



## Yellowbellied Bulbul Geelborswillie

### *Chlorocichla flaviventris*

This is a large bulbul with a wide range in southern Africa, extending north to southern Somalia, west to Angola and reaching the southern extremity of its range on the coast of KwaZulu-Natal and adjacent eastern Cape Province where it is confined to evergreen thickets on dunes and the undergrowth of coastal forests. The nominate subspecies at the southern edge of the range in KwaZulu-Natal is well separated from other populations and so is subspecies *C. f. occidentalis* along the lower Kunene River in northwestern Namibia; it is not clear from the map whether the population in the Save Valley in southeastern Zimbabwe, sometimes considered as *ortiva* (Clancey 1980b), is also isolated.

It is a covert species; in the areas of overlap it is frequently confused with the Sombre Bulbul *Andropadus importunus* when insufficiently viewed, but it is a larger bird with a brown crown (feathers often erected) and a half-orbital white ring above a dark reddish-brown eye (the Sombre Bulbul has a white eye). The voice is also very different; a measured series of querulous notes (for which there are as many different transliterations as authors) is one of the characteristic bird sounds of lowland forests.

It is normally encountered in pairs or in small groups which often join mixed foraging flocks.

**Habitat:** In the moist climate of the southeastern littoral, its normal habitat is lowland forest, including dune forest, riverine forest and sand forest. In drier areas it occurs in riverine forest and sometimes in thickets on termitaria where these are a common feature. In forests it spends most of its time in the understorey and lower strata, retiring to dense cover when disturbed. The vegetation analysis gives rather

undue weight to Mopane and Miombo which do not normally support a dense understorey, nor do the majority of trees provide fruits in the form of berries or small drupes. Such shrubs and trees often occur on termite mounds, however, and the prevalence of thicket-supporting termitaria in some miombo woodlands may provide both cover and food resources through the year (Oatley 1969).

It has a mixed diet, with small berries and drupes forming a significant proportion. One of the longest surviving ringed birds (>12 years) of this species is on record only because it could not resist strawberries and could not find its way out from under the wire netting covering a strawberry bed in a Zimbabwe farmstead garden.

**Movements:** It is sedentary. At Mtunzini (2831DD), a ringed bird was retrapped 24 times in the course of 10 years and 9 months (Lawson 1973). The models for Zones 5–7 reveal a slight late-winter peak. This is a period when foliage is least dense and also when many trees and shrubs bear fruit; these two factors may have tended to increase its conspicuousness.

**Breeding:** In Zones 5 and 6 a distinct spring–summer peak is evident. Egg-laying is known to occur September–March with most clutches initiated October–December (Maclean 1993b).

**Interspecific relationships:** It has several times been photographed perched on the heads of antelope (Vernon 1972a; Steyn 1975a; Chalton 1976; Roberts 1993, 1995). The behaviour is reminiscent of oxpeckers, but observers have not seen the bulbuls removing ectoparasites. The observations were reported because of their unusualness and the behaviour must be presumed to be rare or even atypical, though separately observed in Zimbabwe and in the Mkuze Game Reserve (2732C). Roberts (1995) showed that the birds prefer to peck in the region of the preorbital glands, and suggested that they may ingest the gland secretion.

Yellowbellied Bulbuls may sometimes join mixed foraging flocks which also contain Terrestrial *Phyllastrephus terrestris* and Yellowstreaked *P. flavostriatus* Bulbuls; on such occasions the three species associate without aggression.

**Historical distribution and conservation:** It has undoubtedly suffered accelerating loss of habitat along the KwaZulu-Natal coast over the last 50 years, through clearing of coastal bush to make way for housing and agricultural development. Nevertheless, the Yellowbellied Bulbul is sufficiently widespread that such habitat loss has not resulted in its being listed in the Red Data books (Brooke 1984b; Collar & Stuart 1985).

T.B. Oatley

Recorded in 630 grid cells, 13.9%

Total number of records: 6316

Mean reporting rate for range: 22.9%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types



