Rednecked Falcon

Rooinekvalk

Falco chicquera

The distribution of the Rednecked Falcon in southern Africa is centred in the western arid parts of the region. Elsewhere in Africa it is associated with more mesic habitats where *Borassus* palms are common in moist, open grasslands and savannas. Similar habitat is occupied in the Okavango, Makgadikgadi and Etosha, and also in Mozambique, Zambia, Angola and Malawi. It extends northwards to south of the Sahara Desert, and there is a separate population in India.

Two subspecies are recognized in southern Africa: *F. c. horsbrughi* in the arid west and Botswana, and *ruficollis* in Mozambique (Clancey 1980b). To what extent these two races reflect populations that prefer arid habitats and moist, open savannas, respectively, remains to be established. The species is not particularly abundant anywhere in southern Africa. The great majority of atlas records were from Namibia, Botswana and the extreme northern Cape Province, especially the Kalahari Gemsbok National Park (2520); it was reported only sporadically in the Transvaal, Free State (De Swardt 1992a) and Zimbabwe.

Atlas records suggest that there are three main strongholds in Namibia and Botswana: one large one in the Kalahari and Okavango, one in the Namib Desert, and a third in Etosha and southern Owambo, where there are many large *Hyphaene* palms in which the birds nest (Paxton & Brown 1987).

The only population density recorded in southern Africa comes from the Namib Desert where five pairs occupied an average of 168 km^2 each, with a minimum inter-pair distance of 3.5 km (Brown 1988a). However, a substantial part of this area consisted of gravel plains, largely devoid of vegetation and suitable prey. Along the Kafue River in southern Zambia a linear density of 1 pair/2.1 km of river was found in optimal habitat (Osborne 1984). In seven other areas in Zambia, densities ranged over 1 pair/2.6–83.3 km^2 (Osborne 1984), the lowest density being about double that in the Namib Desert.

Habitat: The vegetation analysis shows it to be most commonly reported in the Okavango, this being a reflection of its preference for palm savannas and floodplains. Populations in the Kalahari and Namib live in the most arid habitats, but are usually associated with waterholes where their small-bird prey and large trees are most abundant.

Movements: It is normally sedentary, pairs living permanently in a favoured group of palm trees or near a waterhole. The models show no evidence for any seasonal migration, but irregular movements into new areas are known to occur. Breeding may even take place well outside the normal range when prey is especially abundant, as happened near Rustenburg (2527CA), allegedly during a rodent plague (Malherbe 1963), but more likely in response to a parallel increase in small birds, as this species rarely feeds on rodents (Guhrs & Osborne 1988).

Breeding: Eggs are laid July–October in southern Africa (Steyn 1982b; Brown & Clinning in press) and the atlas breeding data spanned July–November, with an October peak in the Zone with the most records (Zone 1). In areas with palm trees, it breeds high up in cavities at the bases of palm fronds, while the old nests of crows and other raptors are used in areas without these trees.

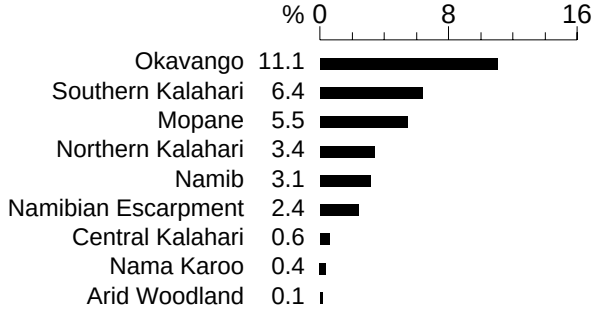
Interspecific relationships: There is regular association between Rednecked Falcons and Gabar Goshawks *Micronisus gabar* around waterholes in the Kalahari, and observations suggest that the hunting success of both species is improved by the association (Malan & Jenkins 1994).

