

Western Redfooted Kestrel

Westelike Rooipootvalk

Falco vespertinus

The Western Redfooted Kestrel is a widely distributed migrant, most abundant in Botswana and northern Namibia. The latter regions, along with southern Angola, are the main wintering areas. Further north in Africa, only birds on passage or vagrants are recorded (Del Hoyo *et al.* 1994). Although the atlas records show the species to be fairly widely reported in Zimbabwe and eastern South Africa, it is comparatively uncommon in these areas, as reflected by the overall lower reporting rates. In the Palearctic it breeds in a zone between 45 and 65°N, stretching from eastern Europe across to Lake Baikal in central Russia, east of which it is 'replaced' by Eastern Redfooted Kestrels *F. amurensis* (Del Hoyo *et al.* 1994).

The scattered nature of the atlas records in northern Namibia and Botswana is a result of insufficient coverage and the erratic nature of the birds. It is conspicuous, usually being seen in small flocks of 10–50 birds in open country. Most hunting during the middle of the day is high in the air, but in the morning, and particularly after storms in the late afternoon, the birds often perch prominently on dead trees or utility lines. Foraging birds also hover frequently when they search for insect prey on the ground. Flocks often include numbers of Lesser Kestrels *F. naumanni* and Eastern Redfooted Kestrels. In eastern regions the species is more usually seen as odd individuals, and easily overlooked, in flocks and roosts of Lesser and Eastern Redfooted Kestrels. Males of the two redfooted kestrels are similar in appearance but the females are markedly different and most atlas records of Western Redfooted Kestrels in the east were probably of females.

Habitat: It prefers large, open, grassy spaces in arid woodlands, such as are found in the Kalahari.

Movements: The first birds arrive in southern Africa from late October onwards. Most records during the first half of summer are from the northern Zones. Further south, it is more often reported in the second half of summer. Reporting rates decline from February onwards and by early May all have left southern Africa. Large numbers are often associated with termite emergences, locust swarms and other sources of temporarily abundant insect prey. Such outbreaks of insects usually follow good rains, especially in semi-arid regions where nomadic flocks of kestrels move around to capitalize on locally and temporarily abundant prey.

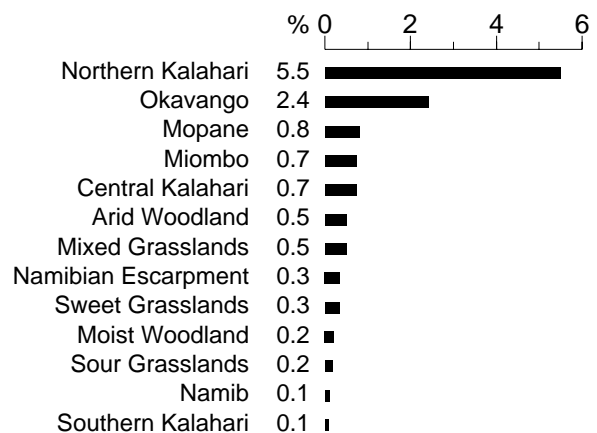
Interspecific relationships: Western and Eastern Redfooted Kestrels have their centres of abundance at opposite ends of the subcontinent, the latter species being more common in the relatively moist, open grasslands of the grassland biome in the east. Since the two species often occur in mixed flocks, this apparent replacement is more likely due to different habitat preferences and not a case of competitive exclusion. Western Redfooted Kestrels were outnumbered 62:1 by Eastern Redfooted Kestrels and 930:1 by Lesser Kestrels in the Transvaal (Tarboton & Allan 1984), while in Botswana they outnumbered Eastern Redfooted Kestrels, e.g. by 2–3:1 in random observations and spot-counts, but by 15:1 in roadside counts (Penry 1994; M.H. unpubl. data).

