

Goldenbacked Pytilia

Geelrugmelba

Pytilia afra

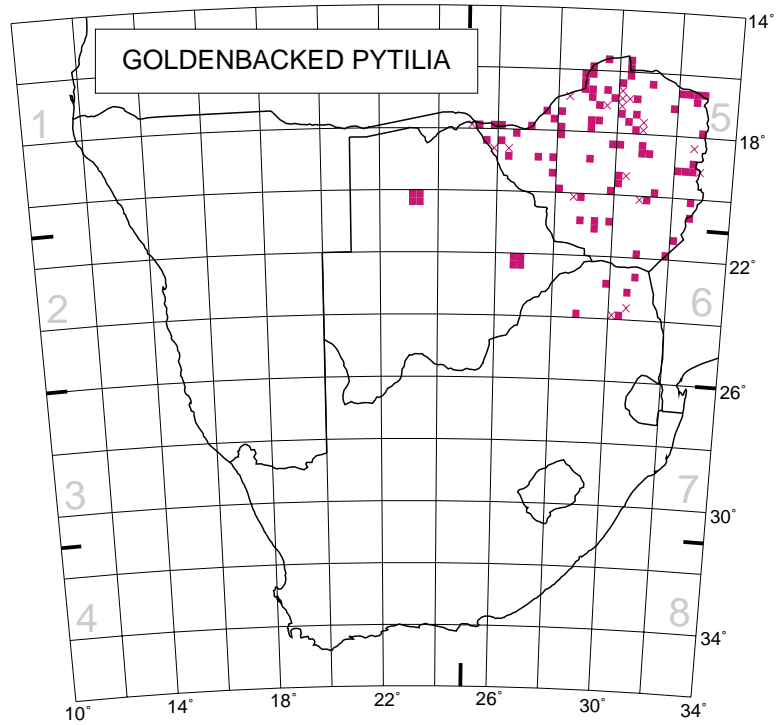
Occurring from northeast Africa southwards, the Goldenbacked Pytilia is found throughout Zimbabwe and its southern limits lie in the northern Transvaal, northern and eastern Botswana, and the eastern Caprivi. The map does not reflect the number of records which have been obtained from Botswana and the Caprivi (e.g. Bushell & Bushell 1989; Brown 1990a; Borello 1992b; Herremans *et al.* 1993a; Randall 1993a; Brewster 1994c; Randall *et al.* 1994). It is uncommon in the atlas region as shown by low reporting rates. The composite picture presented by the distribution map cannot depict the real situation which is one of occasional and erratic occurrence. Despite bright colouring it is easily overlooked because of its inconspicuous habits and a superficial resemblance to the Melba Finch *P. melba*.

Its habitat requirements appear to be broad but it does prefer tangled thickets of grass and bush. Although shown as favouring miombo, it is generally associated with broadleaved woodlands in higher-rainfall areas where it replaces the Melba Finch.

It has been suggested that it moves considerably (e.g. Irwin 1981), but nowhere does it arrive and leave with seasonal regularity. Although the occurrence models do not show evidence of regular movements, the species is highly nomadic, possibly in response to rainfall.

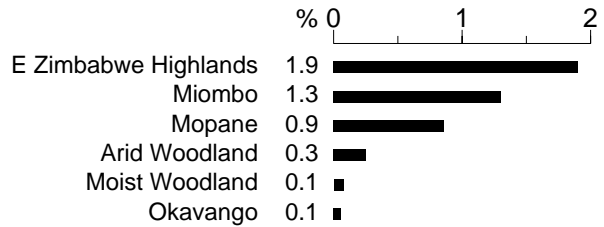
Egg-laying has been recorded February–April in Zimbabwe (Irwin 1981). The Broadtailed Paradise Whydah *Vidua obtusa* is a brood parasite of this species, and the presence of this conspicuous whydah may be a good indicator of the presence of the pytilia (e.g. Randall *et al.* 1994).

Only five records were mentioned by Tarboton *et al.* (1987b) for the northern Transvaal; the larger number of records here does not necessarily indicate a population increase, however. The Goldenbacked Pytilia may be suffering the ravages of the cage-bird trade for which it is much sought after (Brooke 1984b). In Botswana there is no legal capture quota, but it is likely that the species is being traded illegally (M. Herremans pers. comm.).



Recorded in 104 grid cells, 2.3%
 Total number of records: 204
 Mean reporting rate for range: 3.8%

Reporting rates for vegetation types



A.J. Tree

