



## Redbreasted Sparrowhawk

### Rooiborssperwer

#### *Accipiter rufiventris*

The Redbreasted Sparrowhawk has the smallest range of any accipiter in southern Africa. It is limited to the southern and eastern parts of South Africa, western Swaziland, Lesotho and the eastern Zimbabwe highlands. It is associated with Afromontane habitats and its distribution is restricted and disjunct, extending along the isolated montane regions on the eastern side of Africa from the Ethiopian highlands to the southwestern Cape Province. In the southeastern Transvaal a breeding density of 8–11 pairs in 260 km<sup>2</sup> was recorded, with nests 2–6 km apart (Tarboton & Allan 1984). In Zimbabwe inter-nest distances of 3–12 km have been found (Steyn 1982b). The Redbreasted Sparrowhawk has been considered conspecific with the European Sparrowhawk *A. nisus* (e.g. Snow 1978) and these two species are closely related to the Ovambo Sparrowhawk *A. ovampensis* (Irwin *et al.* 1982).

It is more conspicuous than most accipiters, owing to its habit of hunting largely on the wing over open country (Simmons 1986a). It is the most frequently encountered accipiter in its restricted range. It is easily confused with juvenile Ovambo Sparrowhawks which can have largely unmarked rufous underparts, and this has obscured knowledge of its distribution and habitat in Africa (Irwin *et al.* 1982).

**Habitat:** It inhabits mosaics of Afromontane forest patches in montane grassland and fynbos. It has adapted well to roosting and breeding in copses of alien trees. This has allowed it to colonize otherwise treeless montane grassland and fynbos areas, and even parts of the semi-arid Karoo (Boshoff *et al.* 1983; Tarboton & Allan 1984; Allan & Tarboton 1985; Macdonald 1986a; Hockey *et al.* 1989). Like other Afromontane species, it occurs at decreasing altitude with increasing distance from the equator. For example, it occurs only above 1800 m in the Transvaal (Tarboton & Allan 1984) but is found at sea-level in the southwestern Cape Province.

**Movements:** It is thought to be largely sedentary (e.g. Tarboton & Allan 1984) and the models do not show any patterns consistent with regular migration.

**Breeding:** Most breeding was recorded September–December and this accords with previous information from Zimbabwe, the Transvaal, KwaZulu-Natal and the southwestern Cape Province (Winterbottom 1968a; Irwin 1981; Simmons 1986c; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b).

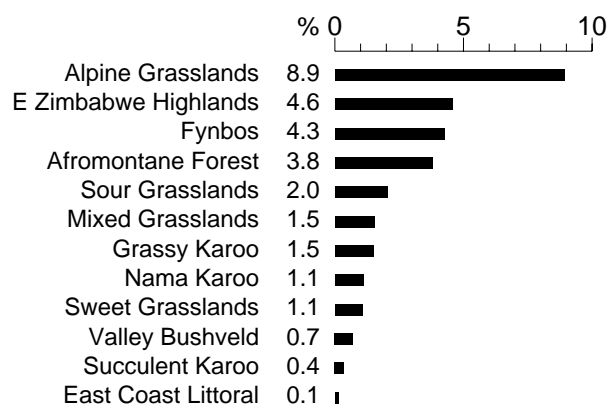
**Interspecific relationships:** Simmons (1986a) showed that the Redbreasted and Ovambo Sparrowhawks are more similar to one another than to any other accipitrine raptors in southern Africa in aspects of their diets, hunting techniques and microhabitat. They inhabit different biomes, however, and he suggested that this may be due to interspecific competition. The other accipiters sharing the range of the Redbreasted Sparrowhawk are either much larger or smaller.

