



## Whitebacked Mousebird

### Witkruisvoël

#### *Colius colius*

The Whitebacked Mousebird is endemic to southern Africa. It occurs mainly in the southwestern arid zone in the Cape Province and the semi-arid to arid savanna of the western Transvaal and western Free State. In Namibia, the distribution mainly follows the distribution of Nama Karoo vegetation (Rutherford & Westfall 1986), but it has also been reported frequently from the arid woodlands and southern Kalahari. The pattern of distribution in southeastern Botswana (2425, 2525) indicates an anthropogenic influence, whereby it benefits from coppicing *Acacia tortilis* bushes on fallow land in areas cleared for agriculture. Intensive agriculture is implicated in high reporting rates along the Orange River and adjacent irrigated orchards.

The white patch on the rump is unique among the mousebirds. There are two subspecies in the region (Clancey 1980b) with ranges widely in contact throughout the Cape Province and Transvaal.

It usually occurs in flocks of 2–10, sometimes forming flocks as large as 40 birds in the Karoo (pers. obs.).

**Habitat:** In the Karoo, it occurs mainly in wooded drainage lines and seldom forages in low or sparse vegetation. It appears to be thinly distributed on deep sands in the Kalahari, Bushmanland and the Namib Desert, and was not recorded from the Kalahari Gemsbok National Park (2520) during the atlas period. However, the highest reporting rates

are from the southeastern Central Kalahari vegetation type in South Africa, from woodland on sands, and this is probably due to irrigated agriculture and associated settlements in that area. Suburban gardens and farmyards probably also influence its occurrence in the southwestern Transvaal, Free State, southeastern Botswana, and Namibia. More intensive coverage of the southern African region during the atlas period shows that the distribution is much less patchy than that given by Rowan (1967) and that it occurs over much of the central plateau grasslands.

**Movements:** The models show little evidence of regular seasonal movements, except a possible dispersal from the Karoo (Zone 3) and an influx into the fynbos (Zone 4) during winter.

**Breeding:** Breeding has been recorded throughout the year but shows a prolonged spring/summer (September–April) peak in most Zones, except in Zone 4 (southwestern Karoo and fynbos) where breeding starts earlier in spring, but with infrequent late-summer breeding.

**Interspecific relationships:** It overlaps in parts of its range with Speckled Mousebird *C. striatus*, and over most of its range with the Redfaced Mousebird *Urocolius indicus*. It associates frequently with both in wooded drainage lines in the Karoo, foraging in the same areas and in the same fruiting trees (pers. obs.).

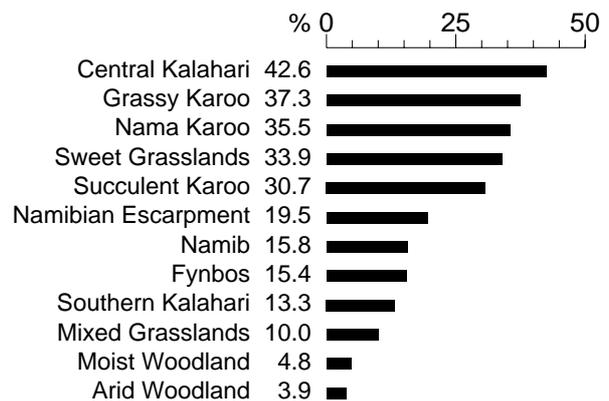
**Historical distribution and conservation:** The distribution has not changed substantially, but occurrence with high reporting rates along the Orange River, for example, may indicate recent colonization of the area as the distribution map in Rowan (1967) does not show many records west of Pella (2919AA). Tarboton *et al.* (1987b) noted that it was first recorded in northern Johannesburg (2628AA) in 1962, and has since become a common resident.

