

## Redbacked Mannikin

### Roorugfret

#### *Spermestes bicolor*

The Redbacked Mannikin was most frequently reported from the eastern Zimbabwe highlands, and it is locally common on edges of lowland or mid-altitude evergreen forest (Irwin 1981). The miombo of Zimbabwe's Mashonaland Plateau is also favoured. Further south it occurs from the northern Transvaal (the Soutpansberg in the west), through Swaziland and KwaZulu-Natal, into the coastal regions of the Transkei and eastern Cape Province. North of the region it is widespread in sub-Saharan Africa (Maclean 1993b). Despite the apparently discrete population centres in the region, all belong to the subspecies *S. b. rufodorsalis* (Clancey 1980b).

It is rarely found in large numbers, but more often in small flocks, or together with larger groups of Bronze Mannikins *S. cucullatus* (Vernon 1990), from which it is easily distinguished. Low overall reporting rates match its uncommon status.

**Habitat:** It is a quiet and unobtrusive bird which favours mesic, wooded habitats, from miombo in Zimbabwe to moist riparian, coastal and mid-altitude forests and thickets on the eastern seaboard. It occurs in coastal forest and on the edges of Afromontane forest, although this may be

seasonal (pers. obs). Records from drier habitats refer either to marginal areas with suitable habitat, or to vagrants. Groups may forage on edges of pine plantations (Lawson & Edmonds 1983; pers. obs).

**Movements:** Some localized and possible seasonal movement may occur in Zimbabwe, with birds moving onto the central Mashonaland Plateau during winter and spring (Masterson 1980; Tree 1987e) via moist riparian vegetation of the tributaries of the Zambezi River (Talbot 1977; Irwin 1981). Localized seasonal movements are also documented for Lake Kariba where it is absent February–May (Donnelly & Donnelly 1983). Seasonal movements are not shown by the models which show wide scatter in reporting rates, especially for Zimbabwe (Zone 5). Records in Zone 8, the eastern Cape Province, are mainly December–April, suggesting littoral movement northeastwards during winter, as shown for several other species in this region (Berruti *et al.* 1994a).

**Breeding:** Breeding occurs throughout the year in Zimbabwe, but mainly during the wet season, October–April. Vernon (1977), however, recorded it as a 'winter breeding visitor' to Great Zimbabwe (2030BD), evidence of breeding being based on 'importuning juveniles only'. In the Transvaal and KwaZulu-Natal (Zones 6 and 7) the data indicate summer breeding, confirming the few published egg-laying data (Dean 1971; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b).

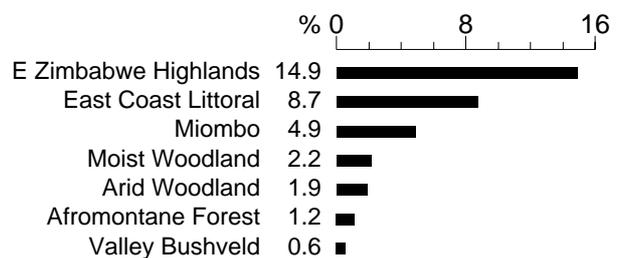
**Interspecific relationships:** Although it frequently associates with congeners and other small seedeaters (Masterson 1972; Irwin 1981; Vernon 1985, 1990; Clement *et al.* 1993; J. Phelan *in litt.*), usually at a food or water source, it is doubtful whether this affects its local or overall distribution.

