



Ovambo Sparrowhawk

Ovambosperwer

Accipiter ovampensis

The Ovambo Sparrowhawk is distributed across the woodlands of northern Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe and north-eastern South Africa. Elsewhere in Africa it is widespread in the savanna belt from West Africa across to East Africa and southwards to southern Africa. In South Africa, it is relatively common in the southcentral Transvaal along the interface of the grassland and woodland biomes and about 150 pairs are estimated to inhabit this region (Tarboton & Allan 1984). A density of 23 pairs in 700 km² was measured in this area, where it was the commonest accipiter, as compared with 1–2 pairs in 350 km² in the central Transvaal woodlands, where it was the scarcest accipiter (Tarboton & Allan 1984). Its enigmatic rarity throughout most of its range has been commented on by many observers (e.g. Brown 1972).

It is closely related to the Redbreasted *A. rufiventris* and European *A. nisus* Sparrowhawks (Irwin *et al.* 1982). It is unobtrusive and easily confused with other similarly plumaged raptors, and was therefore probably widely overlooked (Tarboton & Allan 1984) and misidentified.

Habitat: The vegetation analysis shows the highest reporting rates in the Okavango area, followed by other vegetation types located largely north of South Africa. It appears to prefer a mosaic of tall woodland and open areas (Steyn 1982b). It is attracted to copses of tall alien trees for breeding and this habit has allowed it to colonize otherwise open grassland regions in the ecotone between the woodland and grassland biomes in the Transvaal (Tarboton & Allan 1984). Morphologically this accipiter is unusual and resembles a small falcon, with relatively long wings and short tail and tarsus (Wattel 1973; Kemp & Crowe 1994). Observations of its

hunting technique suggest that it is also falcon-like in its capture of prey, perching high up on the edge of tall woodland and chasing small birds in open areas and avoiding pursuit in dense cover (Allan & Hustler 1984). These factors may explain its choice of habitat.

Movements: Its movements in Africa are poorly understood. It may be a nonbreeding migrant to West Africa and East Africa, although there are a few breeding records from Kenya (Brown *et al.* 1982; Lewis & Pomeroy 1989). In Zimbabwe, Krienke (1932) reported it to be absent at one locality in midsummer (December–February). In the Transvaal, however, it is believed to be resident (Tarboton & Allan 1984). The models show that in Zones 1 (northern Namibia and Botswana), 5 (Zimbabwe) and 6 (Transvaal), it was recorded throughout the year. There is no obvious pattern to its occurrence in northern Namibia and Botswana, and in the Transvaal. In Zimbabwe it was recorded more frequently during winter, according with Krienke's suggestion. In Zone 2 (central Namibia and Botswana) the few records are concentrated in late summer (March–May). The conspicuousness of this bird, however, may be affected by behavioural changes associated with breeding.

Breeding: Breeding was recorded September–January and appears to peak slightly earlier in Zimbabwe with relatively more October records than in the Transvaal. This agrees with previous data from the Transvaal (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b), where egg-laying occurred September–October, and Zimbabwe (Irwin 1981) where egg-laying occurred August–November, peaking slightly earlier than in the Transvaal (August–September).

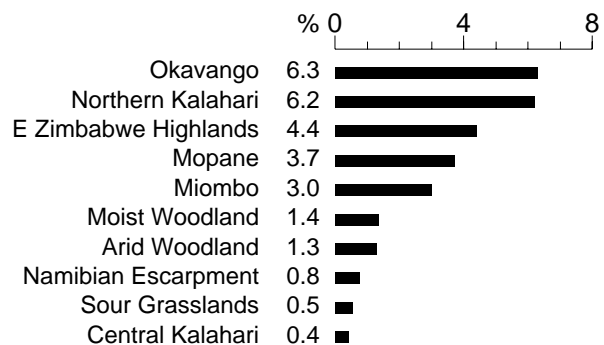
Interspecific relationships: Simmons (1986a) suggested that the Ovambo and Redbreasted Sparrowhawks are likely competitors and that this may explain their largely allopatric distributions (see Redbreasted Sparrowhawk text).

