

### Brown Firefinch

Bruinvuurvinkie

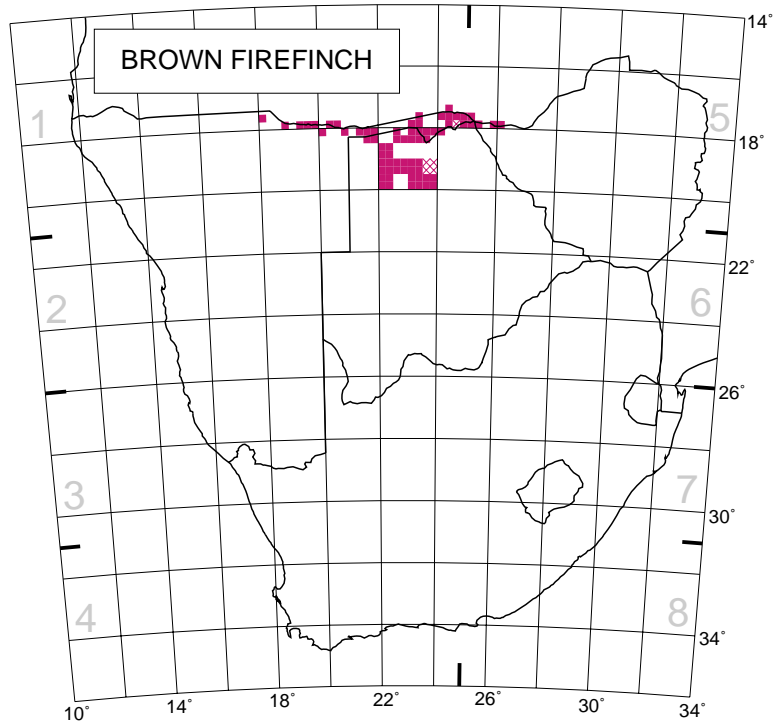
*Lagonosticta nitidula*

The diminutive Brown Firefinch ranges from southcentral to western Africa (Clancey 1980b). In the atlas region, it is restricted mainly to the Okavango and other major river systems in northern Botswana, northeastern Namibia and extreme western Zimbabwe, where it inhabits riparian and thicket vegetation (Brown 1990a). Here it is recorded both as fairly common (Brewster 1989a, 1991) and as a widespread resident (Koen 1988). Small size and a preference for dense thickets render it inconspicuous, and close resemblance to the female Redbilled Firefinch *L. senegala*, a sympatric species in several places (Irwin 1981; Brewster 1989a, 1991), may have caused some confusion.

Although resident in the Okavango and Caprivi, reporting rates increased in summer. Since it is a habitat specialist restricted to the Okavango and adjacent riparian systems, seasonal movements are unlikely. The increase in reporting rates may be a result of increased conspicuousness during the breeding season: October–January in Zimbabwe (Irwin 1981; Maclean 1993b); September–April in Zambia (Maclean 1993b). It may be more active or forced to move over a wider area in search of food at this time, rendering it more conspicuous. Family flocks, including recently fledged young, may also contribute to the higher summer reporting rates.

There appears to have been no shift in the historical range of this species. It is the putative host of the Violet Widowfinch *Vidua wilsoni*, which is unconfirmed in the atlas region (see text for the latter species).

The Brown Firefinch is a poorly known species (Maclean 1993b) but is apparently not immediately threatened. Potential threats include clearing of riparian vegetation in the Okavango and Caprivi, damage to the riparian belt by an overpopulation of elephants, and the cage-bird trade. Its status should be monitored.



Recorded in 73 grid cells, 1.6%  
 Total number of records: 253  
 Mean reporting rate for range: 15.7%

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