

Shafttailed Whydah Pylstertrooibekkie

Vidua regia

The Shafttailed Whydah is near-endemic to southern Africa, extending marginally into southern Zambia and Angola. Its distribution is centred on the Kalahari basin.

Call-sites of males in suitable habitat in the Transvaal, near the southeastern edge of its range (2428DB) can be as little as 710 m apart (mean = 1120 m; SD = 310 m) in a high-density area; overall densities were 1 site/11.3–13.5 km² (Barnard 1989). In the more arid habitat of Windhoek (2217CA), near the western edge of its range, call-sites in a mosaic of *Acacia erioloba* savanna, ephemeral riverbeds and suburban gardens are as little as 52 m apart.

The males are distinctive in breeding plumage, but non-breeding males, females and juveniles are easily overlooked.

Habitat: It occurs in dry, grassy thorn and broadleaved savanna, scrub and woodland, predominantly *A. tortilis* and *A. erioloba* savanna on Kalahari sands. Dry drainage lines and shallow ephemeral riverbeds with prominent trees 4–7 m in height and grass with medium-sized seed, such as *Urochloa*, *Brachiaria* and *Panicum*, seem especially attractive. Adjacent agricultural land and gardens are also used, especially where water and seeds are present. Although this is a bird of arid and semi-arid lands, it is absent from areas with less than c. 150 mm of annual rainfall (unless permanent surface water is present) in the Namib and Kalahari. This is probably due as much to the lack of seeding grass and call-sites as to the scarcity of water. Although individuals do drink daily when water is available, they may be able to do without for longer periods when necessary, especially when the moisture content of grass seed is still relatively high.

Movements: Apparent seasonal movements in the accompanying models partly reflect strong seasonal changes in conspicuousness related to the striking breeding dress. In Windhoek, the winter population dropped to approximately 10% of its summer level (pers. obs.), and it seems likely that birds moved to moister regions; e.g. a bird colour-ringed in Windhoek was resighted in Etosha National Park in July. In December 1970 at Mwaku Pan (2022DB), north-western Botswana, good numbers returned after rains following a drought period during which viduid finches were absent (Tree 1972c). During the 1992 drought, there was an influx into the moist broadleaved woodlands of far northeastern Botswana, with flocks leaving Botswana along the Chobe River (M. Herremans pers. comm.). In general, little is known with certainty about its movements.

More mesic peripheral parts of the range may support resident populations (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b).

Breeding: Exceptionally few nest records exist; in a total of eight records for the region, egg-laying was noted December–May (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Skinner 1995a; Brown & Clinning in press.). Breeding is probably opportunistic, and dependent on both food and host nest availability.

Interspecific relationships: It parasitizes Violet-eared Waxbills *Uraeginthus granatinus*, and the ranges of these two species overlap almost completely. However, there is indirect evidence that it may also parasitize the Black-cheeked Waxbill *Estrilda erythronotos* opportunistically in areas where the Violet-eared Waxbill is scarce.

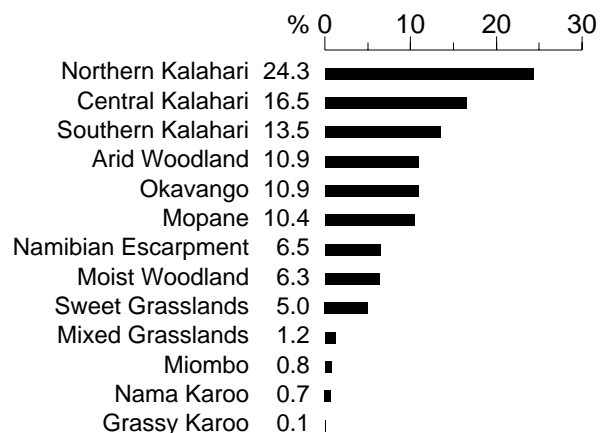
The ranges of all four whydahs in the region overlap widely and all four can be found in far northern Botswana, western Zimbabwe and the eastern Caprivi; the Shafttailed Whydah prefers relatively dry parts of the region.

