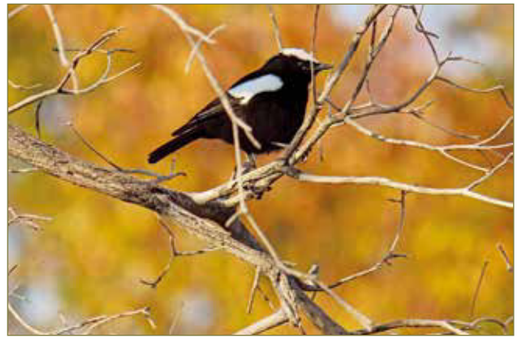
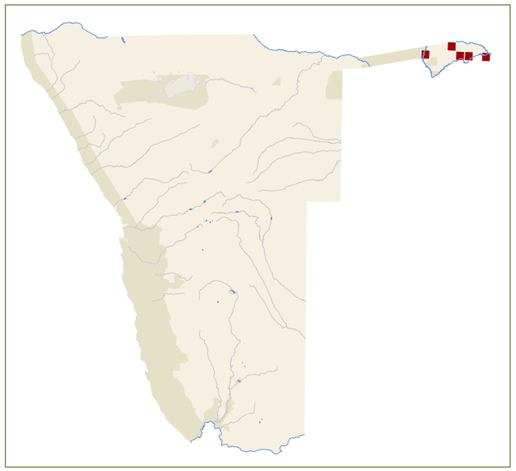


© Jutta Surén

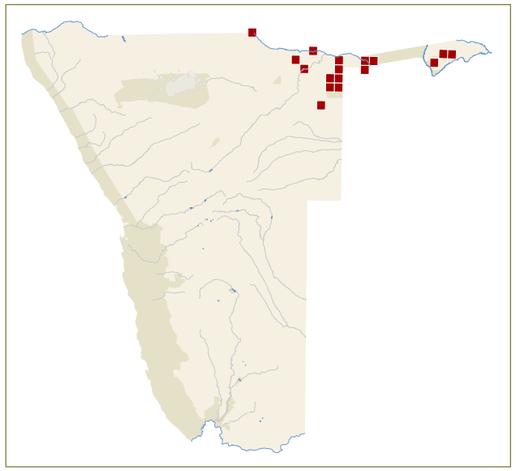
require further research and this rare species requires monitoring as it may need to be elevated to threatened status in the near future.

Miombo Blue-eared Starling (Lesser Blue-eared Starling) | *Lamprotornis elisabeth (Lamprotornis chloropterus)*



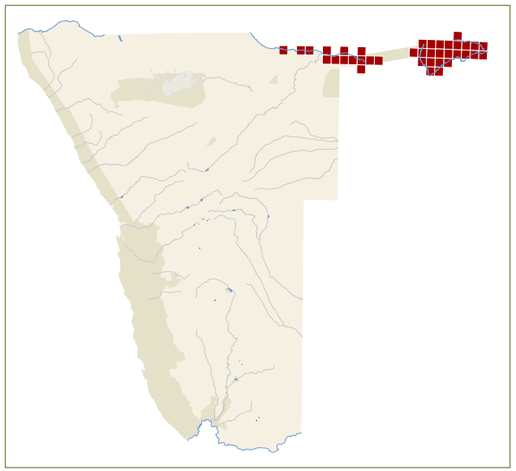
A difficult species to distinguish from the Greater Blue-eared Starling *L. chalybaeus*, this bird is found mainly in Zimbabwe, but with scattered records from the Zambezi region (Tree 1997h). It is found in the mixed arid (broad-leaved) and Mopane woodlands adjacent to the rivers, and it is more likely to form large flocks than the other two glossy starlings here, the Cape Glossy Starling (Glossy Starling) *L. nitens* and the Greater Blue-eared Starling (Tree 1997h). Its reporting rate is 5% in these areas and its area of occupancy is 2,800 km², of which only 4% occurs in protected areas of Mudumu National Park (Jarvis *et al.* 2001). Because of its widespread distribution in sub-Saharan Africa's woodlands it is not a conservation priority in Namibia.

