



Black Sparrowhawk

Swartspierwer

Accipiter melanoleucus

This large accipiter is fairly widely distributed in Zimbabwe, Swaziland, eastern and extreme southern South Africa. It also occurs sparsely in eastern and northern Botswana and the Caprivi Strip. Elsewhere in Africa it is widespread in forests and well-wooded regions of West, East and Central Africa. Tarboton & Allan (1984) provided measures of breeding density from several regions in the Transvaal and these spanned 0.7–2.7 pairs/100 km². The total Transvaal population was estimated at about 800 pairs. Despite its large size, it is remarkably inconspicuous, but when seen it is distinctive and unlikely to be confused with other birds of prey.

Habitat: It inhabits areas of tall, dense vegetation, such as forests, riparian growth and well-developed woodland. The vegetation analysis shows the highest reporting rates in forested areas, followed by woodland and grassland regions. It has adapted well to hunting and nesting in areas with tall alien trees; this has allowed it to expand its range into regions that previously lacked or had few tall trees (Tarboton & Allan 1984; Allan & Tarboton 1985). The relatively high reporting rates in several grassland regions, as shown in the vegetation analysis, reflect extensive colonization of these regions.

Movements: It is thought to be largely sedentary in southern Africa (Steyn 1982b). There is some evidence of migration further north in Africa (Brown *et al.* 1982, but see Lewis & Pomeroy 1989). The models suggest a slight increase in reporting rates during August–September; this may be due to increased conspicuousness resulting from calling at the nest during the breeding season, rather than any pattern of regular migration. The distribution map shows several records well outside the normal range, confirming that this species occa-

sionally wanders widely (Brown *et al.* 1982). During the atlas period, single records of an adult in riverine vegetation along the Orange River near Prieska (2922DB) and another near Beaufort West (3222BA), both sites deep in the semi-arid Karoo, represent such vagrancy.

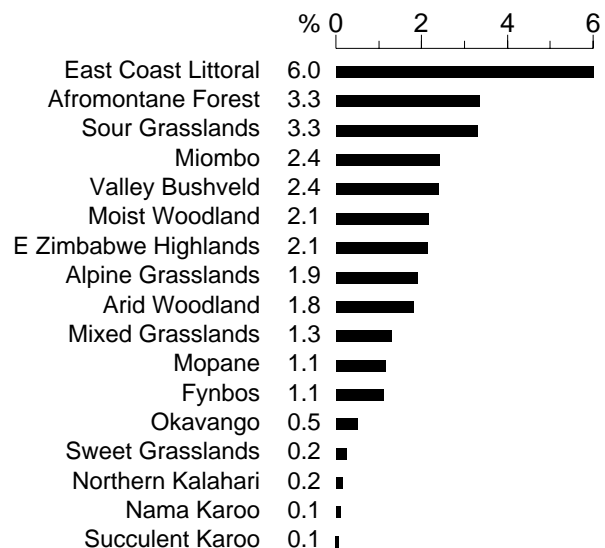
Breeding: Breeding was recorded mainly May–February and seems to start later from south to north in the region. In the southwestern (Zone 4) and eastern Cape Province (Zone 8), breeding spans May–November; in KwaZulu-Natal, Swaziland and the southeastern Transvaal (Zone 7) mainly June–November peaking in August–September, and in the northern Transvaal (Zone 6), mainly July–December peaking in September–November. In Zimbabwe (Zone 5) breeding spans August–February but again peaking September–November. Egg-laying data from the Transvaal and Zimbabwe confirm this trend, spanning May–October and peaking in July–August in the Transvaal (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b) and July–December and peaking September–October in Zimbabwe (Irwin 1981).

