



Greybacked Cisticola Grysrugtinkinkie

Cisticola subruficapilla

The Greybacked Cisticola is a near-endemic to southern Africa. It marginally enters southwestern Angola, in which region it was regarded as a characteristic species by Pinto (1983). It occurs from Namibia southwards to the Cape Peninsula, and eastwards through the Karoo to the southwestern Free State and the eastern Cape Province. The centre of its abundance is in the western Cape Province and Karoo, and the northern population in Namibia appears to be well isolated from the southern populations. The distributions of all five subspecies that have been described for southern populations (Clancey 1980b; Clancey *et al.* 1987) appear continuous on the present map. Two races have been described from the well-separated range in northern and central Namibia (Clancey 1980b).

Found singly, in pairs or family groups, it is not a very conspicuous species, although often locally common. The male makes distinctive display flights and calls from an exposed perch during the breeding season. It is frequently detected by its call, which can be heard throughout the year. It is usually the only 'longtailed' cisticola within its range, but it is difficult to distinguish from the Wailing Cisticola *C. lais*, causing confusion in the southeastern part of the range where they overlap. The two species have similar calls, but are distinguished by different habitat requirements, and in the region of overlap, the Greybacked Cisticola is grey ventrally whereas the Wailing Cisticola is buffy.

Habitat: It occurs in a wide range of habitats where low scrub is present: lowland and montane fynbos, shrubby plains, scrub-covered hillsides and ravines in semi-arid areas, dune grassland, saline grassland near estuaries and, in the northern Cape Province and Namibia, in grassy patches on rocky hillsides.

It was reported most frequently in Karoo (Succulent, Nama and Grassy) and in Fynbos. It was more marginally reported from a number of other vegetation types, presumably from scrubby pockets in those biomes.

Movements: It is resident. Modelled reporting rates show small increases in winter and spring, occurring earlier in the south. These changes presumably reflect an increase in male vocalizations and conspicuousness during the breeding season.

Breeding: In the winter-rainfall region (Zone 4) breeding occurs from early spring throughout the summer (July–April), but with a clear peak August–November, confirming published records (Winterbottom 1968a). It can be expected that breeding in central and northern Namibia and the Karoo is opportunistic in relation to rainfall, and therefore more likely to occur later in summer. In Namibia there are egg-laying records December–February (Brown & Clinning in press).

Interspecific relationships: It is very similar to the Wailing Cisticola which is slightly bigger and has a thicker bill (Maclean 1993b), suggesting that it consumes larger invertebrates. The Greybacked Cisticola prefers scrub rather than grass as the dominant component of the habitat. The ranges overlap in the eastern Cape Province, but are otherwise largely complementary. The Spotted Prinia *Prinia maculosa* is another 'longtailed' warbler which frequently occurs in the same habitats, but to what extent the species compete is not known.

Historical distribution and conservation: The historical distribution is not known to have differed from the present. The species is able to occupy a variety of scrubby habitats and can therefore tolerate some vegetational changes. It is able to persist in a highly fragmented landscape; Hockey *et al.* (1989) noted that it occupies small patches of renosterveld in wheat fields. The Greybacked Cisticola is not threatened, and even though it is near-endemic to the region, it is sufficiently abundant and widespread to resist long-term changes, and much of its habitat is unsuitable for intensive agriculture.

A. Berruti

Recorded in 760 grid cells, 16.8%
Total number of records: 7125
Mean reporting rate for range: 18.0%

Reporting rates for vegetation types