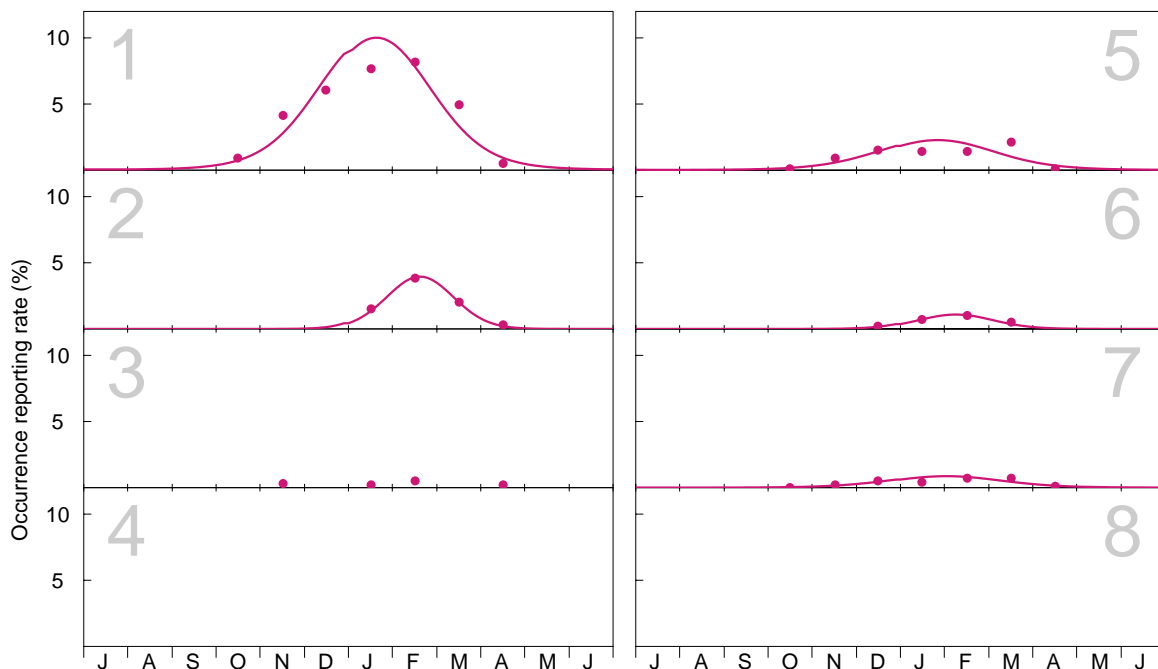
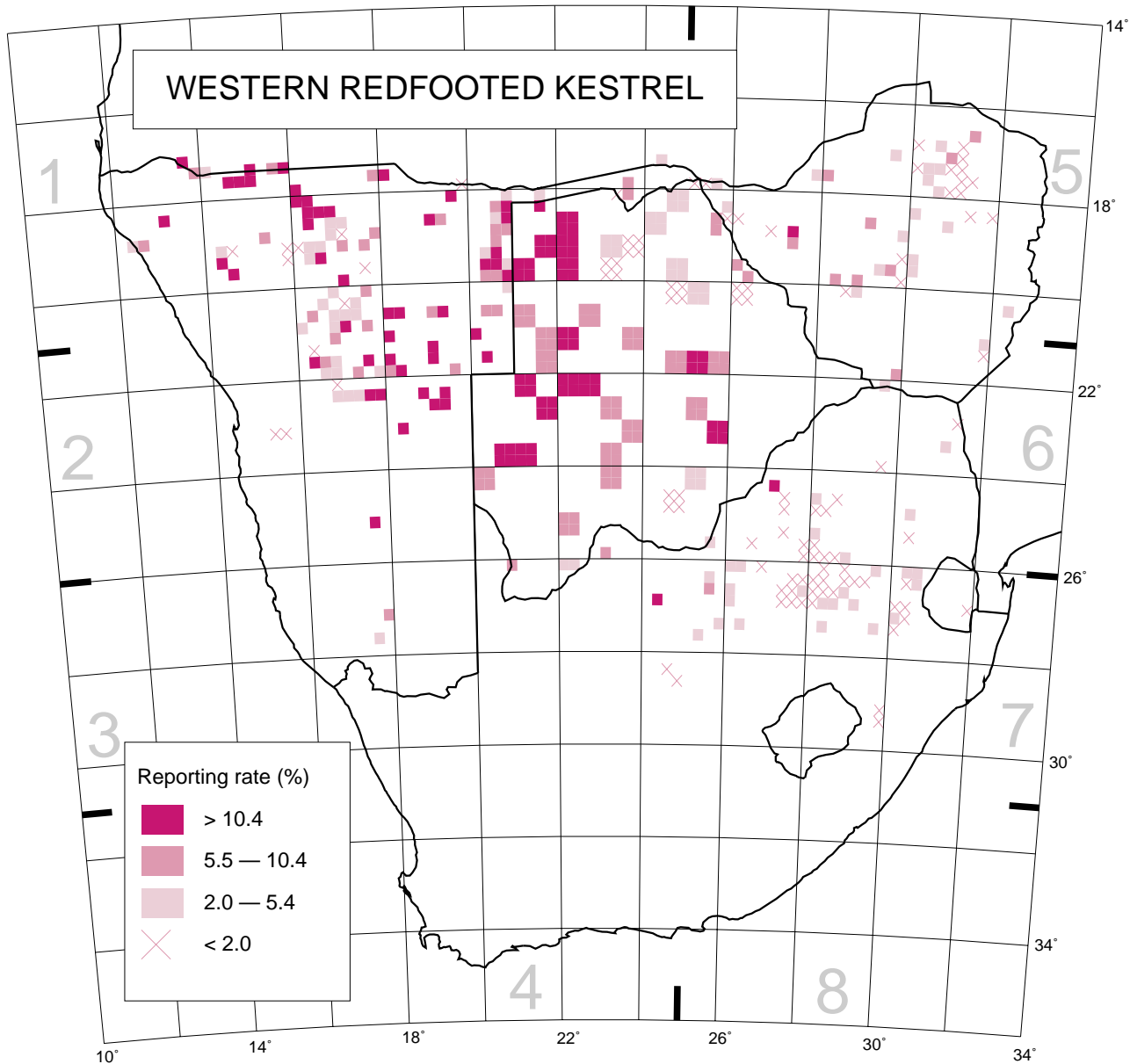
Historical distribution and conservation: Although Irwin (1981) suggested local declines in Zimbabwe, there is no consistent evidence for changes in distribution and numbers in southern Africa. Given its habitat preferences and distribution in the region, the Western Redfooted Kestrel is unlikely to face major threats in southern Africa, but it is declining markedly on its breeding grounds (Del Hoyo *et al.* 1994).

J.M. Mendelson and M. Herremans

Recorded in 412 grid cells, 9.1%
Total number of records: 541
Mean reporting rate for range: 2.2%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 206, 66, 8, 0, 73, 47, 105, 0.