Sharp-tailed Starling | *Lamprotornis acuticaudus*



This species differs from the other glossy starlings by its orange or red eyes and wedge-shaped tail (Underhill & Brown 1997b). Its southern African range only encompasses the Kavango and Caprivi sandveld region of Namibia and adjacent areas of Botswana (Underhill & Brown 1997b). Elsewhere it is found in Angola, Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo. It is rarely reported, with an average reporting rate of 12% and a maximum reporting rate of 36% at Khaudum camp. It occupies an area of 9,400 km², of which 48% occurs in the protected area of Mahango in the Bwabwata National Park and in the Khaudum National Park (Jarvis *et al.* 2001). There, it is resident in the mature deciduous broad-leafed woodland, especially the *Burkea-Pterocarpus* habitat (Brown 1990). A small population was found in 2011 in Mopane woodlands some 40 km south-west of Katima Mulilo at a density of about 20 birds per 10 km² (Brown 2012b). Another population has been found in the vicinity of Shamvura in the Kavango East region (Paxton 2014). Population size could be gleaned from flocks that form after breeding, which takes place from November to March (Underhill & Brown 1997b). Little is known about its breeding biology (Craig 2005). Seven breeding records for Namibia have egg-laying in October (one) November (three) and December (three) (Brown *et al.* 2015). One nest containing chicks was monitored during December 2011 (Paxton 2014). The nest was located in a sheltered nest hole in the dead branch of a *Guiboutia coleosperma* tree growing in a mahangu field. There were sub-adult cooperative helpers at the nest and the birds were not disturbed by nearby plowing activities. Brood size and breeding success could not be ascertained.

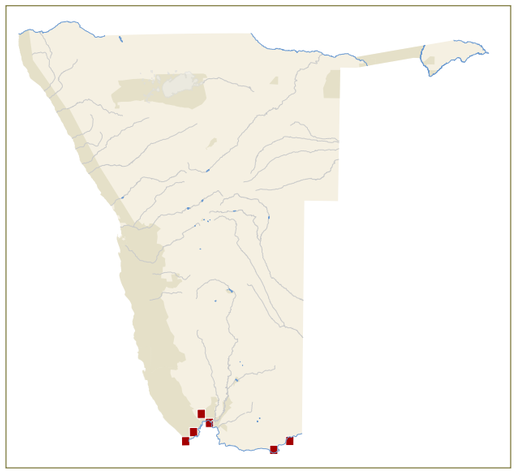
Red-billed Oxpecker | *Buphagus erythrorynchus*



Accurate population figures for this species were derived from two sets of counts undertaken on the two oxpecker species found in the Caprivi Strip, the only area of Namibia in which they both occur (Mundy 1997f). An increase in numbers was recorded over a 15-year period, with an estimated 3,627 to 4,902 birds recorded in 1997 and 1998 (Robertson & Jarvis 2000), compared with 2,285 to 3,780 birds recorded in 1983 and 1984 (Stutterheim & Panagis 1985, Brown & Brown 1987). They are most numerous around the Okavango River and the river systems of the Zambezi region, where their main modern-day host, domestic cattle, increased at least three-fold in the same time period (Mendelsohn & Roberts 1997, Robertson & Jarvis 2000). They appear to be unaffected by reduced rainfall and increasing frequency of fire; factors that may have caused the decline in the red-listed Yellow-billed Oxpecker *B. africanus* populations in the same areas (Robertson & Jarvis 2000). Red-billed Oxpeckers occupy an area of 18,000 km² in Namibia, of which 65% falls into conservation areas. Many locations are well away from the riverine systems favoured by the Yellow-billed Oxpecker (Robertson & Jarvis 2000). The species was listed as *Near Threatened* in South Africa due to the historical decline in range size induced by arsenic-based cattle dips that killed ticks as well as oxpeckers (Barnes 2000a). This may have occurred in Namibia, but the more traditional farming methods in the rural north-east make this less likely. Populations have rebounded in South Africa and the species was recently downgraded there to *Least Concern* (Taylor *et al.* in press). Red-billed Oxpeckers are not threatened in Namibia, but any population assessment of the *Endangered* Yellow-billed Oxpecker should include this species.

