

Southern Black Tit

Gewone Swartmees

Parus niger

The Southern Black Tit is a member of a complex of similar-looking forms found in the savanna region south of the equatorial lowland forest belt that stretches east–west from the Gulf of Guinea through Zaire into East Africa. The group has been the subject of several taxonomic assessments, each of which has produced a different interpretation of species limits in the group.

Clancey (1980b) recognized two species as occurring in the southern African region, this species and Carp's Black Tit *P. carpi*. The latter is very closely related to the White-winged Tit *P. leucomelas*, found in Angola, Zambia and Zaire, and has previously been treated as a subspecies of this form (see also Clancey 1972b, 1985c). Clancey (1972b) claimed that Southern and Carp's Black Tits are wholly allopatric in northern Namibia and that the range of the Southern Black Tit does not extend west of the Okavango River valley, but has recently reassessed the situation and recognized areas of overlap in northern and central Namibia, based in part on atlas data (Clancey 1995). In western Zambia the Southern Black and White-winged Tits have a narrow zone of overlap (Benson *et al.* 1971).

The range of the Southern Black Tit across the eastern half of the subcontinent follows the pattern of a typical woodland and savanna species. Over most of its range it is a common resident; it is noisy and easily detected and this accounts for the relatively high reporting rates in its preferred habitats. A density of about 45 birds/400 ha was

measured in mature broadleaved woodland in the northern Transvaal (Tarboton 1981); a conservative extrapolation of this density over its southern African range indicates a population in excess of one million birds in this region.

Habitat: It occurs mainly in broadleaved woodlands, including those dominated by *Brachystegia*, *Baikiaea*, *Combretum*, Mopane, *Burkea* and other broadleaved species, and this is largely reflected in the vegetation analysis. It is scarcer and often absent from more arid savanna vegetation types, especially from the Kalahari. Unlike many other savanna birds, this species also enters Afro-montane and coastal forest. In KwaZulu-Natal and the eastern Cape Province it is found in both forest and thornveld, and it reaches its western limit here at about 25°E.

Movements: It is resident and sedentary. The slight increases in reporting rates in winter in most Zones probably reflect greater detectability at this time of the year in deciduous woodland habitat.

Breeding: The atlas records indicate a summer breeding season (mainly September–February) and indicates that breeding peaks later with increasing latitude. Egg-laying data from Zimbabwe, the Transvaal and KwaZulu-Natal also suggest that breeding is slightly later in the south of the range (Dean 1971; Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b).

Interspecific relationships: Its range overlaps that of Carp's Black Tit in two small areas (Clancey 1995), one of which is the Waterberg Plateau Park (2017A). At this locality the Southern Black Tit is in broadleaved woodland on Kalahari sand on top of the plateau, while Carp's Black Tit is in *Acacia* savanna below and on the slopes of the escarpment.

It competes for nest sites in most of its range with other hole-nesting species, including barbets, woodpeckers, hoopoes and starlings. Wherever it occurs it is a common member of mixed-species bird parties.

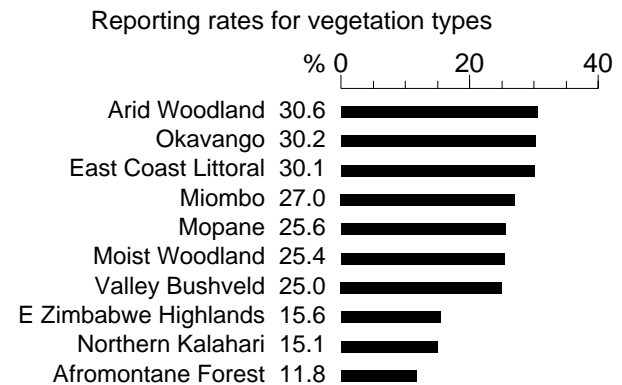
Historical distribution and conservation: Although the past distribution has not been documented, it is unlikely to have been different from its present distribution. The Southern Black Tit is not of conservation concern in southern Africa.

