



Paradise Whydah Gewone Paradysvink

Vidua paradisaea

The Paradise Whydah is the largest and, for breeding males, the most impressive viduid finch in the atlas region. It is widespread throughout the savannas of sub-Saharan Africa. In southern Africa it is common in thorn savanna of the hardveld in eastern Botswana, the northwestern Transvaal, southwestern Zimbabwe and northcentral Namibia. It avoids areas without permanent water on deep Kalahari sands. It is considered monospecific in the region (Clancey 1980b).

Flocks of up to 136 birds, including 88 males in breeding plumage, have been recorded in Namibia at artificial seed sources (pers. obs). In *Acacia tortilis* savanna in central Transvaal (2428DB), active male call-sites along dirt roads were 580–2800 m apart (mean = 1390 m; SD = 870 m), with variable overall densities of 1 call-site/8.5–62.0 km² in suitable habitat (Barnard 1989).

The acquisition of breeding plumage by males occurs over most of the year, with a great deal of temporal asynchrony (Barnard 1994), so there is only a short period in mid- to late winter when all males in a population are in eclipse plumage and therefore under-recorded.

Habitat: Often called the 'Acacia Paradise Whydah' to distinguish it from the Broadtailed Paradise Whydah *V. obtusa*, it is found in a variety of semi-arid woodlands and savannas, principally thorn savanna. Like the Pintailed *V. macroura* and especially the Shafttailed *V. regia* Whydahs, it favours open *Acacia* savanna with large grassy areas or roadsides, and prominent trees of 3–8 m in height. It is also fairly frequent

in *Brachystegia*, *Baikiaea* and stunted Mopane woodland, particularly in the nonbreeding season. The vegetation analysis reflects its preference for thorn and mixed open woodlands.

Movements: As with other viduid finches, a pronounced drop in reporting rates from winter to mid-spring probably reflects both nomadism and reduced conspicuousness. Whydahs do also flock in this period, often making nomadic movements away from their breeding grounds. In December 1970 at Mwaku Pan (2022DB), northwestern Botswana, good numbers returned after rain following a drought period in which viduid finches were absent (Tree 1972c). There is a need for data on winter movements in all viduid finches.

Breeding: Few records exist for the region. From plumage development, copulations and display, and breeding period of its host, it can be deduced that breeding must be from mid-summer to autumn. Egg-laying has been recorded January–June (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Brown & Clinning in press).

As with other viduids, breeding depends on food and host-plant availability late in the rainy season, and is opportunistic whenever conditions (including mature green seed-heads as food and nestbuilding material for the host) are favourable.

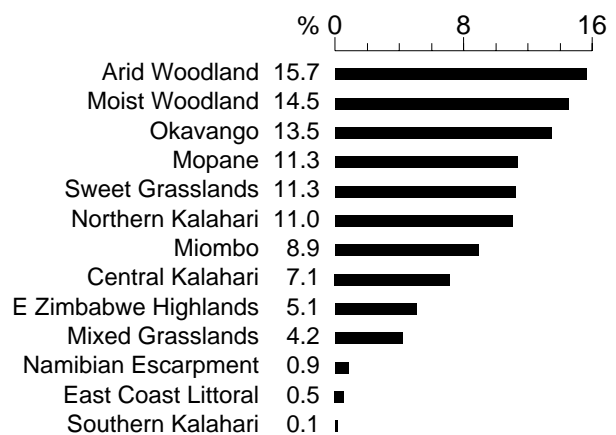
Interspecific relationships: It is an obligate brood-parasite of the Melba Finch *Pytilia melba*, and the ranges of these two species follow the same pattern. Its habitat requirements seem intermediate between those of the Pintailed and Shafttailed Whydahs, as it tends to inhabit more arid areas than does the former, but is less tolerant of aridity than the latter.

