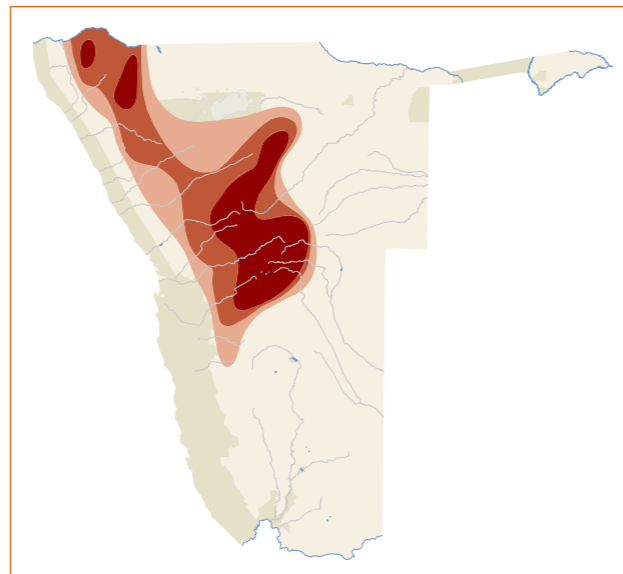


## Rockrunner | *Achaetops pycnopygius*



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This species is more commonly heard than seen because of its skulking behaviour and the broken rocky habitat it occupies, leading to the conclusion that it is rather rare. However, population size in Namibia is estimated at 96,500 birds, slightly less than the Herero Chat, and even this may underestimate the birds' true density. Based on SABAP1 atlas data, it was once thought to occupy an area of only 59,000 km<sup>2</sup> (Simmons 1997m), but it is now predicted to occur in a much larger area of 238,000 km<sup>2</sup> (Jarvis & Robertson 1999), extending eastwards to the Waterberg Plateau Park, and south to the Namib-Naukluft National Park (24.5°S). It extends into the Huila, Namibe and Benguela provinces of Angola, where it occurs sparsely among rocky outcrops (Dean 2000). In Namibia, it is commonest in the central highlands, but territory size is unknown (Simmons 1997m). At least four distinct territories were recorded in the National Botanical Gardens in Windhoek (Schweitzer 2011), an area of just under 10 ha, giving a density of about 2.5 ha per pair. Peak laying co-incides with higher rainfall, which occurs from January to March within the bird's range, but it is recorded egg-laying over a six-month period from November to April (n=28) (Jarvis *et al.* 2001, Schweitzer 2011). The average clutch is 2.5 eggs, with three eggs being most common (Brown *et al.* 2015). Its preference for rocky edges where neither agriculture nor people are present precludes it from being a conservation



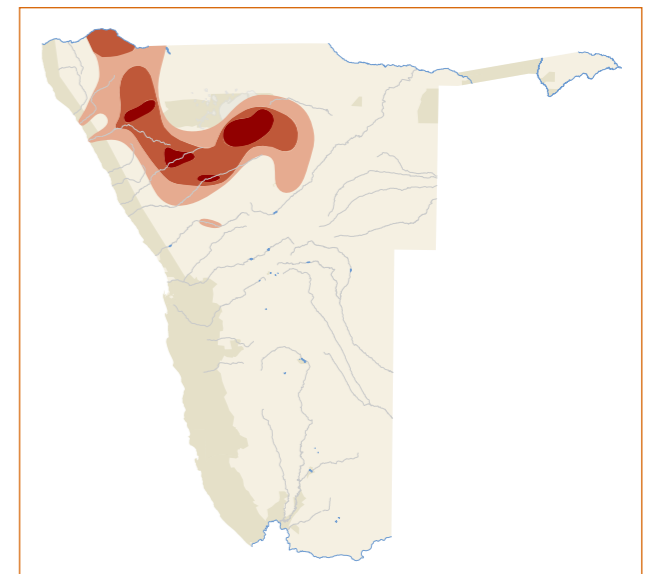
priority, but few nests have been found (see Tarboton 2001); Schweitzer (2011) found nests in an aloe and sisal plant, whereas all previous records show nests in grass tufts. Most of its life history is completely unknown, but Schweitzer (2011) documented the growth of one set of chicks from hatching to fledging. This is a species that requires further study and may prove to be among the most ancient passerines in Africa.

## Bare-cheeked Babbler | *Turdoides gymnogenys*



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Population size in Namibia is estimated at 79,100 birds, with an area of occupancy of 90,900 km<sup>2</sup> (Jarvis & Robertson 1999). It is the commonest babbler in the dry Mopane woodlands of north-west Namibia, and is 10 times more likely to be detected in the dry riverbeds in this region than away from riverbeds (Shaw & Shrewby 2000). It is sympatric with the Southern Pied Babbler (Pied Babbler) *T. bicolor* in the mixed *Acacia*-broadleaf areas of eastern Etosha National Park, and with the Black-faced Babbler *T. melanops* and Hartlaub's Babbler *T. hartlaubii* in the Kunene River area (Simmons & Herremans 1997, Herremans & Simmons 1997). Like other babblers, it occurs in co-operatively breeding groups of two to 11 birds (Shaw & Shrewby 2000), with a mean density of four to six birds per km<sup>2</sup> or about one group per km<sup>2</sup> (Robertson *et al.* 1995). There is no evidence of decline in this sparsely populated region of Namibia, and a decline is unlikely to occur unless global warming decreases rainfall in this region, decreasing breeding frequency. It also occurs extensively within the Etosha National Park, with an average reporting rate of 15% (Simmons 1997k). It is both conspicuous and resident within its range according to colour-ringed individuals marked in Hobatere that remained year-round (S Braine unpubl. data). Eggs are laid throughout the year, with three recorded in January, one in each of March and May, two in July and one each month from September through to December (n=11). Either



two or three eggs are laid per clutch (Brown *et al.* 2015). Birds breeding near riverbeds are twice as successful as those breeding away from them (Shaw & Shrewby 2000). Group size is also larger near riverbeds. It is of little conservation concern, given that human population density is low in its preferred habitat and 16% of its area of occupancy lies within protected areas, mainly the Etosha National Park (Jarvis *et al.* 2001).