

## Blackthroated Canary

### Bergkanarie

#### *Serinus atrogularis*

The range of this common, widespread resident of the interior highveld, semi-arid grassy savannas and arid regions of southern Africa extends to northeastern Africa and southwestern Arabia (Maclean 1993b). It is usually found close to water (Irwin 1981; Maclean 1993b; Penry 1994) but may be independent of it during moist periods (Ginn *et al.* 1989); the water dependence results in a clear 'Kalahari hole' in the distribution, coinciding with the arid area on deep, permeable Kalahari sands. Apart from occasional vagrants, it avoids coastal and escarpment regions (Ginn *et al.* 1989). It shows an area of consistently high reporting rates in the southwestern Transvaal and northern Free State, although it is widespread elsewhere in southern Africa. The four subspecies recognized by Clancey (1980b) in the region show continuous distributions.

It is quiet and easily overlooked unless singing (Clancey 1964b; Maclean 1993b); it may be confused with the Lemon-breasted Canary *S. citrinipectus*, the similar but larger female Yellow Canary *S. flaviventris*, and even the Whitethroated Canary *S. albogularis*.

**Habitat:** It favours dry country, including grassland, savanna and lightly wooded areas, also *Acacia* thornveld and the edges of miombo woodland (Irwin 1981). Especially in arid regions, it frequents riparian thickets (Clancey 1964b; Ginn *et al.* 1989); this is particularly evident along the Orange River. It adapts to cultivated areas (Collett 1982; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b) and alien plantations (Clancey 1964b; Cyrus & Robson 1980).

**Movements:** During the nonbreeding season, flocks wander locally in search of food (Clancey 1964b); this appears to be particularly the case in Zimbabwe where there are large transient influxes (Irwin 1981; A.J. Tree *in litt.*). The models show little seasonal variation, although only one recapture out of 73 birds ringed at a site over a three-year period (pers. obs.) suggests extensive local population turnover and hence local movement. Small seasonal variations in reporting rate are probably due to flocking birds being less dispersed and thus reported less

frequently. Singing activity and breeding behaviour during spring and summer may also render birds more conspicuous.

**Breeding:** Atlas records indicate that breeding occurs mainly September–May, with the season prolonged in the north and west. In the arid west where rainfall may be erratic, the small number of records of breeding activity were in late summer or autumn in the northern Zones 1 and 2, while an early-summer peak occurred in Zone 3, where breeding activity extended September–May. However, the eastern part of Zone 3 incorporates a section of the core distribution and many of the early breeding records come from this moister part of the Zone. Sample sizes are small, however, and regional variation in breeding seasonality should be interpreted with caution. Published egg-laying data, based on larger samples, show a peak in November–January in Zone 5 and December–February in Zone 6 (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b).

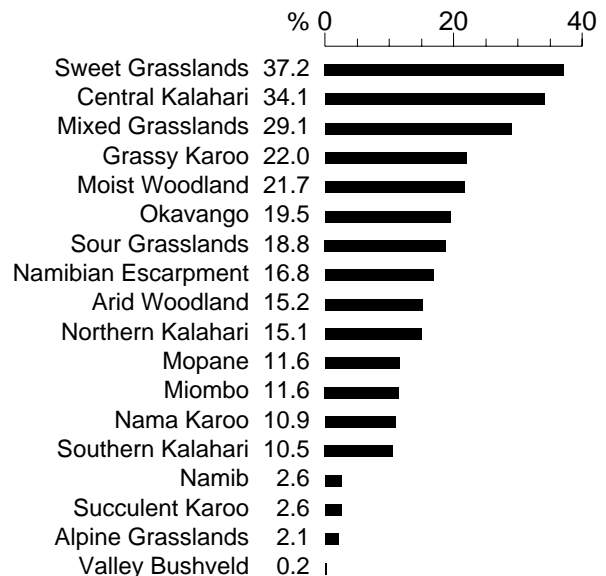
**Interspecific relationships:** Although Blackthroated and Yelloweyed *S. mozambicus* Canaries may compete in areas of sympatry, the former is more typical of dry savannas, and feeds more on or near the ground than the latter (Irwin 1981). The Blackthroated Canary is replaced by the Lemon-breasted Canary in some far-eastern regions; these two species are similar and occur together in a limited area of overlap in the central Limpopo Valley. Competition may occur between sympatric Blackthroated and Yellow Canaries.

