

Thickbilled Weaver

Dikbekwewer

Amblyospiza albifrons

The southern African distribution extends from the eastern Cape Province northeastwards along the eastern tropical coastal belt, and into the eastern half of the Transvaal, Swaziland, eastern Zimbabwe, and the Okavango and Caprivi regions. The Thickbilled Weaver is sparsely distributed in southern Mozambique (Clancey 1971c). To the north it is found through Angola and Zambia to Ethiopia, and across Central Africa to West Africa (Hall & Moreau 1970).

Three subspecies have been recognized in the region (Clancey 1980b): *A. a. albifrons* occurs in the coastal belt from the eastern Cape Province to KwaZulu-Natal, and is almost continuous with *woltersi* which occurs inland, from northern KwaZulu-Natal northwards. The population in eastern Zimbabwe is included in *woltersi*, but the birds from west of Victoria Falls into the Caprivi and the Okavango, where the species is sparse and localized, are at the southern limit of the tropical subspecies *maxima*.

With its massive bill and dark plumage it is highly distinctive and unlikely to be misidentified.

Habitat: Reporting rates show a strong association with forest types, including riparian forest, where the species frequently feeds. The breeding habitat of reeds or bulrushes within reach of forest patches is not specific to any of the vegetation types listed, and the species can occur in a variety of biomes.

Movements: All Zones show reduced reporting rates in winter, when it flocks and moves away from the open breeding habitat into taller woody vegetation. It undertakes local movements from roosts to feeding areas; the farthest recorded movement of a ringed bird is 130 km from Steynsrust Dam (3326DB) in September 1971 to the Kwelela River estuary (3228CC) in February 1974 (Laycock 1984; SAFRING).

Breeding: Breeding activity occurs primarily October–March throughout the eastern sector (Zones 5–8). Summer breeding is also indicated by records from Zimbabwe and KwaZulu-Natal (Dean 1971; Laycock 1979; Irwin 1981). There are few data, but the subspecies *maxima* may breed somewhat later, December–May (Skinner 1995a).

Interspecific relationships: It does not usually associate with other ploceids, nor join communal roosts of weavers.

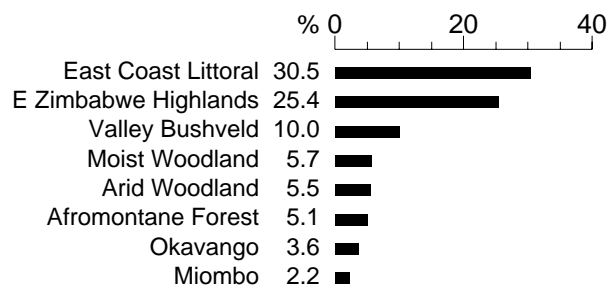
Historical distribution and conservation: The localities plotted in Hall & Moreau (1970) included few inland records, and none from Botswana or Namibia. However, Smithers (1964) recorded Thickbilled Weavers in the Caprivi area. The present records for Botswana are almost certainly the result of better coverage in the northern areas where the species is rare and localized relative to the apparent extent of available habitat.