© Ken Oake Game Studios (Botswana) Pty Ltd

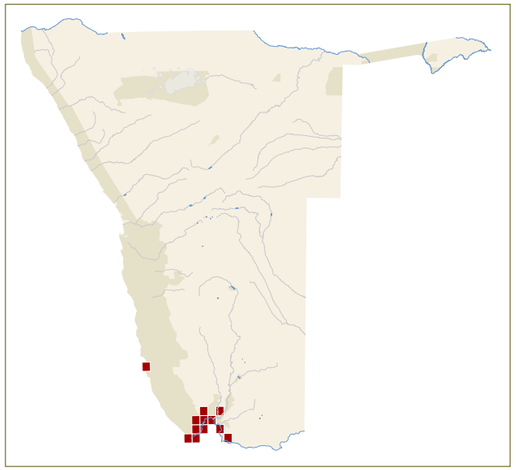
Malachite Sunbird | *Nectarinia famosa*



This common species is found from the Ethiopian highlands southwards to South Africa, where reporting rates are above 35% over much of its large range (Fraser 1997a). It just touches the Namibian border along the Orange River from the mouth (where it is common in gardens in Oranjemund) east to about 20°E. It occupies an area of 1,800 km², of which 25% occurs within the

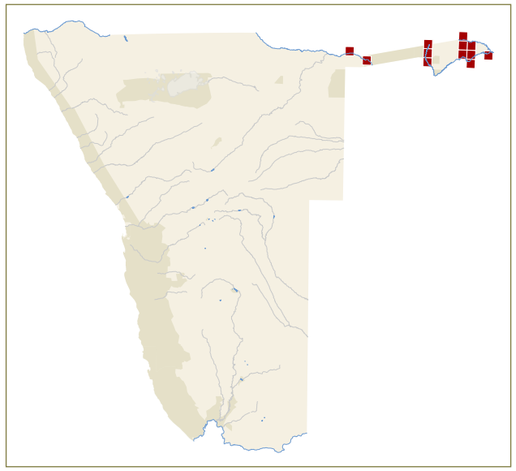
/Ai-/Ais and Tsau//Khaeb (Sperrgebiet) national parks (Jarvis *et al.* 2001). It is attracted to flowering *Protea*, *Watsonia* and *Aloe* spp., where it can reach densities in excess of 350 birds per km^2 (Fraser 1997a). Populations are reduced where Rooikrans *Acacia cyclops* has invaded its preferred habitat, but not where gums *Eucalyptus* spp. have done so (Fraser & Crowe 1990). This may have influenced its distribution along the Orange River but population size is not known. It is not of conservation priority in Namibia because it is so common elsewhere.

Southern Double-collared Sunbird (Lesser Double-collared Sunbird) | *Cinnyris chalybeus (Nectarinia chalybea)*



One of the smallest of the sunbird tribe, this species is virtually endemic to South Africa, with a tiny distribution extending into Namibia across the Orange River (Fraser 1997b). It prefers fynbos vegetation, but is also found in the semi-arid Karoo and along rivers, explaining its presence along the length of the Orange River in Namibia (Fraser 1997b). Small numbers are also seen occasionally in gardens in Lüderitz (J Kemper pers. obs.). It occurs at densities of 150 to 200 birds per km^2 in South Africa, but densities and total population size is unknown in Namibia. It occupies an area of 4,800 km^2, of which 17% occurs within the protected areas of the /Ai-/Ais and Tsau//Khaeb (Sperrgebiet) national parks (Jarvis *et al.* 2001). Reporting rates were higher than for the Malachite Sunbird *Nectarinia famosa*; several quarter-degree squares along the Orange River had reporting rates of 40%. It seems to adapt well to infestations of alien trees (Fraser & Crowe 1990), which may explain it presence along most of the Orange River. Its common occurrence in South Africa and adaptation to alien vegetation precludes it from conservation concern in Namibia.