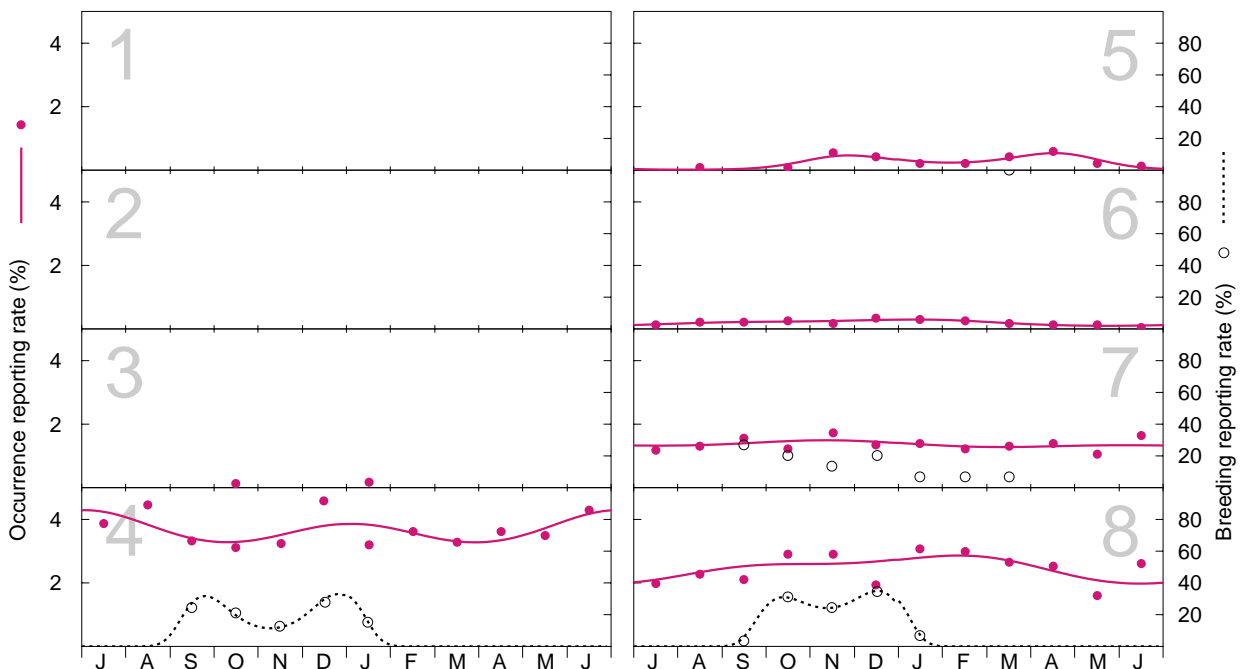
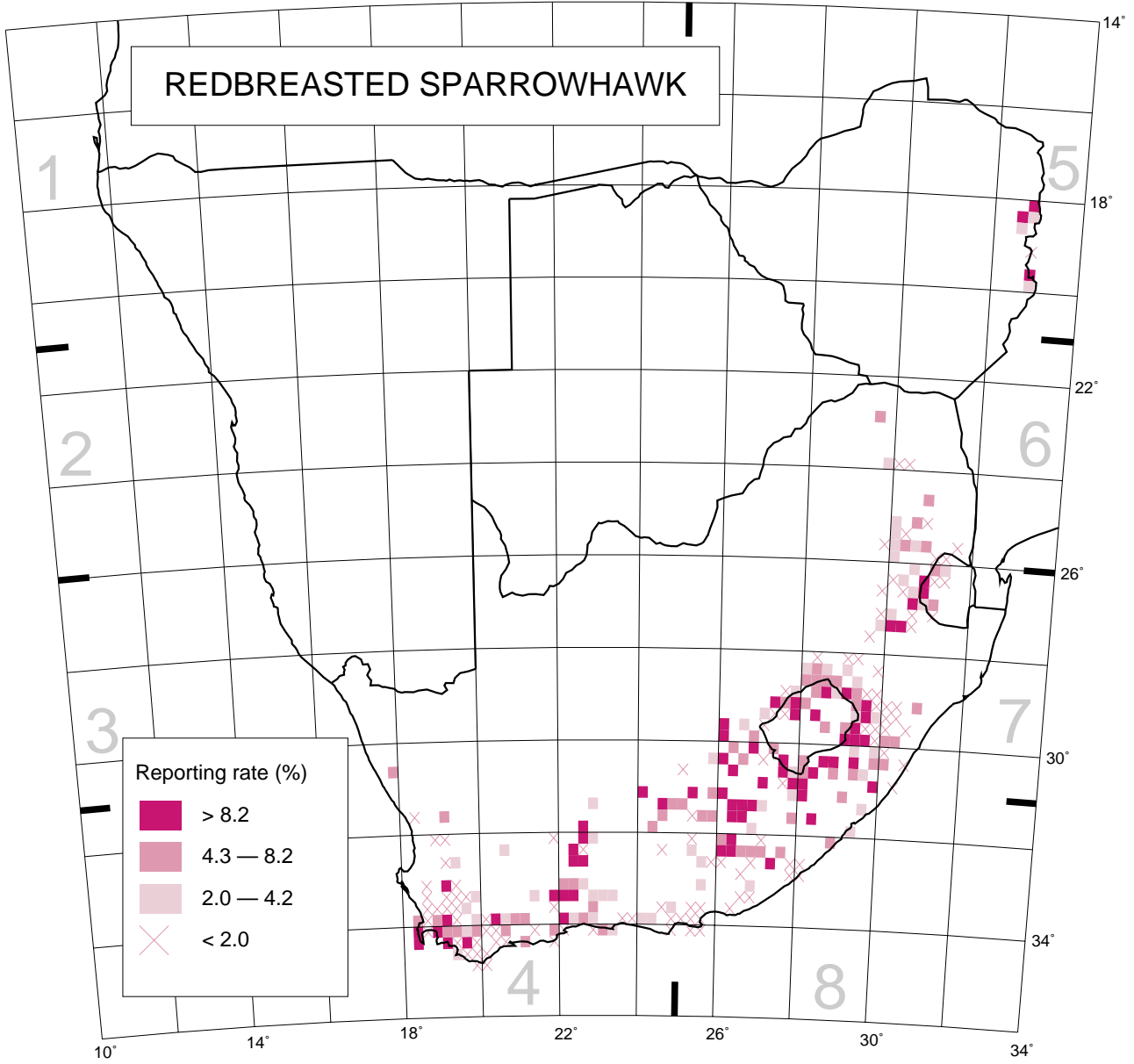
**Historical distribution and conservation:** The Redbreasted Sparrowhawk has benefited from the establishment of copses of alien trees which have allowed it to increase in numbers and distribution. Large-scale afforestation, however, may reduce its open hunting habitat. It has also been suggested that it is largely secure from pesticide contamination, at least in the Transvaal, owing to its inhabiting small-stock, rather than crop-farming regions (Tarboton & Allan 1984).

*D.G. Allan*

Recorded in 295 grid cells, 6.5%  
Total number of records: 1917  
Mean reporting rate for range: 5.3%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 0, 0, 2, 936, 28, 48, 611, 288; Breeding: 0, 0, 0, 33, 0, 1, 15, 29.