



Pintailed Whydah

Koninggroobekkie

Vidua macroura

The Pintailed Whydah is the most ubiquitous and well-known viduid finch, distributed widely over sub-Saharan Africa in a variety of open habitats. It frequents open mesic habitats of almost any description, especially mid- and high-altitude grasslands (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). Two subspecies are recognized in the region (Clancey 1980b); these appear to have continuous ranges.

Nonbreeding densities are difficult to estimate because it forms seasonally nomadic flocks in most areas. At a study site in the Transvaal (2428DB), call-sites of breeding males in optimal habitat along dirt roads in open *Acacia* savanna and floodplain were as close as 200 m (mean = 540 m, SD = 420 m) (Barnard 1989); overall densities in broadly suitable habitat were 1 site/12.4–15.5 km². In the moist coastal strip of the southern Cape Province (3322DC,DD, 3422BA,BB), adjacent call-sites were 330–3900 m apart, with overall densities in suitable habitat of 1 site/20.2–23.8 km² (Barnard 1989). By contrast, in Windhoek (2217CA), an arid area probably colonized in the last 50 years, densities are much less. Density is strongly influenced by human settlement patterns, especially where water and grass seed are in short supply. Call-sites are held by a breeding male, with females and nonbreeding males visiting different sites, so overall population estimates cannot be made without extensive mark–recapture efforts. Call-site densities also underestimate the density of males, as there tend to be several nonterritorial floaters for each call-site holder (Barnard 1989).

Breeding males are unmistakable, but inexperienced observers easily confuse females and nonbreeding males with other sparrow-like seedeaters, or overlook them altogether.

Habitat: The vegetation analysis shows it to inhabit a wide range of open mesic habitats. It occurs in gardens, orchards, crop- and grazing lands, floodplains, sewage works, roadsides, and edge habitats. In arid areas it becomes more specifically associated with wetlands, as illustrated by the linear distribution along the Orange River.

Movements: Reporting rates decreased dramatically during winter (May–September), but this is largely an artefact of much reduced conspicuousness when males lack breeding tail ornaments and pied plumage. However, whydahs in most areas are seasonally nomadic, except where artificial water-points and gardens allow individuals to overwinter. Popu-

lations in the moist southern and eastern parts of the region may have a greater proportion of resident individuals than those in the arid northwest.

Breeding: Breeding depends on the activity of its host, normally the Common Waxbill *Estrilda astrild*. It breeds in spring and summer (mainly August–May), but breeding peaks earlier (October–December) in the winter-rainfall area in the southwestern Cape Province (Zone 4) than further north in the Transvaal (January–February) or Zimbabwe (January–March), corroborating published egg-laying data (Winterbottom 1968a; Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). Breeding was not recorded from the northwest of the region (Zones 1 and 2) (see also Skinner 1995a; Brown & Clinning in press).

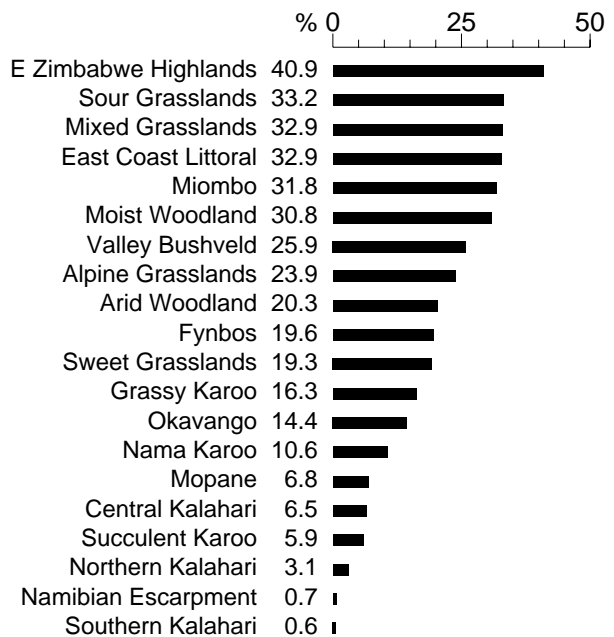
Interspecific relationships: It is the only viduid finch in the region which lacks a strictly host-specific relationship with a single estrildid finch. Although it nearly always parasitizes the Common Waxbill in southern Africa, it lacks the species-specific vocal and palate-marking mimicry that is such a striking and interesting feature of other viduid–estrildid coevolutionary relationships (Payne 1985). It is absent from some arid areas where Common Waxbills are common, for instance along the northern Namib Coast and in Namaqualand in the Cape Province.