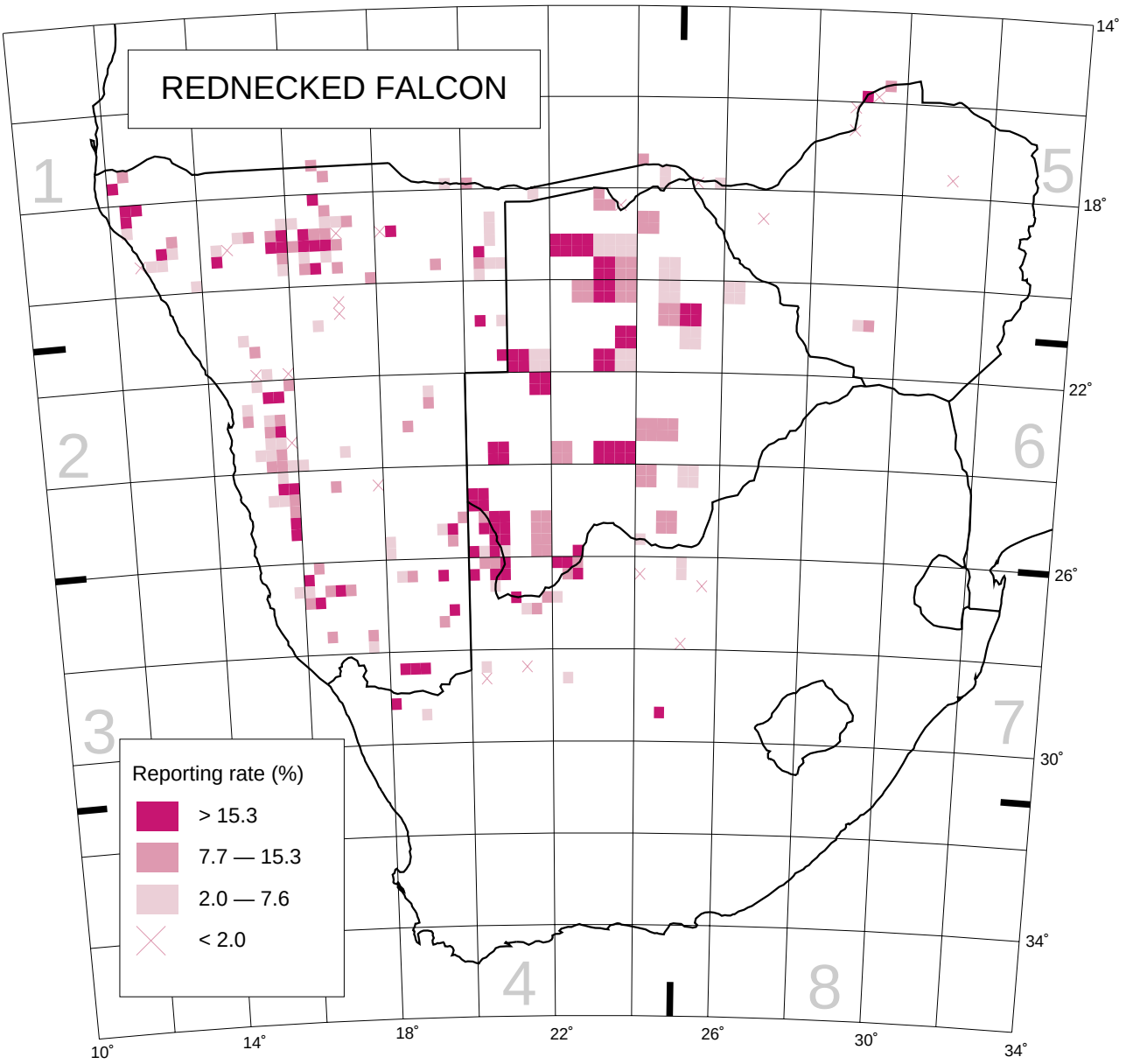
Historical distribution and conservation: In the past it may have occurred more frequently in the Transvaal, from where several old breeding records are known (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). Artificial watering points have probably benefited the Rednecked Falcon in arid areas. The destruction of palm trees, such as in the Okavango Delta, by expanding elephant populations (M. Herremans pers. obs), may have local negative effects.

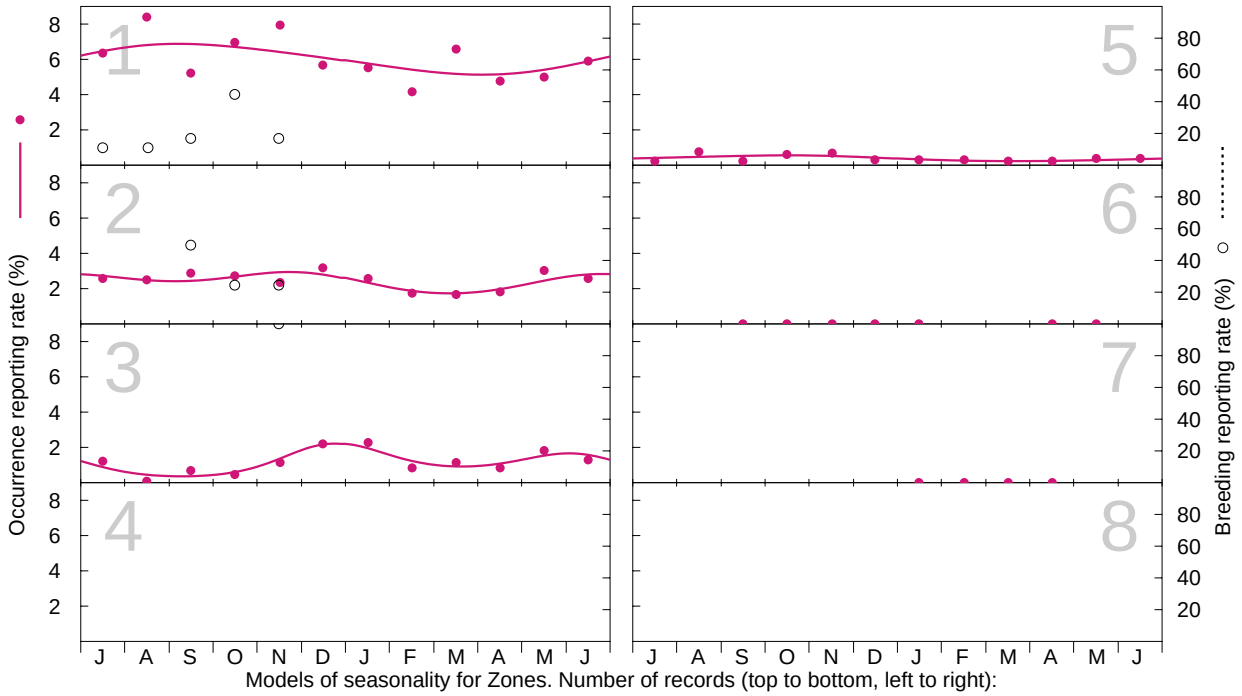
J.M. Mendelsohn

Recorded in 331 grid cells, 7.3%
Total number of records: 977
Mean reporting rate for range: 10.3%

Reporting rates for vegetation types







Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
Occurrence: 548, 259, 109, 0, 45, 7, 4, 0; Breeding: 18, 4, 1, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0.