

Swynnerton's Robin

Bandkeeljanfrederik

Swynnertonia swynnertoni

Swynnerton's Robin is an endemic Afrotropical species known only from the eastern Zimbabwe highlands, Gorongosa Mountain in Mozambique – which probably has the largest population – and sundry montane areas in Tanzania where it was only recently discovered (Jensen & Stuart 1982; Keith *et al.* 1992). It was for many years considered to be congeneric with the Starred Robin *Pogonocichla stellata* because of a superficial resemblance in plumage pattern, but its specific traits are quite different and no close relatives are currently recognized.

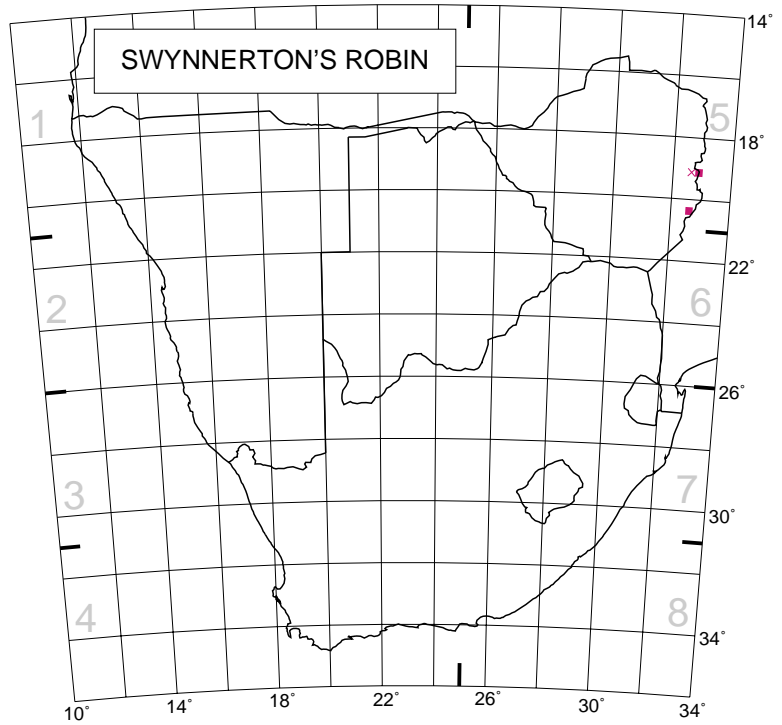
The atlas data correctly depicts its distribution in the eastern Zimbabwe highlands where it is known from three localities (Irwin 1981). It inhabits the undergrowth of transitional and Afromontane forest, being commonest at around 900–1200 m and shunning higher forest above 1900 m. It is often abundant (4–6 pairs/ha) where the plant *Dracaena fragans* is dominant, as in large areas of the Mount Selinda forest (2032BC).

It is sedentary. In addition to a variety of rather weak vocalizations (Manson 1990), it has a remarkably loud song for so small a bird, similar to the song call of the Rufousnaped Lark *Mirafra africana* (Irwin 1981), but is virtually silent during the winter months. The summer increase in reporting rates probably resulted from increased vocal conspicuousness during the breeding season. Breeding activity is restricted to the first half of the rainy season October–January with a peak in December (Irwin 1981). The nest is an open cup built within one metre of the ground and often sited in the leaf axils of *Dracaena* plants. Except when attending fledglings, it is usually encountered in pairs and is not particularly shy. It regularly attends army ant columns during the dry season.

Its 'rare' status (Collar & Stewart 1985), and its restriction to so few forests, makes it vulnerable to destruction of its habitat. Encroachment on forest by shifting cultivation prac-

tices of local farmers is a threat at all populations, and only rigorous protection of the forests will ensure its future survival. Swynnerton's Robin has been classified as 'vulnerable' in the latest global list of threatened birds (Collar *et al.* 1994).

T.B. Oatley



Recorded in 3 grid cells, 0.1%
 Total number of records: 63
 Mean reporting rate for range: 19.3%

