

Locust Finch

Rooivlerkkwartelvinkie

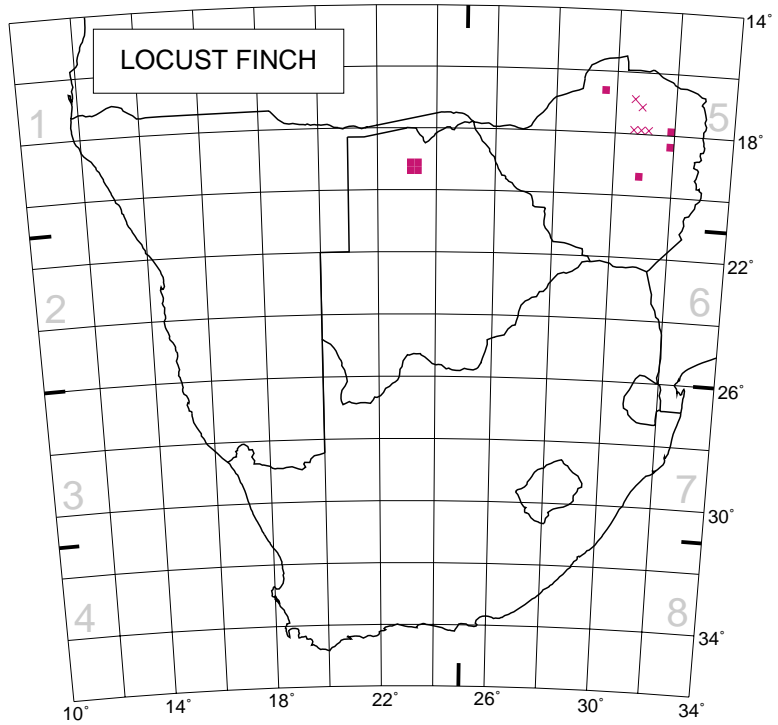
Ortygospiza locustella

The Locust Finch reaches the southern extremity of its range in Zimbabwe and Botswana, occurring southwards from Zaire through Zambia where it is widespread although local (Benson *et al.* 1971). In Zimbabwe it is uncommon, although it may well be overlooked owing to its quail-like tendency to sit tight and to fly a substantial distance when disturbed, its weak call-note and its similarity to the conspicuously noisy Quail Finch *O. atricollis* which is generally widespread and locally common. It has twice been recorded on the Shindi airstrip near Xugana lagoon (1923A) in the Okavango Delta in Botswana (Archer & Turner 1979; Bishop 1995).

It requires moist habitats which, in spite of recent droughts, still persist in Zimbabwe, but these may be insufficient to sustain a viable population and this species now appears to be virtually relict. Furthermore, it may not be competitive with the more robust Quail Finch which readily occupies habitat apparently suitable for Locust Finches. It is an obligate terrestrial feeder and apparently never perches; its favoured habitat is damp and poorly vegetated patches among longer grasses around dams or in vleis and it has an apparent preference for sandveld rather than black clay soils (Irwin 1981). As much of this habitat tends to dry out as the dry season progresses, it wanders extensively and is difficult to locate at this time. It is usually in pairs but occasionally occurs in flocks of up to about 10 birds when forced to aggregate on remaining suitable habitat.

Egg-laying occurs January–May with the peak during the months of heaviest rainfall January–February (Irwin 1981).

The distribution indicates some range contraction in comparison with Irwin’s (1981) description; this may have been brought about by droughts during the 1980s. Irwin (1981) suggested that its population may fluctuate, increasing in wetter years and declining during drought.



Recorded in 13 grid cells, 0.3%
 Total number of records: 13
 Mean reporting rate for range: 1.2%

A.J. Tree