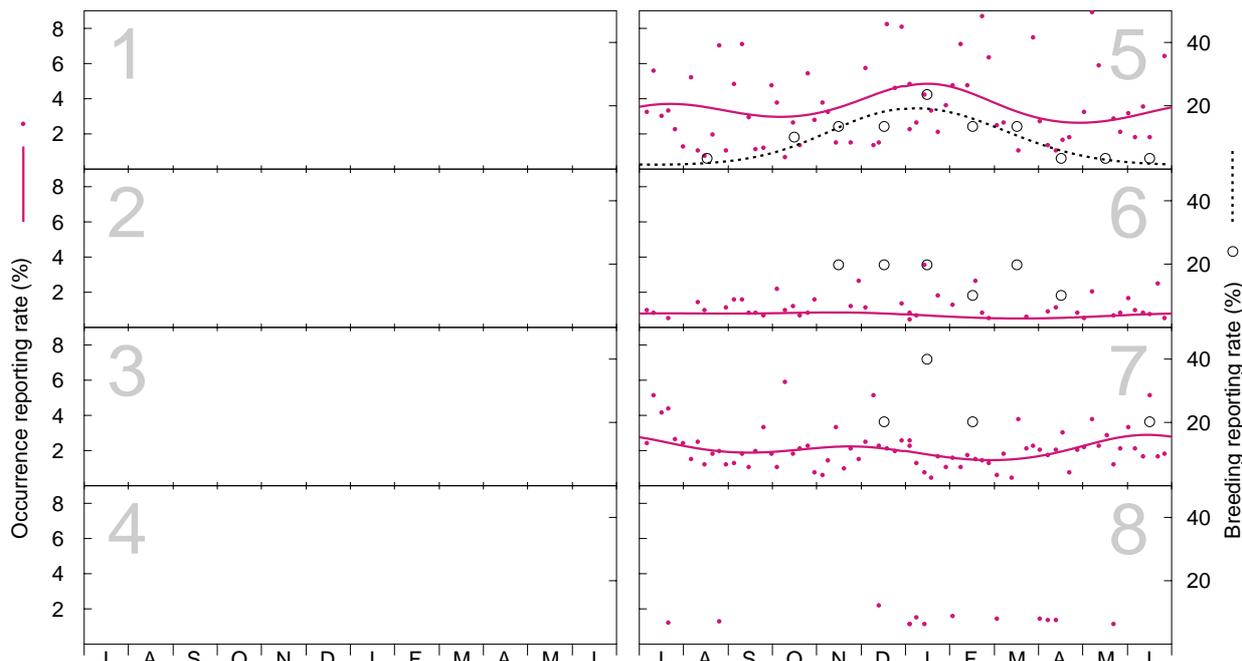
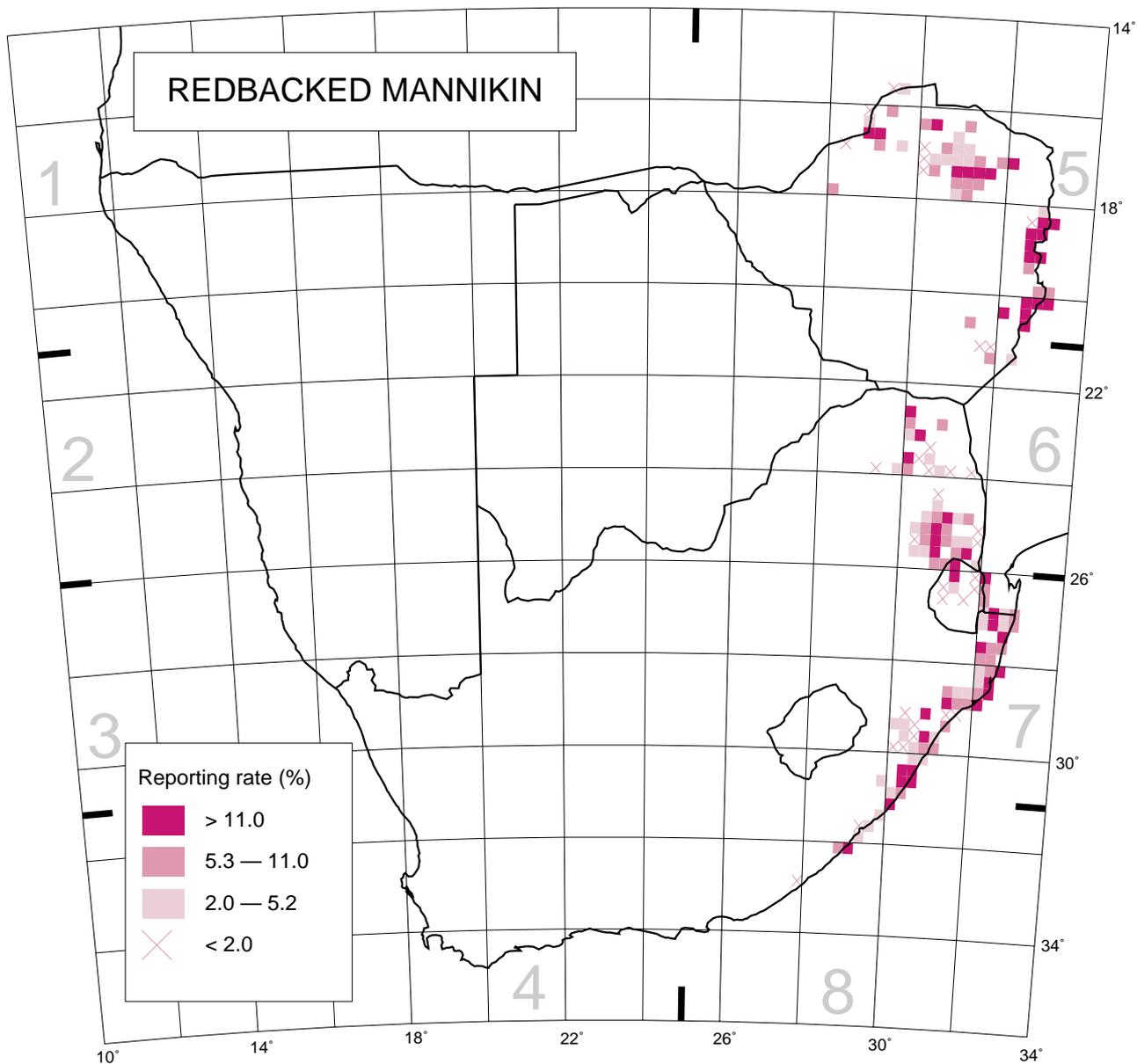
**Historical distribution and conservation:** Localized range extensions have been reported north of Harare (1731CC) (Tree 1989c) and vagrants have been recorded in the Caprivi Strip, near Lake Liambezi (1724CD) (Koen 1988). The illegal wild-bird trade could threaten local populations of this attractive seedeater. Although adaptable to some suburban environments, the Redbacked Mannikin is adversely affected by habitat alteration through urban development in eastern coastal areas.