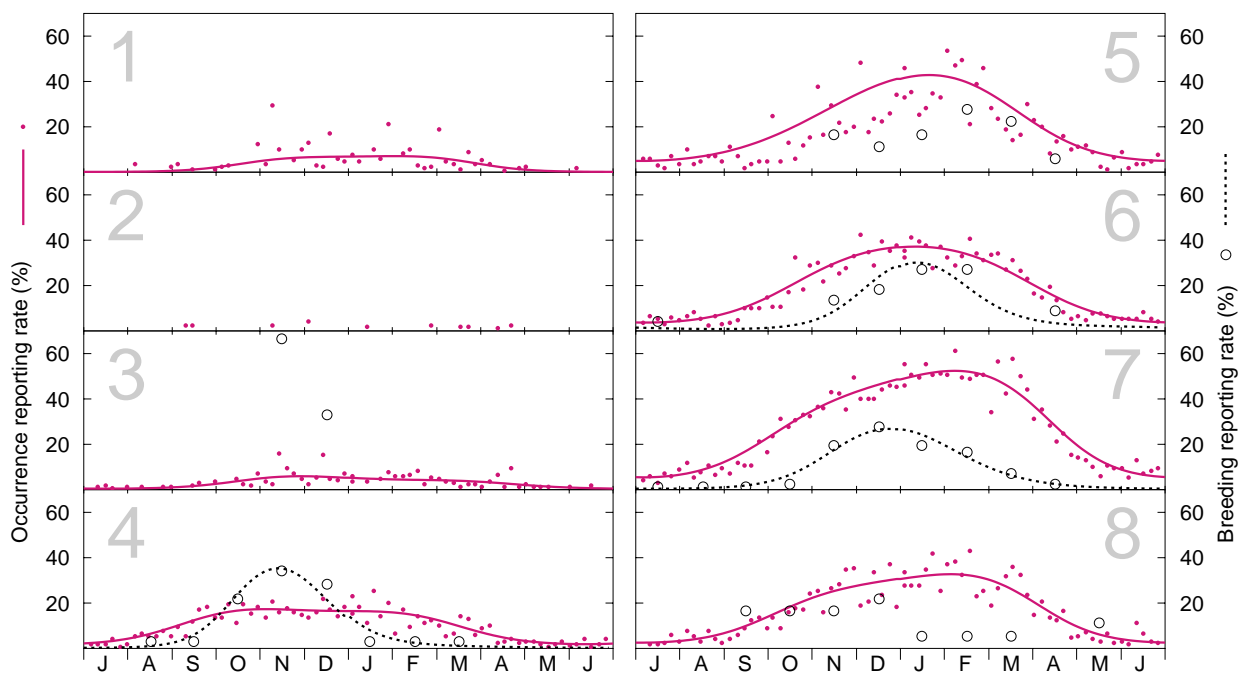
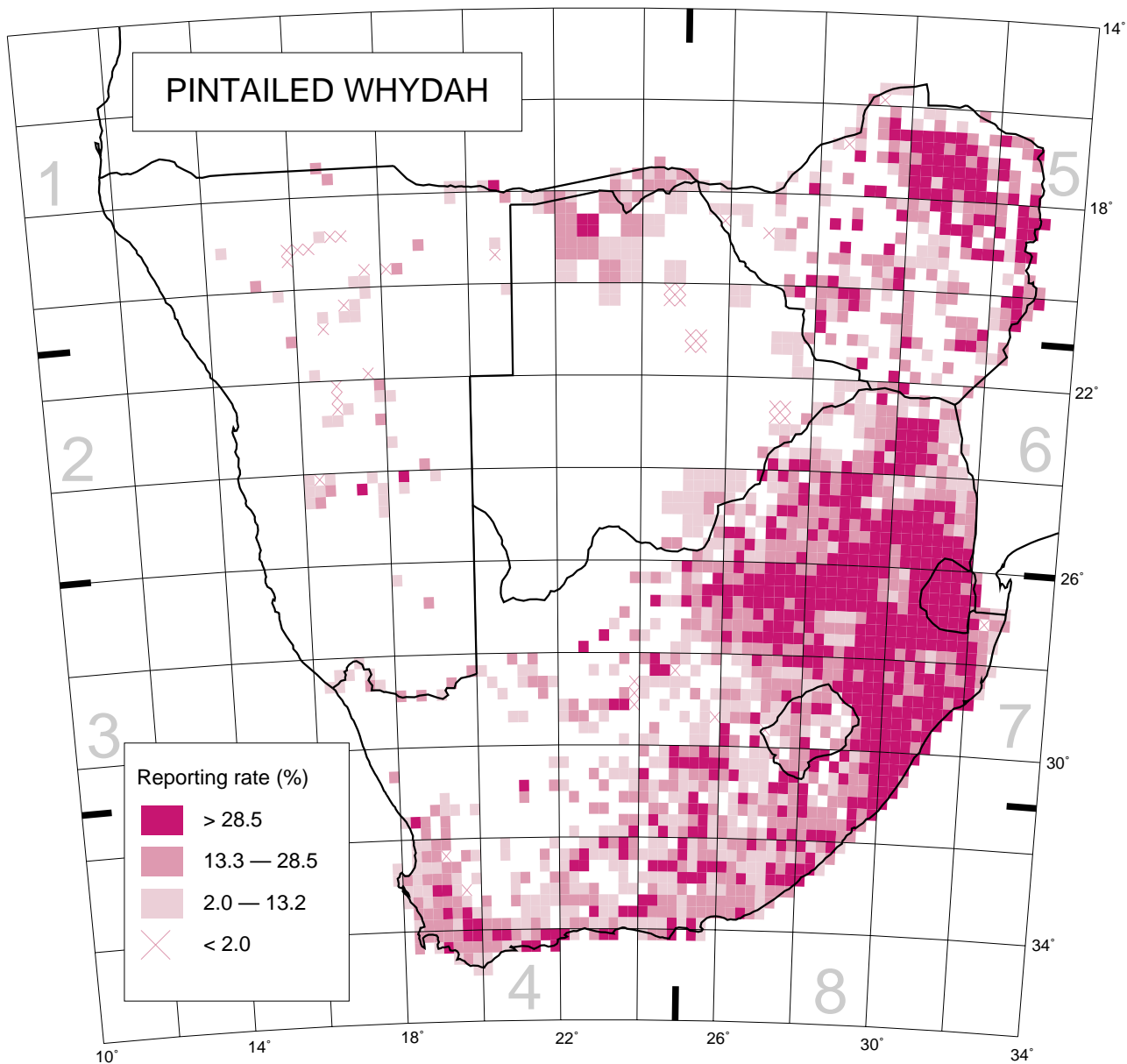
Historical distribution and conservation: The present range is not known to differ greatly from the past. It seems likely, however, that the Pintailed Whydah has colonized many new towns and other human settlements, especially in the arid west, in the past 50–100 years. This presumed expansion may have followed habitat alteration, including irrigated crop production and creation of gardens, parks and dams, construction of sewage works, and the colonization of these areas by the Common Waxbill. No threats are apparent, as its habitat requirements are broad.

P. Barnard

Recorded in 1786 grid cells, 39.4%
Total number of records: 32 907
Mean reporting rate for range: 26.6%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 91, 13, 150, 861, 1770, 2181, 5612, 940; Breeding: 0, 0, 3, 32, 18, 22, 72, 18.