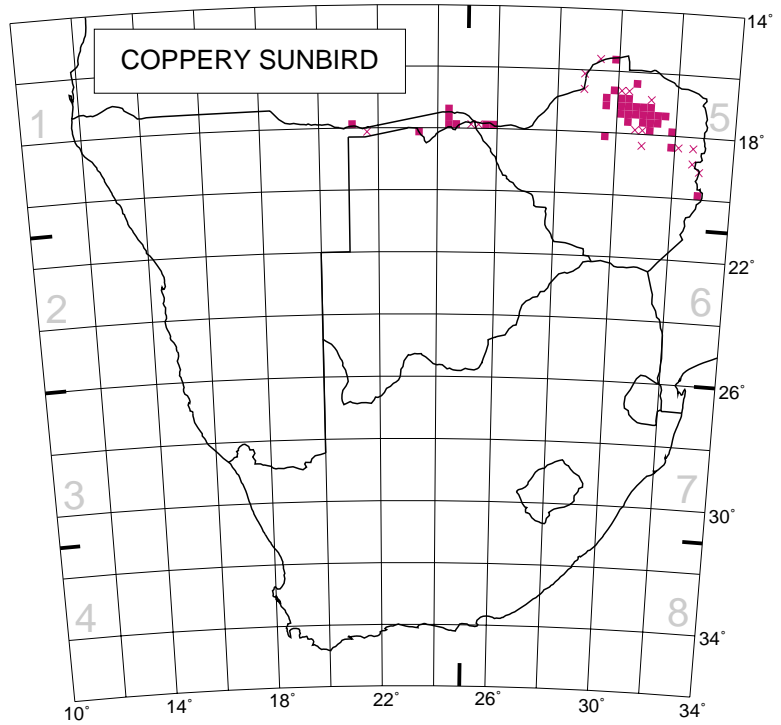
Koprusuikerbekkie

Nectarinia cuprea

The Coppery Sunbird has a restricted distribution in southern Africa, being confined mainly to the Mashonaland highveld of Zimbabwe, and marginally in the eastern highlands, in association with miombo vegetation. There are occasional records from the middle Zambezi and upstream of the Victoria Falls (1725DD), where it extends westwards along the Caprivi Strip in Namibia and along the Chobe River in extreme northern Botswana (e.g. Bishop 1995). Extraliminally it occurs eastwards from Senegal and thence southwards to the Zambezi River (Skead 1967c). The population inhabiting the Zambezi Valley appears to be small, but is part of the same subspecies as occurs in eastern Zimbabwe (Clancey 1980b). The main population occurs on the Mashonaland highveld, with the largest concentration from around Harare (1731CC) northwards to Chinhoyi (1730AC) and Mhangura (1630CC). Within this zone it may be, on occasion, the commonest sunbird present at suitable nectar sources but is generally less common than the Miombo Doublecollared *N. manoensis*, Whitebellied *N. talatala*, Scarlet-chested *N. senegalensis* and Black *N. amethystina* Sunbirds.

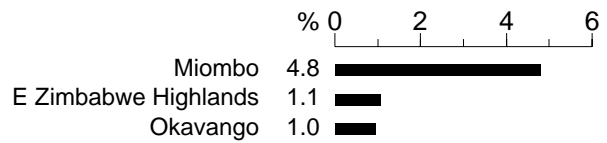
It has been largely overlooked during winter when males are in eclipse plumage and this, together with the fact that it tends to concentrate at favoured nectar sources in winter, would account for the low reporting rates at that time of year. It was previously assumed to be migratory but recent ringing studies have shown it to be nomadic (Tree 1990d). The main habitat, when it is not concentrating at midwinter nectar sources, appears to be along the edges of moist vleis where it frequents flowering trees such as *Syzgium* spp. or *Acacia polyacantha*. It shows a strong preference for *Leonotis leonura*, *Calliandra* spp., *Tecomaria capense* and *Aloe cameronii* (Tree 1990d).

Breeding takes place during the rains with records of egg-laying December–February (Irwin 1981), and atlas records January–April. It is an occasional host of Klaas’s Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx klaas* (Bishop *et al.* 1995).



Recorded in 52 grid cells, 1.1%
 Total number of records: 351
 Mean reporting rate for range: 8.1%

Reporting rates for vegetation types



The Coppery Sunbird appears to be increasing within its rather circumscribed range (Tree 1990d) but the reasons for this are unknown. Skead’s (1967c) map did not show its occurrence in the eastern Zimbabwe highlands or Caprivi Strip.

A.J. Tree