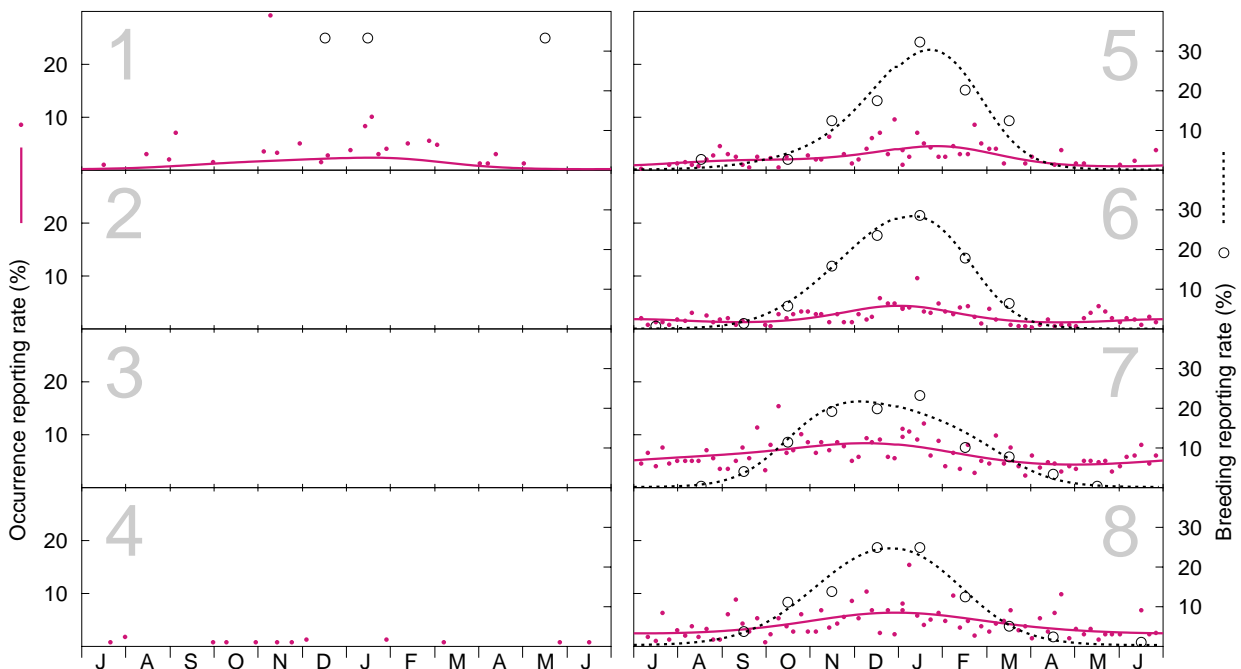
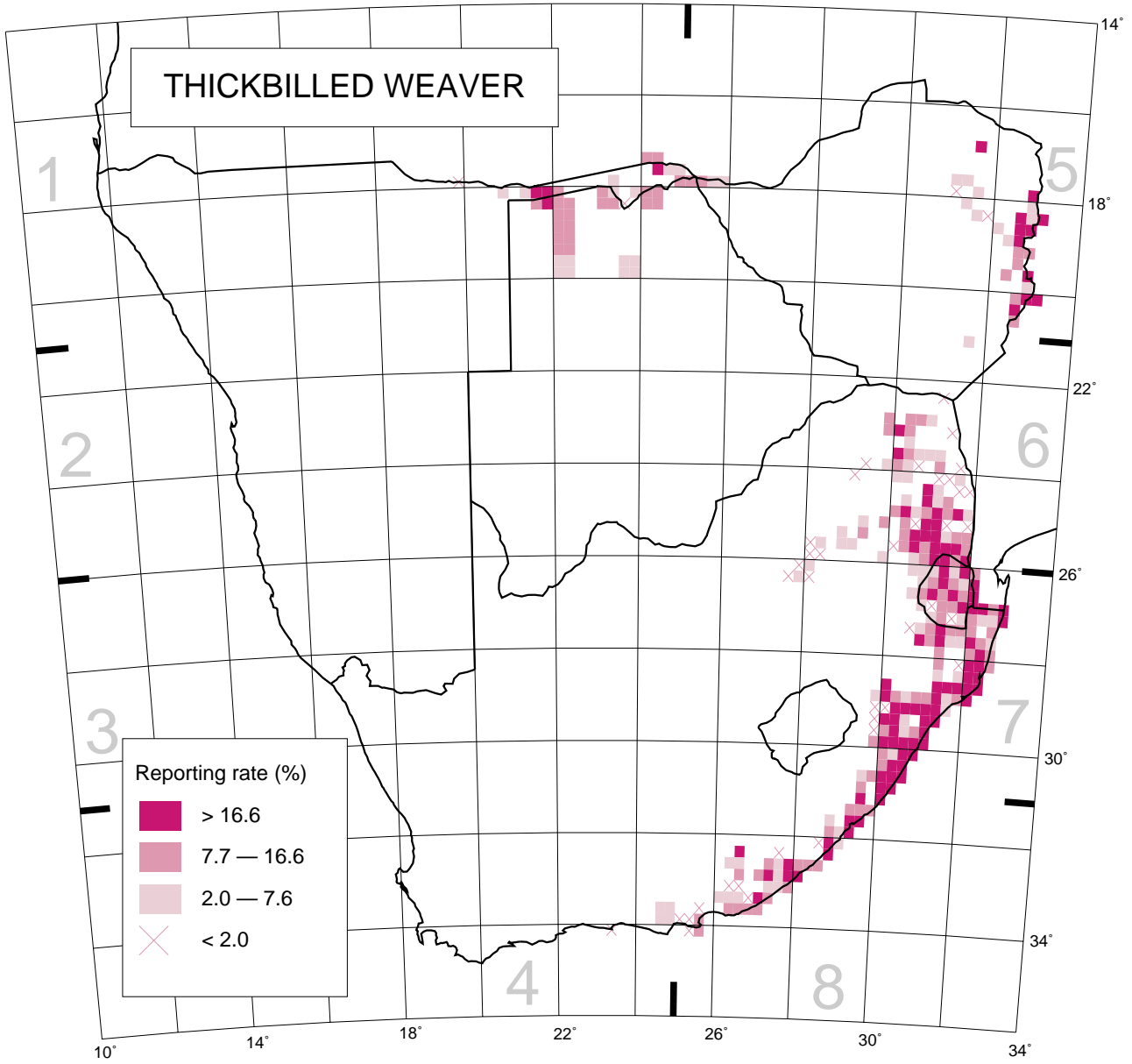
It was first recorded on the Witwatersrand in the early 1960s, possibly after a natural expansion along the Olifants River (Tarboton 1968; Winterton 1982; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b); it is still expanding further on the Witwatersrand (Anon. 1994). In Zimbabwe it expanded its range to Nyanga National Park (Newton-Howes & Newton-Howes 1984; Clark *et al.* 1986), and from there westward to Harare (1731CC) (Shaw 1990, 1992, 1993, 1994b). The Thickbilled Weaver is not considered threatened in any part of its range at present.

A.J.F.K. Craig

Recorded in 342 grid cells, 7.5%
Total number of records: 6527
Mean reporting rate for range: 15.1%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 32, 0, 0, 13, 189, 245, 1216, 223; Breeding: 3, 0, 0, 0, 40, 140, 271, 80.