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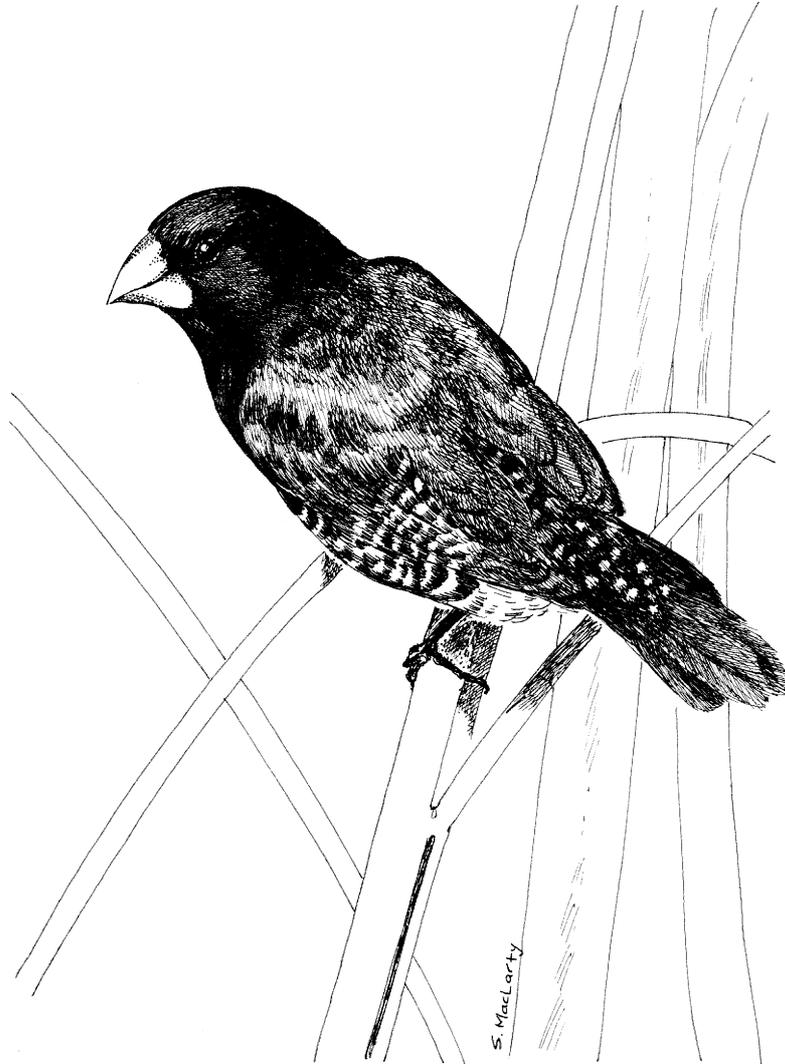
Recorded in 177 grid cells, 3.9%  
Total number of records: 1966  
Mean reporting rate for range: 8.5%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 0, 0, 0, 0, 305, 81, 408, 13; Breeding: 0, 0, 0, 0, 30, 10, 5, 0.



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