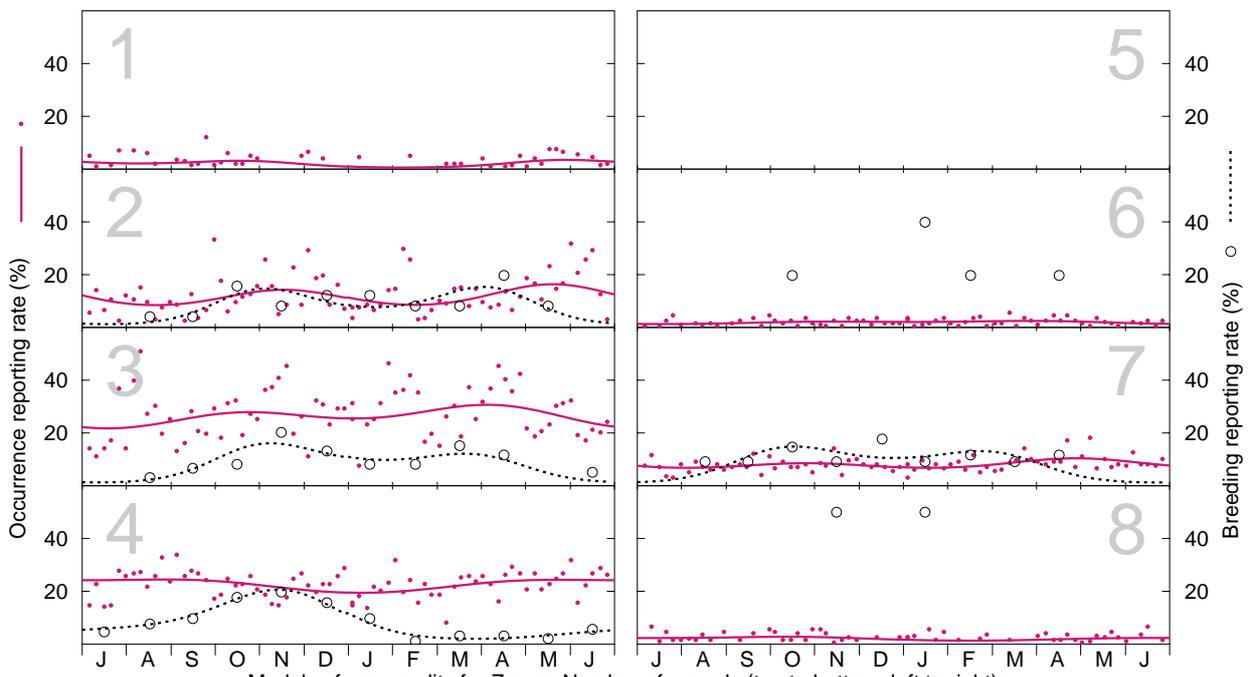
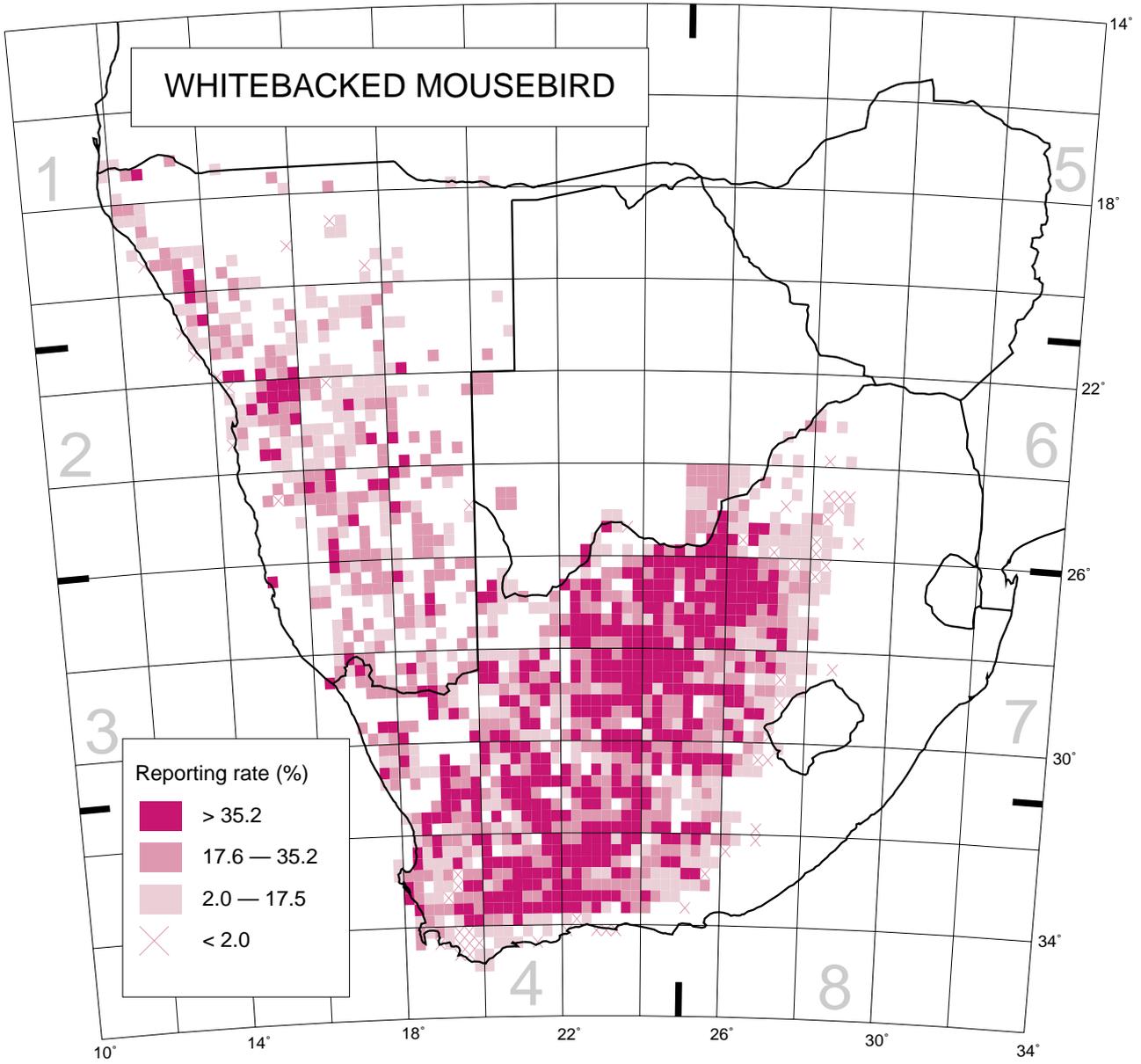
The Whitebacked Mousebird is not considered to be threatened in southern Africa and is usually common.

W.R.J. Dean

Recorded in 1460 grid cells, 32.2%  
Total number of records: 16 011  
Mean reporting rate for range: 23.2%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 73, 422, 1458, 1990, 0, 223, 1587, 115; Breeding: 0, 25, 60, 102, 0, 5, 34, 2.