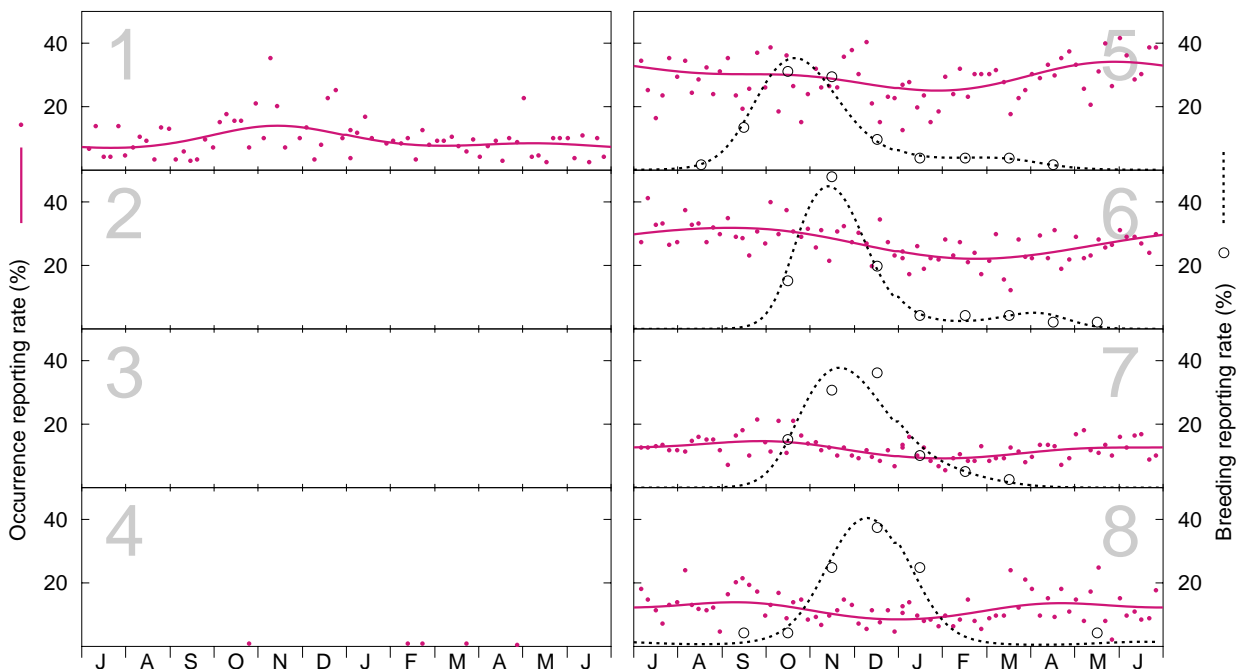
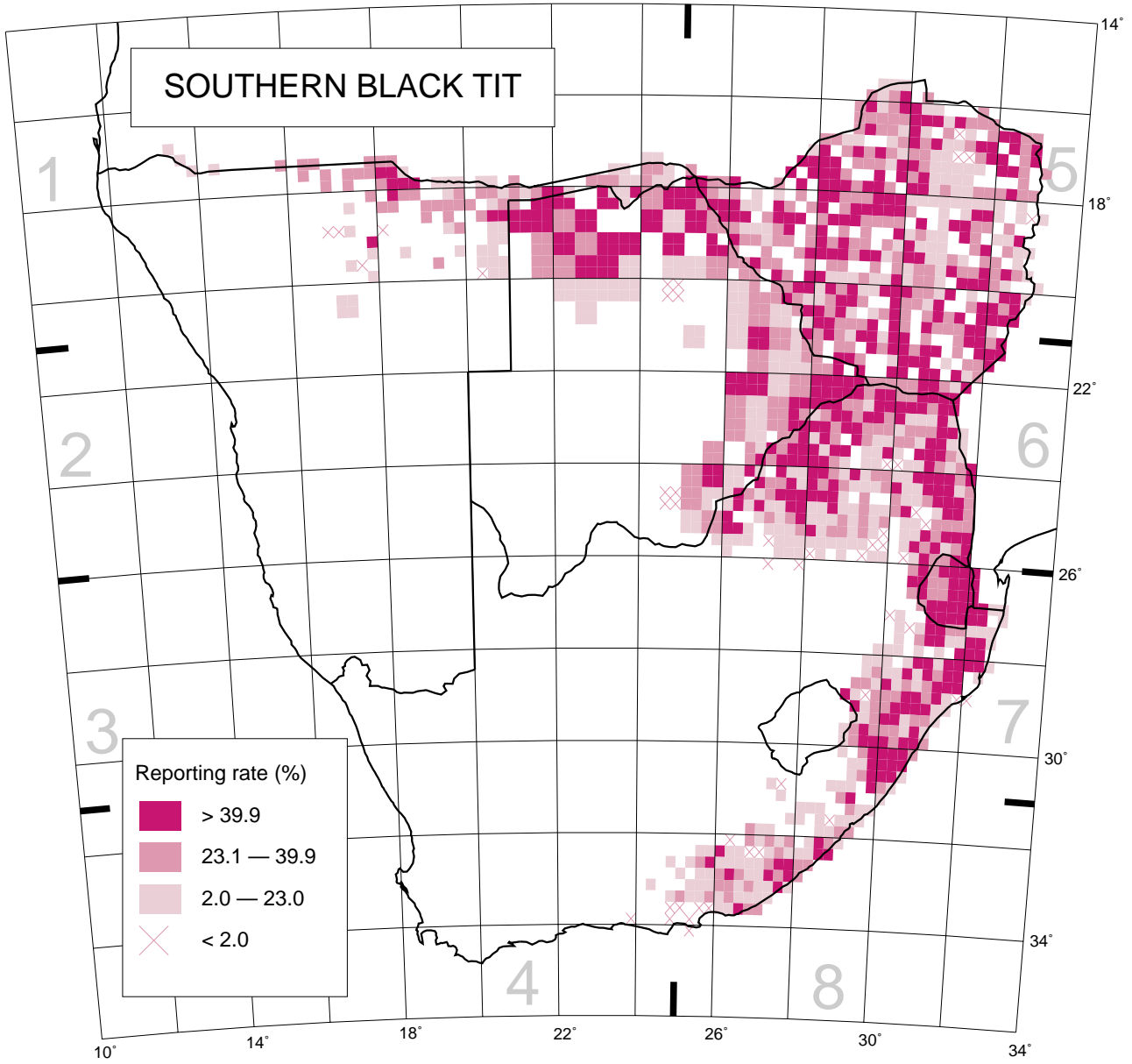
W.R. Tarboton

Recorded in 1408 grid cells, 31.0%

Total number of records: 19 981

Mean reporting rate for range: 29.2%





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 301, 0, 0, 5, 2604, 3095, 2358, 651; Breeding: 0, 0, 0, 0, 51, 46, 39, 24.