

Redfaced Mousebird

Rooiwangmuisvoël

Urocolius indicus

The Redfaced Mousebird is widespread in savanna woodlands in Africa south of the equator. It is widely distributed in southern Africa, but only sparsely in the western Karoo interior and arid savanna on granitic sands. It enters the northern Namib Desert via the larger westward-flowing ephemeral rivers, occurring almost to the coast along the Kuiseb River. There were relatively few records from the eastern Transvaal and Swaziland highveld grassland, and the grasslands of the KwaZulu-Natal interior, Lesotho and Transkei.

Four subspecies are recognized in southern Africa (Clancey 1980b), and the northernmost *U. i. mossambicus* along the Zambezi Valley appears marginally separated from the other races. From Tanzania northwards and throughout the northern savannas to West Africa it is replaced by a close relative, the Bluenaped Mousebird *Urocolius macrourus* (Fry *et al.* 1988).

It usually occurs in small flocks of 3–10 birds (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Penry 1994; pers. obs.), but sometimes up to 20 (Maclean 1993b). This is a distinctive species, and confusion between it and other mousebirds is unlikely in southern Africa; the atlas data can be considered reliable.

Habitat: Like other mousebirds in southern Africa, its distribution and occurrence in certain vegetation types have been influenced by the presence of suburban gardens, fruit farming and irrigated agriculture, and this may be the cause of the relatively high reporting rates from the Sweet, Mixed and Sour Grasslands. It is commonest in savanna woodlands, and was most frequently reported from relatively moist woodlands; but it occurs in all types of woodland and shrubland, avoiding only forest and open grassland. In the southern Karoo, it forages in dwarf shrublands and feeds at isolated fruiting shrubs well away from wooded drainage lines. It occurs in thickets of alien *Acacia* spp. and roosts in eucalypts in the southwestern Cape Province (Rowan 1967; Hockey *et al.* 1989).

Movements: The models show some evidence of seasonal movements, with lower reporting rates in the drier western interior (Zone 3) and higher reporting rates in the moister east (Zone 7) in winter. Like other mousebirds, it is locally nomadic, and flocks may move about somewhat

unpredictably (Rowan 1967), particularly in drier areas (Herremans & Herremans-Tonnoeyr 1994a). Furthermore, it varies in abundance between years in the southwestern Cape Province (Rowan 1967; Hockey *et al.* 1989).

Breeding: There are records throughout the year, with a marked spring/summer (September–January) peak in breeding in most of southern Africa. Breeding is earlier in the southwestern Cape Province (Zone 4) and in Zimbabwe (Zone 5), peaking September–October, while it is progressively later in the east with increasing latitude. The atlas data agree with previous information on breeding seasonality (Winterbottom 1968a; Dean 1971; Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b).

Interspecific relationships: It overlaps widely with Speckled *Colius striatus* and Whitebacked *C. colius* Mousebirds. It generally occurs in drier woodlands than the Speckled Mousebird, and also occurs in a wider range of vegetation types than

both the Speckled and Whitebacked Mousebirds. Where they overlap, it is more frequently observed foraging in monospecific flocks.

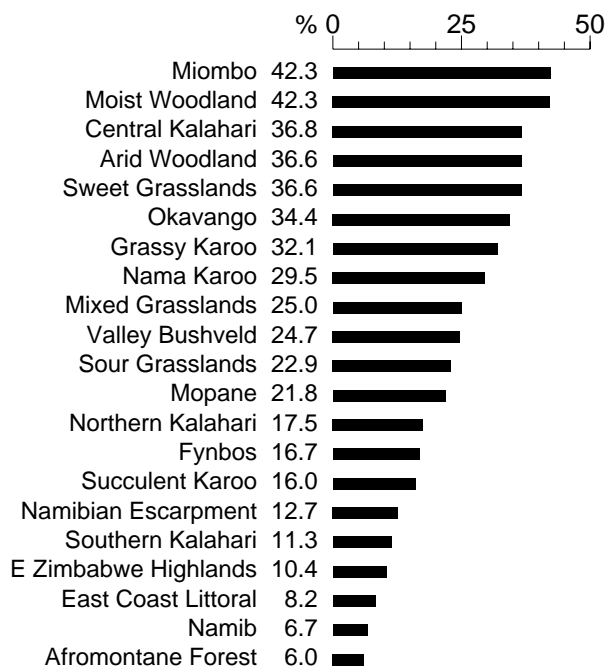
Historical distribution and conservation: The distribution has not changed substantially from that given by Rowan (1967), and there is no evidence of local extinctions or gross changes in range. However, atlas records suggest that it is less continuously distributed along the Orange River than previously (Rowan 1967) and may indicate changes in the distribution in this area, where Whitebacked Mousebird is now more common.