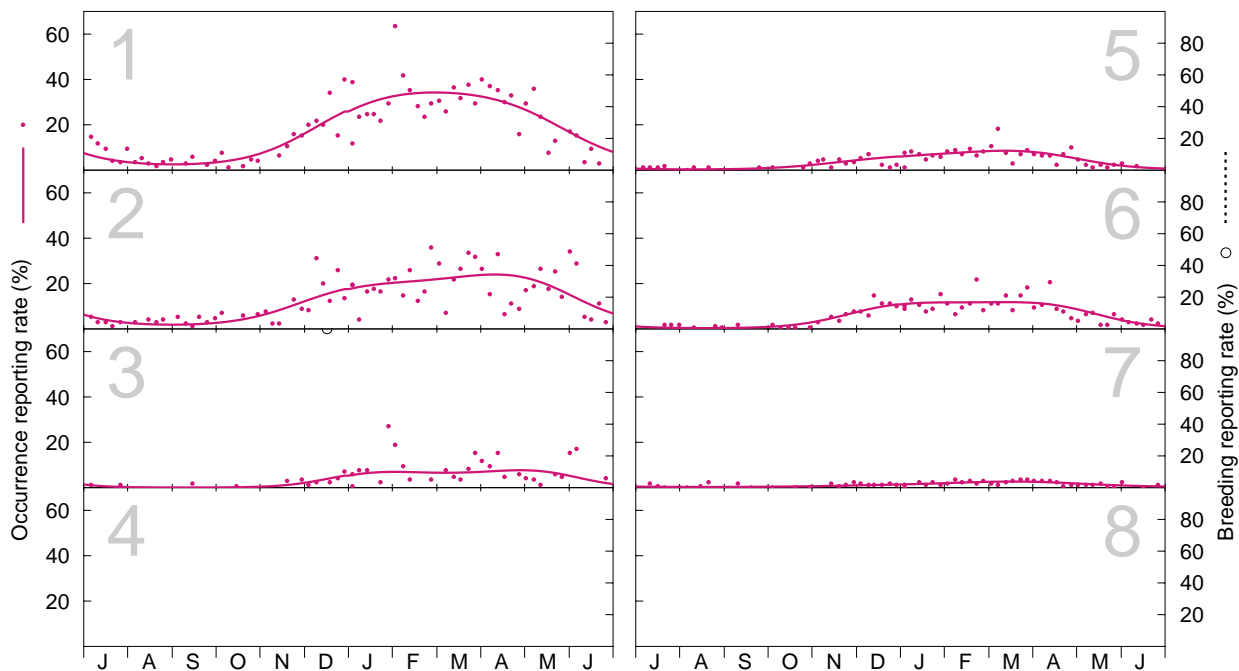
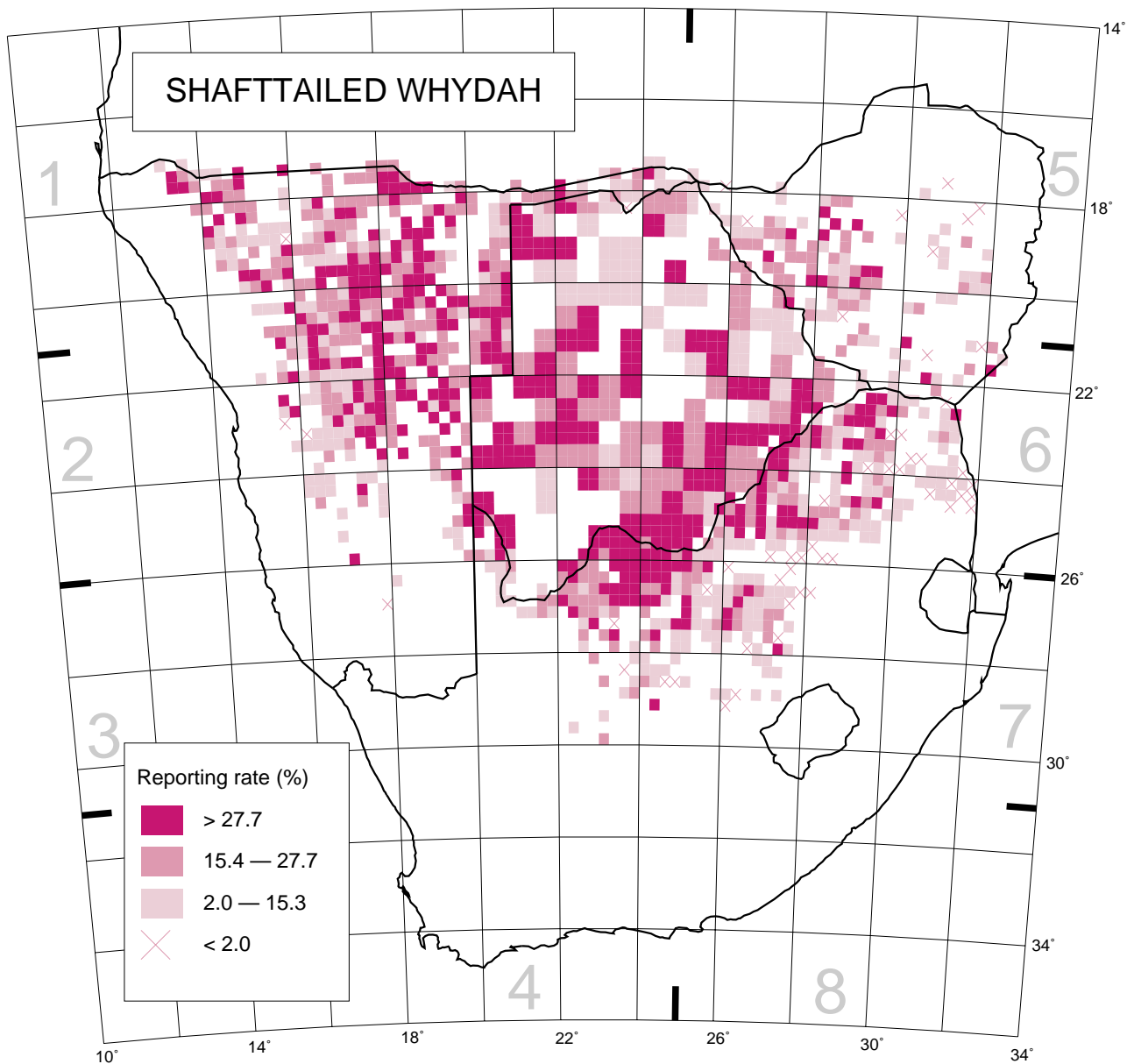
Historical distribution and conservation: The historical range is not known to have differed from the present. The Shafttailed Whydah seems free from threats on a broad scale. It is not clear whether habitat change due to agricultural intensification and urbanization has reduced or benefited whydah populations. It is common and probably not severely affected by the cage-bird trade.

P. Barnard

Recorded in 1487 grid cells, 32.8%
Total number of records: 5886
Mean reporting rate for range: 14.7%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 578, 490, 198, 0, 323, 691, 239, 0; Breeding: 0, 0, 1, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0.