



Fiscal Shrike

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Lanius collaris

The Fiscal Shrike occurs widely in sub-Saharan Africa (Harris & Arnott 1988) and in southern Africa, except much of Botswana, extreme northern and northwestern Namibia, and in southeastern Zimbabwe and the Zambezi Valley. Its distribution and abundance show that it is more common in the temperate south than in the tropical north. It is usually encountered in pairs which defend territories throughout the year. Territories range in size from as little as 1 ha in urban areas to 13 ha in arid areas (Harris & Arnott 1988). The three subspecies described in the region (Clancey 1980b) have continuous ranges.

It is highly conspicuous owing to its striking appearance, aggressive nature, use of exposed perches, and its attraction to roadsides. It is therefore unlikely that it was overlooked anywhere where it occurs.

Habitat: Its habitat requirements are determined largely by its foraging behaviour. It hunts from exposed perches and usually seizes its prey on the ground. It is found where open spaces coincide with exposed perches, short or sparse ground-cover and trees to provide nesting sites. It has adapted to a range of man-made habitats and is particularly common in gardens, parks and along roadsides. The vegetation analysis, however, shows it to be relatively scarce in Arid Woodland. It is not found in Marula *Sclerocarya caffra* and Knobthorn *Acacia nigrescens* dominated savanna in the Transvaal and Swaziland lowveld (Parker 1994). The vegetation analysis also confirms that it is less common in Alpine Grassland than in other grassland types (Osborne & Tigar 1990). This may be due to extreme climatic conditions, a shortage of nest sites and perches, or a combination of these factors.

Movements: It is believed to be resident throughout its range (Harris & Arnott 1988) and the atlas data do not indicate large-scale movements. The models show a slight increase in reporting rates during the winter, probably related to changes in conspicuousness. In Botswana it is predominantly a winter visitor (Penry 1994; Herremans 1994d), indicating some movement within the region. A vagrant bird of the northern race *L. c. subcoronatus* has been seen on the Cape Peninsula (Fraser & McMahon 1994).

Of 45 ringing recoveries (15 adults and 30 juveniles), one adult in the northern Transvaal was recovered at 110 km and one juvenile in the eastern Cape Province at 36 km from the ringing site; all other recoveries were within 20 km (SAFRING).

Breeding: The atlas data indicate that, for most of the region, breeding occurs August–March. In Zimbabwe, however, breeding was reported over a longer period, commencing in midwinter. Breeding has previously been reported in all months except February and mainly August–December (Maclean 1993b), with the Transvaal and Zimbabwe showing a September–October peak (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Irwin 1981). In the most arid west, breeding peaks in late summer. In the southwestern Cape Province the breeding season appears to be shorter than elsewhere; this was previously also established from nest record cards (Cooper 1971).

Interspecific relationships: Its scarcity or absence from arid woodlands, specifically marula–knobthorn savanna in the lowveld, may be a result of competition with the Longtailed Shrike *Corvinella melanoleuca* which occupies a similar niche. The latter species may have an advantage due to its greater size and gregariousness. In the Kalahari it may be at a competitive disadvantage relative to the Lesser Grey Shrike *L. minor*, whose distribution is largely complementary to that of the Fiscal Shrike. Although the distributions of the Fiscal Shrike and Redbacked Shrike *L. collurio* overlap widely, the pattern of reporting rates in the distribution map show that the latter is more abundant than the former in drier country, e.g. in the Limpopo Valley and eastern lowveld.

Historical distribution and conservation: The extent to which it has expanded its range has not been documented. It has spread into open areas where roadside transmission lines and alien trees provide perches and has undoubtedly become more numerous around human population centres. However, the relatively low reporting rates in the Transkei and Lesotho indicate a degree of sensitivity to different types of land use.

V. Parker

Recorded in 2899 grid cells, 63.9%

Total number of records: 90 973

Mean reporting rate for range: 67.6%

Reporting rates for vegetation types