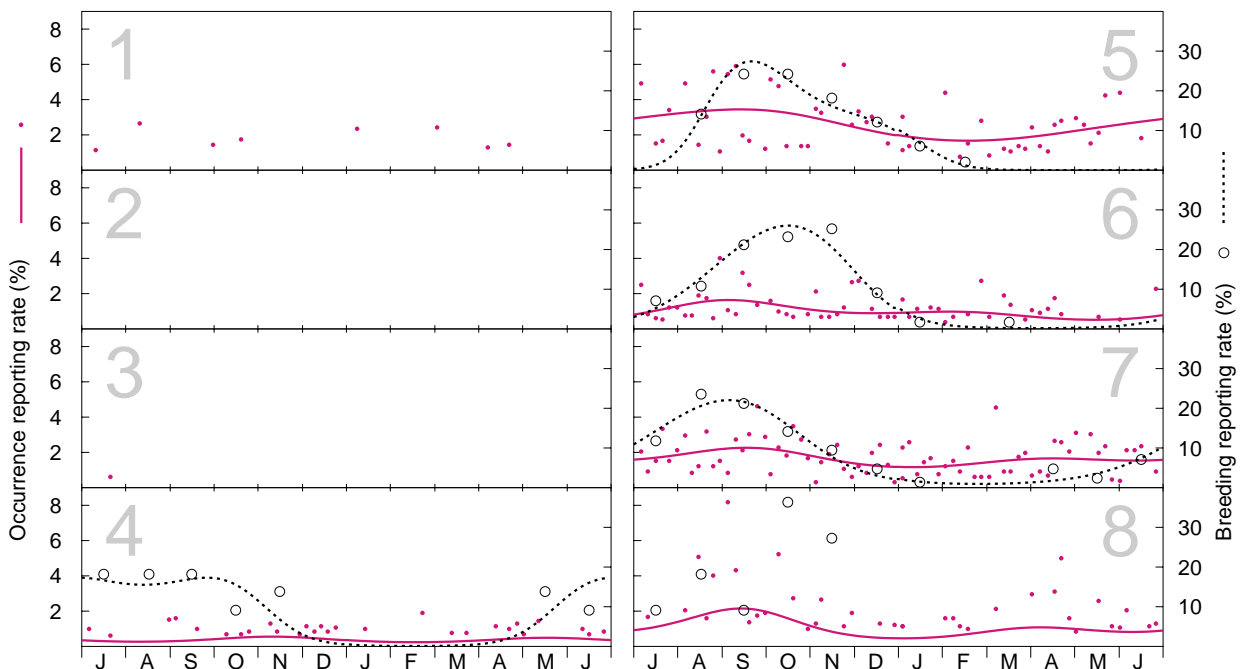
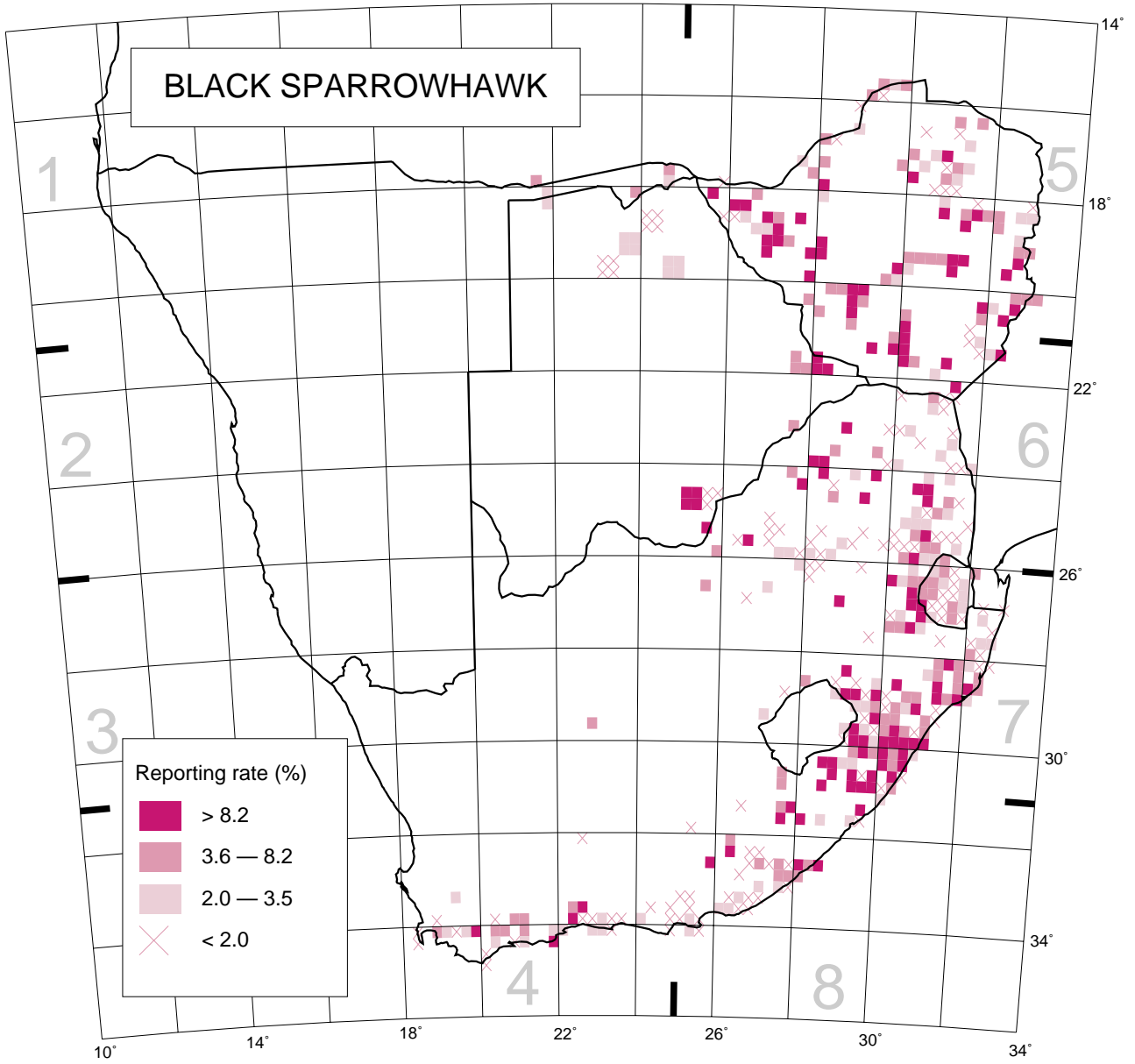
Historical distribution and conservation: The Black Sparrowhawk has undergone an explosive expansion in several regions owing to its ability to exploit copses of tall alien trees. This has been particularly well documented in the Transvaal (Tarboton & Allan 1984). In the southwestern Cape Province it has expanded to the west in recent years (Hockey *et al.* 1989) and has also benefited from alien tree plantations in KwaZulu-Natal (Cyrus & Robson 1980) and Zimbabwe (Irwin 1981), and probably in other parts of its range. It feeds largely on francolins, pigeons, doves and domestic fowl, and has probably also benefited from an increase in its prey owing to crop farming (Allan & Tarboton 1985). Its avian diet renders it vulnerable to pesticide contamination. It is also popular with falconers and sensitive to commercial forestry practices (Tarboton & Allan 1984). It is regarded as a pest by peasant farmers with free-range chickens.

D.G. Allan

Recorded in 472 grid cells, 10.4%
Total number of records: 2656
Mean reporting rate for range: 4.5%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 8, 0, 1, 33, 226, 111, 320, 59; Breeding: 0, 0, 0, 22, 50, 56, 85, 11.