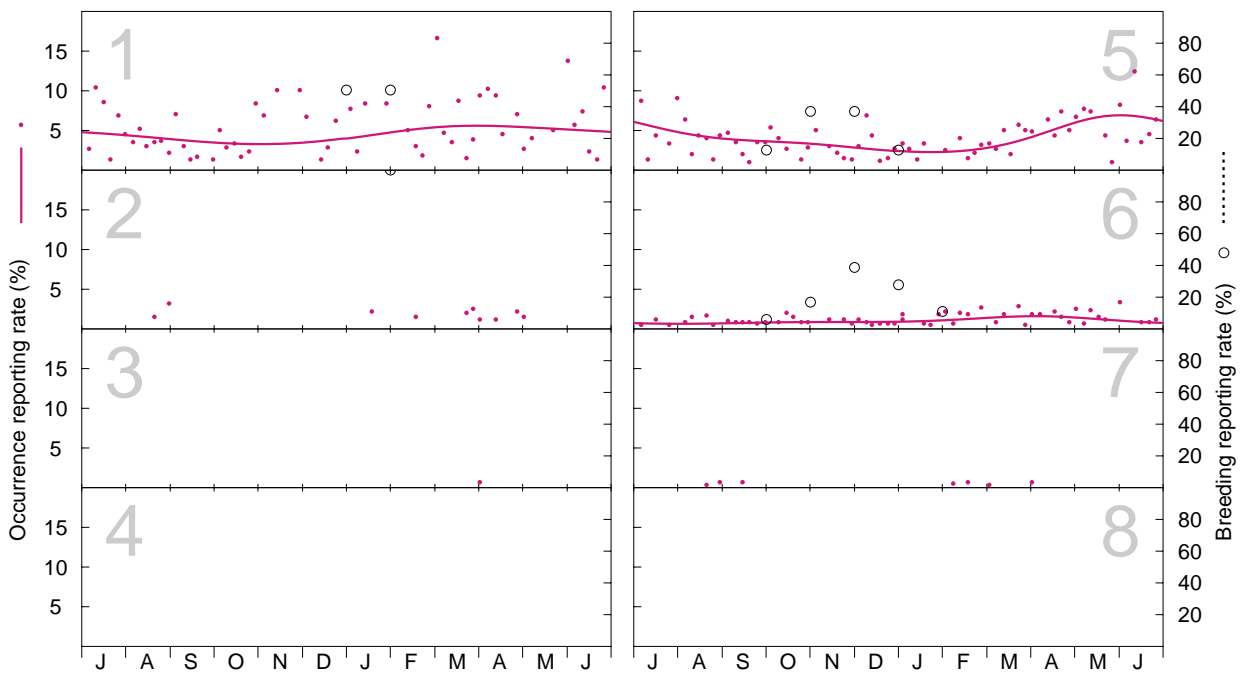
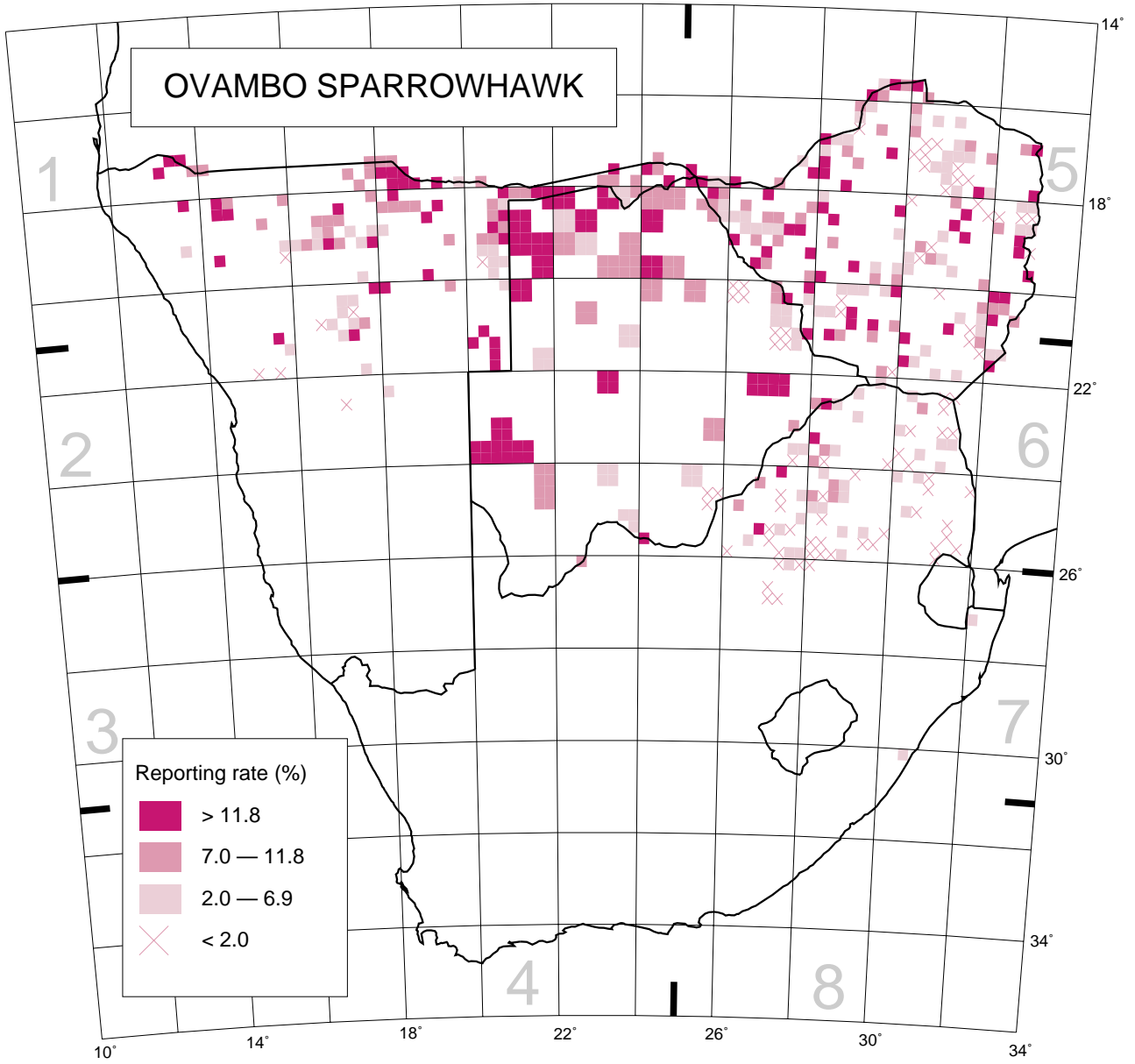
Historical distribution and conservation: It has benefited from copses of alien trees and has increased in distribution and density through its ability to exploit these as nest sites (Irwin *et al.* 1982; Tarboton & Allan 1984; Allan & Tarboton 1985). It has probably also benefited from an increase in prey species owing to crop farming in parts of its range and from bush clearance in woodland areas. The breeding success of the Ovambo Sparrowhawk in the southcentral Transvaal is low and may reflect contamination by pesticides (Tarboton & Allan 1984).

D.G. Allan

Recorded in 552 grid cells, 12.2%
Total number of records: 1198
Mean reporting rate for range: 4.0%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 153, 11, 1, 0, 360, 116, 11, 0; Breeding: 2, 1, 0, 0, 8, 18, 0, 0.