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FIRST RECORD OF CHESTNUT-FRONTED HELMET-SHRIKE AT CHILO GORGE LODGE, ZIMBABWE

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One of the pristine wilderness areas in Zimbabwe is the world-renowned Gonarezhou National Park in the south eastern part of the country. The Save River forms the north eastern border of the park. The park is not only famous for the matured woodland habitat, elephant sightings and other wildlife experiences – it also boasts the well-known Chilojo Cliffs – red sandstone cliffs which are described as "the most prominent and enduring natural features of Gonarezhou National Park" (ZPWMA 2014).

The Chestnut-fronted Helmet-Shrike *Prionops scopifrons* is described as "an uncommon breeding resident of dense mixed woodland and forest which occurs in family groups of four to eight birds" (Parker, 1999). The species occurs in "East Africa south to extreme ne S Africa. In s Africa, in extreme se Zimbabwe, s Mozambique and ne KwaZulu-Natal (where rare and localised, not recorded in recent years)" (Vernon and Dean, 2005) (ref Fig 1).

This short note records a new sighting and distribution record for the species. Chilo Gorge Lodge (S21°14.779' E32°20.908') is situated on the northern bank of the Save near the confluence with the Runde River. About 10 km from Chilo Gorge lodge is a patch of sand forest where we recorded a small flock of Chestnut-fronted Helmet-Shrikes on 2 July 2014. This is the first record of this species in the area (Mutombeni, pers. comm.)

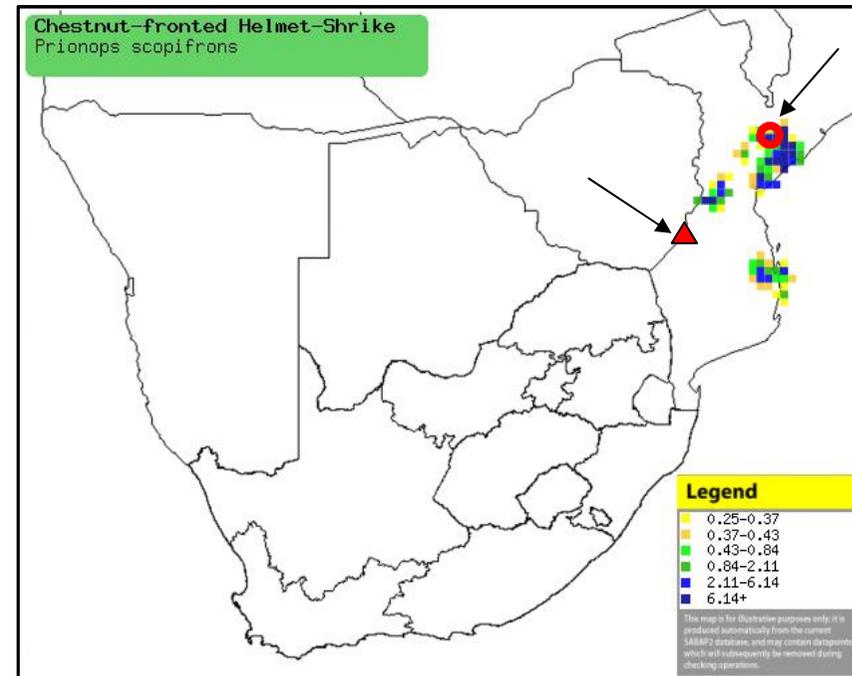


Fig 1 – The smoothed distribution map of the Chestnut-fronted Helmet-Shrike as recorded in SABAP1 surveys. The red triangle indicates the area of the sighting discussed in this paper. The area in which the only SABAP2 observations were recorded is indicated by the red circle and arrow.

(Source: Animal Demography Unit, University of Cape Town)

"The population possibly does not exceed 500 birds and it is threatened in this region [southern Mozambique]." (Parker, 1999). Therefore this record is of great importance – it records a new distribution record and may add to estimates of population numbers of the threatened species.

It is believed that this sand forest is also home to one of the biggest Nyala trees *Xanthocercis zambesiaca* in Zimbabwe.



Fig 2 – One of the Chestnut-fronted Helmet-Shrikes observed near Chilo Gorge Lodge © Lizet Grobbelaar



Fig 3 – The renowned Chilojo Cliffs in the Gonarezhou National Park in Zimbabwe ©Lizet Grobbelaar

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