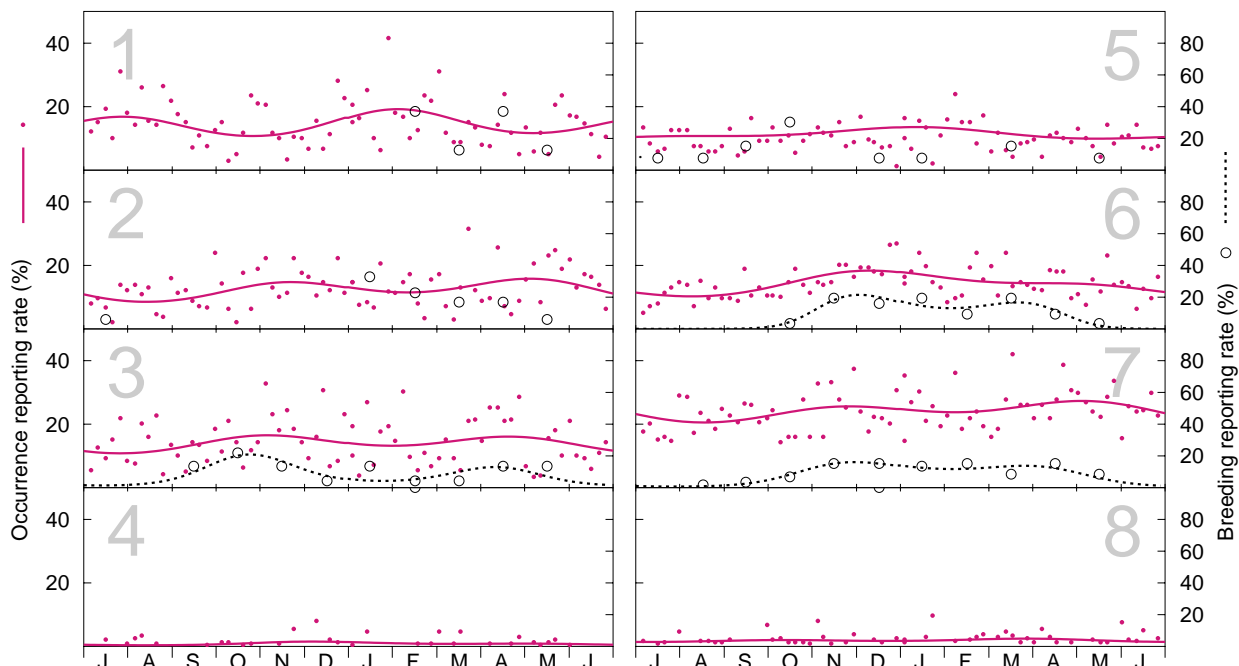
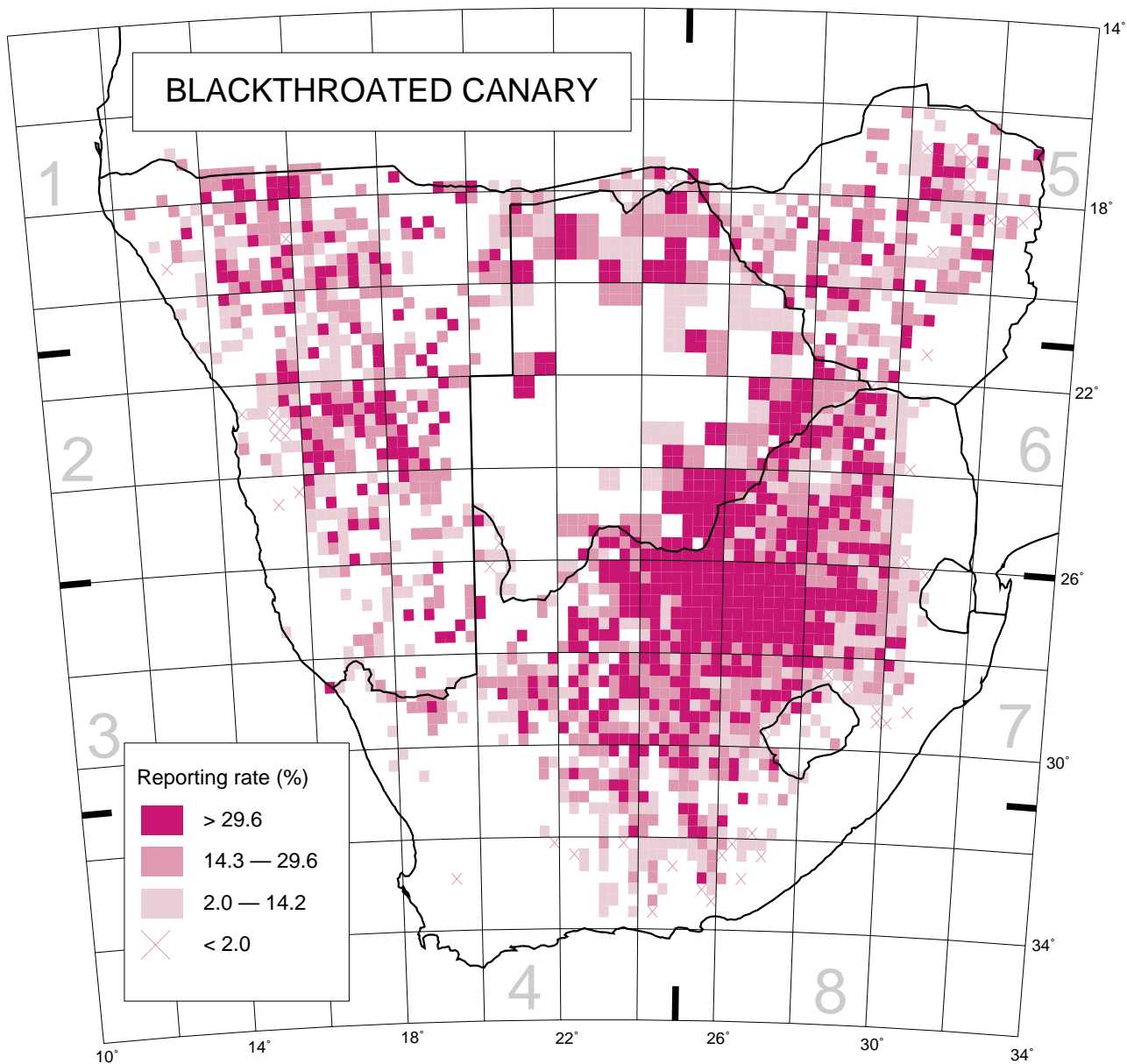
**Historical distribution and conservation:** The atlas data indicate a wider range in the west and southwest than previously reported (Skead 1960; Hall & Moreau 1970); these differences may result from insufficient historical data. However, it was unrecorded before 1950 near Cradock (3225BA) and has since been seen frequently in the district (Collett 1982). Skead (1960) mentioned its absence south of 22°S in Botswana from where it was commonly reported during the atlas period, at least in the east. Tree (1989c) reported a northward extension of its known range (Irwin 1981) to Centenary (1631CA). Water provisioning for livestock and cultivation has possibly facilitated expansion into arid areas. Blackthroated Canaries are trapped for the cage-bird trade, particularly in Botswana, where substantial commercial quotas are issued.

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Recorded in 2002 grid cells, 44.1%  
Total number of records: 20 947  
Mean reporting rate for range: 27.5%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 471, 450, 772, 73, 992, 1626, 4739, 104; Breeding: 8, 18, 23, 1, 13, 31, 61, 2.