



## Redheaded Finch

### Rooikopvink

#### *Amadina erythrocephala*

The Redheaded Finch is near endemic to southern Africa. It drinks frequently (Skead 1975a; Ginn *et al.* 1989; Maclean 1993b) and water dependence therefore influences its distribution. There are distinct strongholds in two areas at opposite ends of the range where permanent water can readily be found: in the southwestern Transvaal, adjacent Free State and southeastern Botswana; and in northern and central Namibia. Between these, it is more scattered in arid areas and is highly nomadic. There is also a stronghold on the poorly drained lacustrine soils in the Makgadikgadi area. As with some other thornbelt species that reach the eastern Cape Province (e.g. Pririt Batis *Batis pririt* and Scalyfeathered Finch *Sporopipes squamifrons*), this southernmost population is somewhat isolated.

It is found in pairs, family parties or flocks throughout the year, but flocking increases in the dry season and during drought periods, when flocks of hundreds can be found near waterholes (Ginn *et al.* 1989; Maclean 1993b).

**Habitat:** It prefers dry, open grassland areas with scattered trees and bushes. There might be a shift in habitat from more densely wooded thornbush in the breeding season to more open grasslands after breeding. It was most commonly recorded in the Sweet and Mixed Grasslands and in the Southern and Central Kalahari. It is frequently found in urban areas. It occurs over a broad range of altitudes, from coastal areas to the highveld, but avoids the escarpment in the Transvaal (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b) and the high areas of Lesotho (Bonde 1993). It is absent from the winter-rainfall region, and from the more humid coastal areas and lowlands in the east. It also avoids the miombo in Zimbabwe. The fairly high reporting rates from Mopane woodlands can be related to the poorly drained soils in this biome, with many pans holding water in the dry season.

**Movements:** It is nomadic and eruptive (Benson 1982b), as may be expected from an arid-country bird that needs to drink. All four Zones where it is common show strong seasonality, but the interpretation is not straightforward. It may, to some extent, be a late-rains to early dry-season

(March–June) visitor to the more arid mid-west (Zones 2–3); this is the season when surface water and seeds are most likely to be freely available in this area.

In the middle and late dry season (July–September) there is an influx in the northwest (Zone 1), and there are increases throughout the dry season in the southeast (Zone 7). It may well be that the strongholds that appear on the map in the northwest and southeast are the result of a boost in the dry season by birds ‘wintering’ in these areas.

**Breeding:** It mostly re-uses nests of sparrows, weavers and finches to breed (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Maclean 1993b), and such nests are most often found in dense thornbushes. The breeding records confirm that it breeds throughout the year (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Skinner 1995a), but with a peak spanning the dry season, and lowest breeding during midsummer (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Maclean 1993b; Skinner 1995a).

**Interspecific relationships:** It overlaps with its congener and close relative the Cutthroat Finch *A. fasciata*, but its main stronghold is to the south of the latter’s range. They regularly form mixed flocks and several hybrids have been found in the wild in eastern Botswana and southern Zimbabwe (pers. obs).

**Historical distribution and conservation:** In arid areas it benefits from livestock watering points, and it has probably expanded its range accordingly in recent decades. The Redheaded Finch is in high demand by the cage-bird trade and, although locally common, the sustainability of the capture quota in Botswana should be monitored.

M. Herremans

Recorded in 1728 grid cells, 38.1%  
Total number of records: 15 376  
Mean reporting rate for range: 23.2%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types