Copper Sunbird (Coppery Sunbird) | *Cinnyris cupreus (Nectarinia cuprea)*

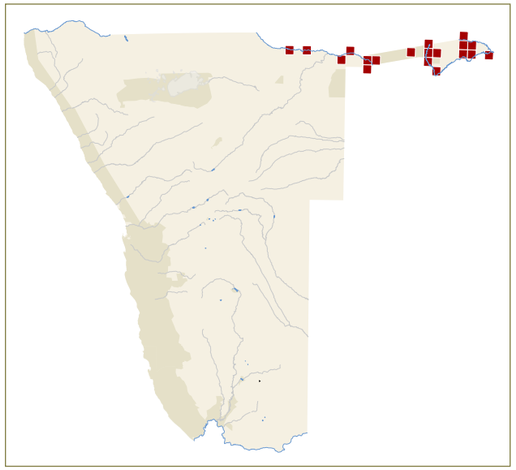


Across the Zimbabwean Mashonaland Highveld, westwards through the north-east of Namibia, including along the Okavango River, the Copper Sunbird has a virtually identical pattern of occurrence to the Purple-banded Sunbird *Cinnyris bifasciatus* (*Nectarinia bifasciata*) (Tree 1997e). Its area of occupancy in Namibia is 2,700 km^2, smaller than that of the Purple-banded Sunbird, of which 3% occurs within protected areas; reporting rate was 4% (Jarvis *et al.* 2001). Copper Sunbirds inhabit riverine woodland, forest edge and clearings, similar but more diverse habitat to that occupied by Purple-banded Sunbirds. There are two breeding records from Namibia, from the Kwando River bridge near Susuwe, where a nest with three eggs was found in January 1996 and from Katima Mulilo, also with eggs in January (Brown *et al.* 2015). Both species may suffer local degradation of habitat as riparian woodland, particularly on the Okavango River, is heavily utilised by the dense populations of local people

© Dr Ursula Franke-Bryson

and is damaged by elephants (Mendelsohn & el Obeid 2004). Both species occur widely outside Namibia and the Namibian range of both is less than 1% of their African range. Both species also appear to have increased their range in north-east Namibia, because neither species was recorded by Skead (1967).

Purple-banded Sunbird | *Cinnyris bifasciatus (Nectarinia bifasciata)*

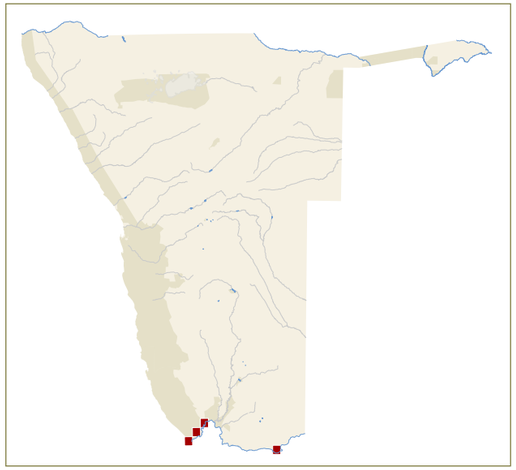


This species occurs mainly in East Africa, south to the eastern coastal regions of Mozambique and into Swaziland and Durban in South Africa. It is rare inland, but it is found in the northern and eastern highveld of Zimbabwe, and continues westward through north-east Namibia as far as 19°E on the Okavango River (Tree 1997i). There, it occurs in riparian broad-leafed woodland wherever nectar-bearing flowers occur. Records indicate it is a very rare visitor (5% reporting rate), occurring only between November and June and disappearing in winter (Tree 1997i). Its area of occupancy covers 7,100 km^2, of which 28% falls within the protected areas of the Nkasa Rupara (Mamili) National Park and the Mahango area of the Bwabwata National Park (Jarvis *et al.* 2001). It is not considered threatened, although it may be locally impacted by wood clearing activities (Tree 1997i).

Cape Weaver | *Ploceus capensis*

This well-known species is virtually endemic to South Africa and an uncommon resident in Namibia, found only along the Orange River. In Oranjemund, it occurs regularly in some gardens and breeds at the Oranjemund Golf Club (Anderson 2006); females with brood patches have

© Eckart Demasius



been ringed next to the golf course (HD Oschadleus pers. comm.). Birds have been recorded at Vellorsdrif, 250 km east of Oranjemund. It also roosts and nests in reeds that are frequent along the river, but Simmons & Allan (2002) did not find it in 50 km surveys east of Noordoewer. The population along the lower Orange River is disjunct from that found in Little Namaqualand, South Africa (Anderson 2006). It occupies an area of 1,800 km^2, of which 8% occurs within the protected areas of the /Ai-/Ais and Tsau//Khaeb (Sperrgebiet) national parks (Jarvis *et al.* 2001, Frazee *et al.* 2005). It seems likely that the bird is more common than the small distribution suggests, given its propensity for agricultural areas in South Africa and the increase in farming along the Orange River. Its commonness elsewhere precludes it from being a conservation priority in Namibia.