

# Ornithological Observations

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Ornithological Observations accepts papers containing faunistic information about birds. This includes descriptions of distribution, behaviour, breeding, foraging, food, movement, measurements, habitat and plumage. It will also consider for publication a variety of other interesting or relevant ornithological material: reports of projects and conferences, annotated checklists for a site or region, specialist bibliographies, and any other interesting or relevant material.

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## **GOLDEN-TAILED WOODPECKERS ALONG THE ORANGE RIVER IN THE SOUTHERN FREE STATE**

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## GOLDEN-TAILED WOODPECKERS ALONG THE ORANGE RIVER IN THE SOUTHERN FREE STATE

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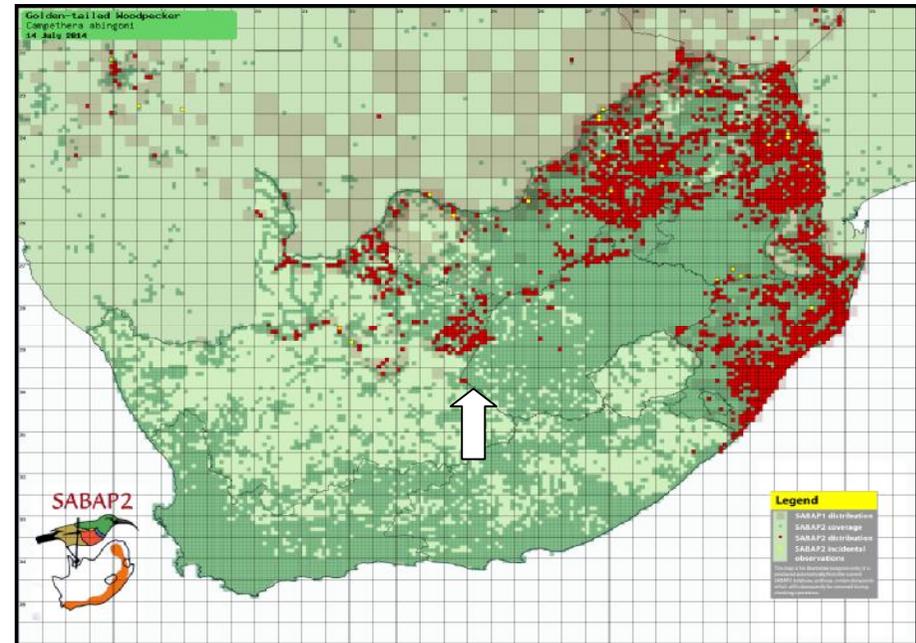
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Golden-tailed Woodpeckers *Campethera abingoni* occurs widespread in all savanna areas, also in coastal forests, evergreen thickets, riverine forests and developed woodland in urban areas of southern Africa (Tarboton 2005). During the first southern African bird atlas project (SABAP1) they were recorded in the Free State mainly along the Vaal River, but also along the Orange River in the Northern Cape as far west as Kimberley where this species are relatively common (Tarboton 1997). Their preferred habitat along the Vaal River is mainly *Vachellia* thickets and also kalahari thornveld patches.

During a fieldwork visit to the south-western Free State at the farm Bleskop, in the Luckhoff district (S29°51'; E24°32') along the Orange River in *Vachellia* thickets during November 2003, the following observations of Golden-tailed Woodpeckers are of interest. In the afternoon of 10 November 2003, the loud, nasal "weeeaaa" call was heard and an adult was seen perched in a large *Vachellia* tree in the riverine bush a few metres from the river. The bird then flew away and disappeared. Another individual was heard again later during the day. This observation was made in what is now labeled SABAP2 pentad 2950\_2430. At that time it represented the furthest record west of this species along the Orange River.



**Fig 1** - Distribution of Golden-tailed Woodpecker according to SABAP2 data. The pre SABAP2 record at Bleskop, Luckhoff during November 2003 is indicated by an arrow.

During SABAP2 surveys this species were regularly recorded in the Orania area along the Orange River in pentads 2945\_2420 (7.14% reporting rate) and 2945\_2425 (24.0% reporting rate) (Fig 1). The birds were located first by WSB in pentad 2845\_2425 in the period 4-6 December 2008 and in pentad 2845\_2420 between 10-11 March 2009. They were observed again during subsequent visits. In the Orania area they were recorded mostly in the riverine *Vachellia* bush along the Orange River (similar to the Bleskop locality), but also in the gardens and the caravan park area dominated by *Ziziphus mucronata* and *Vachellia* bush. Breeding was suspected in the area as in most occasions pairs were observed – though it was never



confirmed. The Orania area is about 12.4 km west from the Bleskop locality. Earlé and Grobler (1987) listed a March record for this species near Bethulie in the southern Free State which was probably rejected during final vetting for SABAP1 as the record is not shown in Tarboton (1997).

During SABAP2 this species was also recorded at localities along the Vet River in the Wesselsbron area and regularly recorded on the farm Armika (pentad 2800\_2615) and adjacent pentad (2800\_2610). The closest localities are also along the Vet River near Hoopstad (2750\_2545) and further in the Sandveld Nature Reserve and Vaal River areas in riverine *Vachellia* bush or *V. erolobia* veld. The species was also recorded at Amakulu Safaris (2845\_2455) in the Perdeberg area (which is near the Modder River) and east of Kimberley in the Free State. Further along the Modder River there were *ad hoc* sightings as well – in Soetdoring Nature Reserve (2845\_2600) and near Mockes Dam in the Glen area in 2900\_2625 (11.11% reporting rate).

The November 2003 record of Golden-tailed Woodpeckers represents the first record of this species along the Orange River before the data collection of SABAP2 started in July 2007.

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