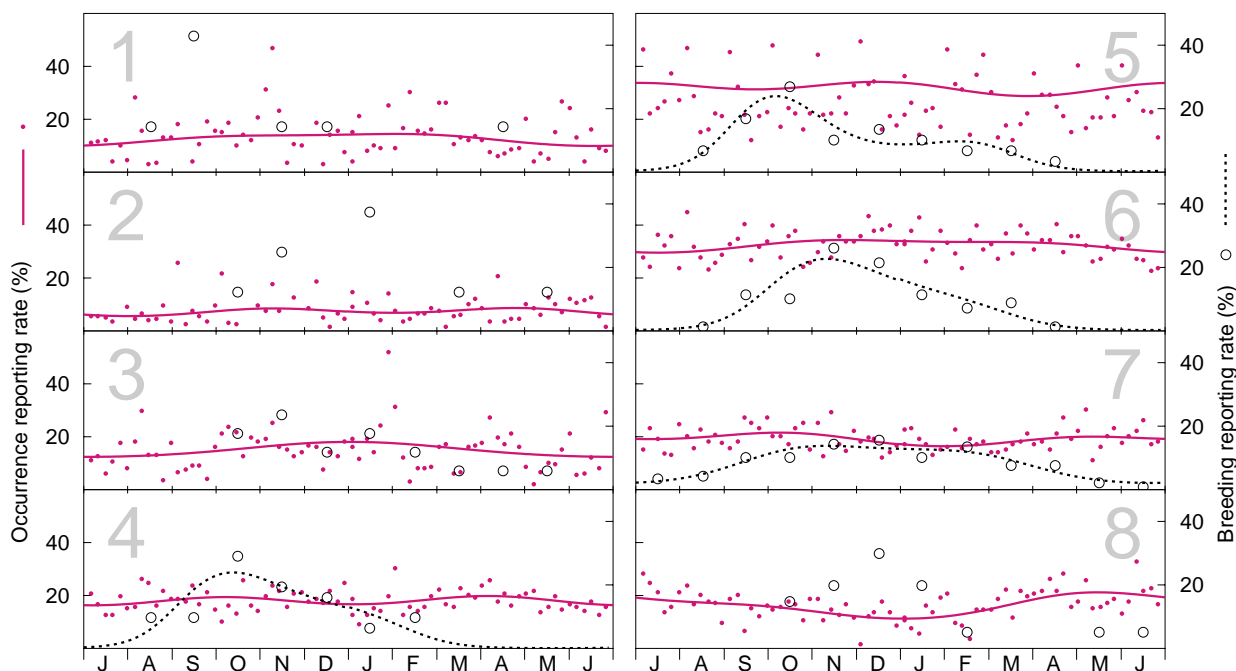
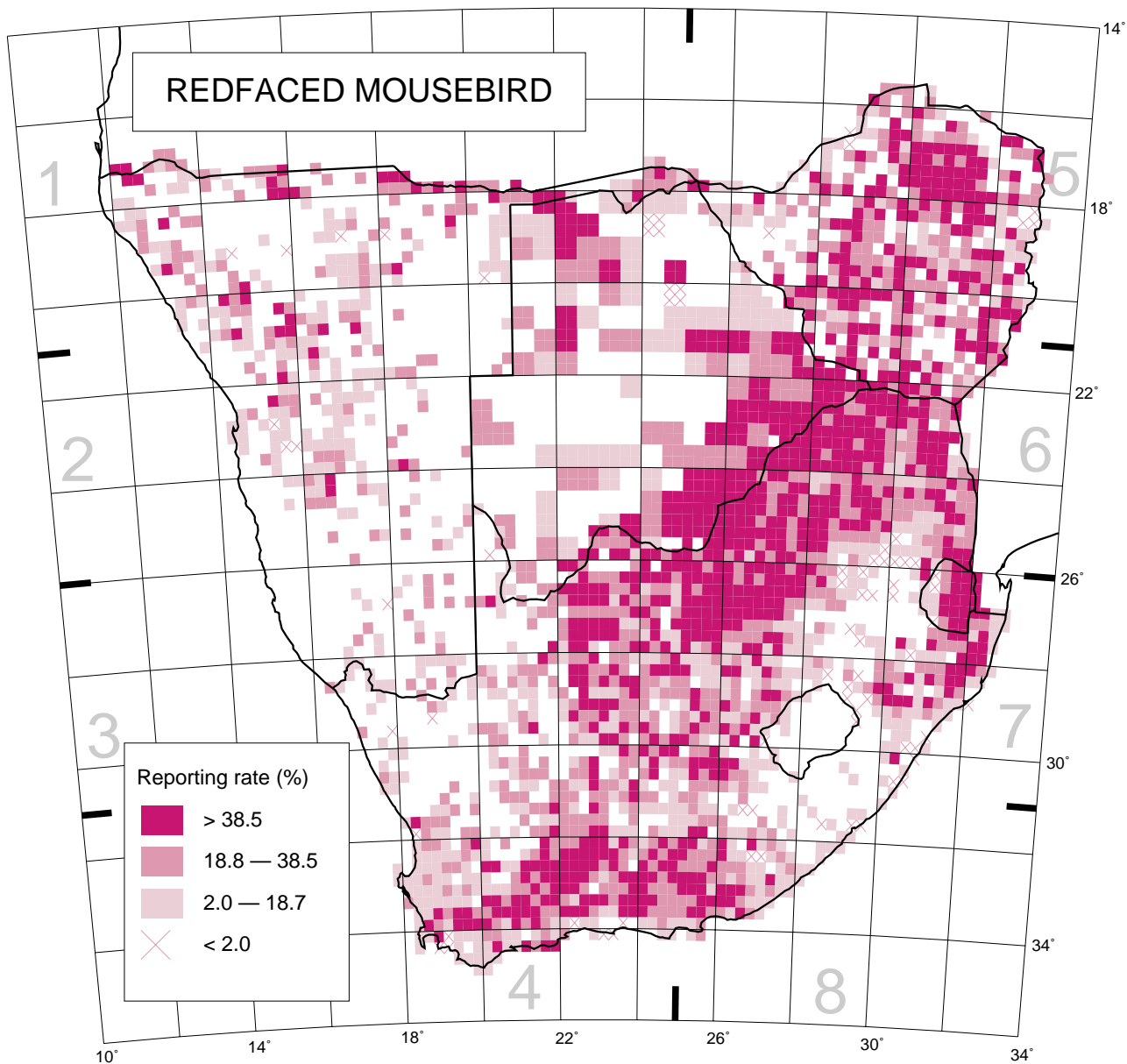
The Redfaced Mousebird is not threatened in any part of its range in southern Africa.

W.R.J. Dean

Recorded in 2675 grid cells, 59.0%
Total number of records: 37 489
Mean reporting rate for range: 29.1%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 410, 264, 810, 1580, 2785, 3711, 3748, 893; Breeding: 7, 8, 17, 31, 30, 69, 90, 20.