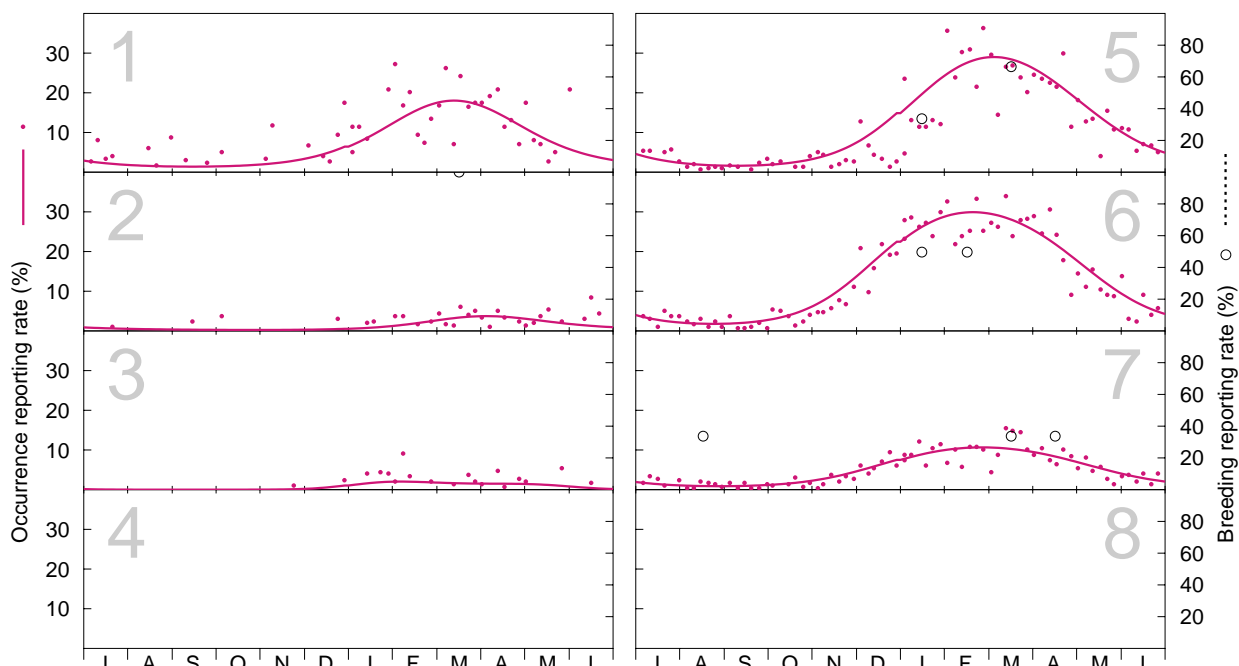
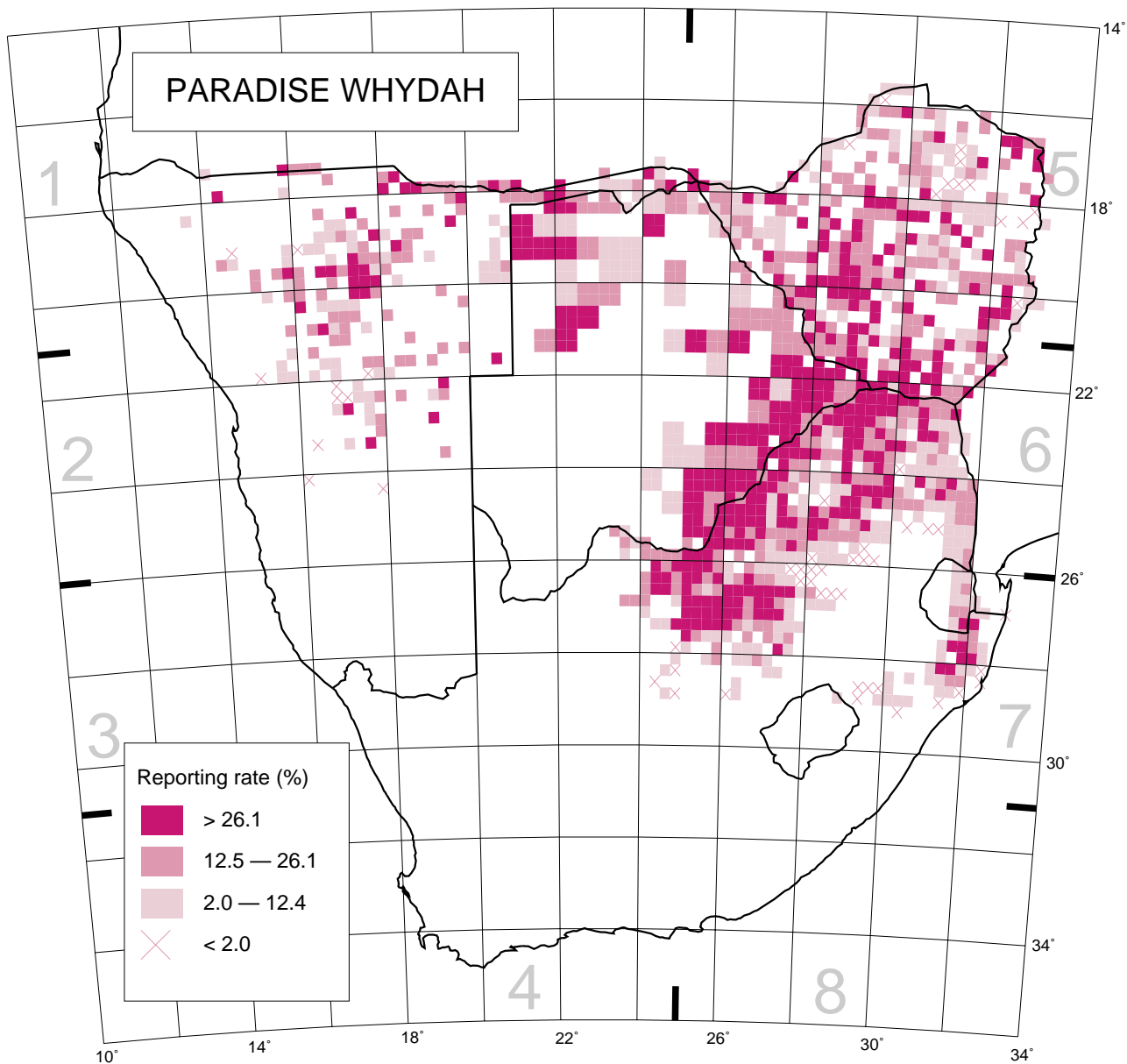
Historical distribution and conservation: Its historical range is not known to have differed significantly from the present. It is popular among aviculturists owing to its extravagant ornamental plumage, but because it is difficult to breed in captivity, illegal trapping for the cage-bird trade must be substantial in some areas. Increased agriculture and urbanization are likely to have a detrimental effect on the Paradise Whydah, through loss of call-sites and annual grasses, aggravated by this species' wariness of humans and avoidance of gardens.

P. Barnard

Recorded in 1271 grid cells, 28.0%
Total number of records: 8039
Mean reporting rate for range: 13.3%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 243, 56, 40, 0, 1017, 1582, 994, 0; Breeding: 0, 1, 0, 0, 3, 2, 3, 0.