



Southern Greyheaded Sparrow Suidelike Gryskepommie

Passer diffusus

This species was formerly included in a taxon ranging from the Sahara Desert southwards, but southern populations have been separated from northern birds (Clancey 1980b; Clancey *et al.* 1991; Clement *et al.* 1993). Southern Greyheaded Sparrows occur throughout southern Africa except for parts of southwestern Namibia and the southwestern Cape Province. The apparent gap in distribution in eastern Namibia and central Botswana probably reflects less coverage. It is widespread in Mozambique, and is often associated with human settlements there (Clancey 1971c). To the north, it extends into southeastern Angola and southern and eastern Zambia, while further north it is replaced by other taxa formerly included in the Greyheaded Sparrow *P. griseus* species-complex (Hall & Moreau 1970; Clement *et al.* 1993). The two subspecies in the region (Clancey 1980b) have continuous ranges.

It is common, but easily confused with female House *P. domesticus* or Cape *P. melanurus* Sparrows on casual observation, and is also often found with these species.

Habitat: The highest reporting rates occurred in various woodland types, both broadleaved and *Acacia*, which were its original habitat. The wide range of associations with other habitat types (particularly the grassland biomes) results primarily from commensalism with humans and its use of alien-tree plantations near human habitation.

Movements: In the arid Zones 1–3, and the southerly Zone 8, seasonal variations in reporting rates suggest less frequent occurrence in winter. This may merely reflect greater conspicuousness during the breeding season or dispersal from breeding sites because there is no other evidence of regular seasonal movements. At Mwakw Pan (2022DB), northwestern Botswana, Tree (1972c) described the population as nomadic; high turnover was demonstrated by low retrap rates of ringed birds during two consecutive dry winters, following summers with extremes of rainfall.

Breeding: Breeding is more seasonal in the south (Zones 4 and 8) than in the northeast (Zones 5–7). In broad terms, a summer breeding peak occurs throughout the range, confirming smaller published samples (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Skinner 1995a). Breeding peaks are in early summer in the southern parts of the range and in late summer in the north, particularly in the arid western part of the range (Zones 1–2). The extended season in Zone 3 probably results

from the lumping of early-summer records from the coastal winter-rainfall belt with late-summer records from the inland summer-rainfall region. In Malawi, urban birds bred seasonally in contrast to sympatric House Sparrows which nested throughout the year (Nhlane 1993).

Interspecific relations: At many localities it occurs with House, Cape and Great *P. motitensis* Sparrows. There are some differences in habitat selection in urban environments: House Sparrows occur in densely populated areas, whereas Southern Greyheaded Sparrows favour suburban habitats (Nhlane 1993; pers. obs). Their interactions are currently under study, but competition at a local scale may not influence distribution at the level shown here (Bennett 1990).

Historical distribution and conservation: In South Africa there has been a dramatic range expansion in recent years. In Zimbabwe, Irwin (1981) suggested that it had been displaced by the House Sparrow from some areas. However, in South Africa the new areas occupied had long been colonized by the House Sparrow (Craig *et al.* 1987). Hall & Moreau (1970) showed no records south of the Orange River or west of 26°E, but subsequently it spread westwards (Craig *et al.* 1987) and reached the southwestern Cape Province by 1983 (Hockey *et al.* 1989). In Lesotho, it appears to be spreading into the mountains along the rivers (Bonde 1993). Coverage for KwaZulu-Natal, Zimbabwe, the Free State, the Transvaal and the Transkei is probably better than in previous studies, so it is not clear if it has increased in numbers or expanded its range in those areas (Cyrus & Robson 1980; Irwin 1981; Earlé & Grobler 1987; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Quickelberge 1989). It can be expected to increase further in urban areas in the future.

Southern Greyheaded Sparrows are almost ubiquitous in southern Africa. In the Cape Province this is a protected species, whereas House and Cape Sparrows are unprotected.

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Recorded in 2883 grid cells, 63.5%
Total number of records: 34 803
Mean reporting rate for range: 29.6%

Reporting rates for vegetation types



