



## Eastern Redfooted Kestrel

### Oostelike Rooipootvalk

*Falco amurensis*

The Eastern Redfooted Kestrel (Amur Kestrel) is a Palearctic migrant to southern Africa. The distribution map shows that it is most abundant in eastern South Africa and in northeastern Zimbabwe. Outside these regions, records are scattered and sparse. There is a stronghold of particularly high reporting rates in the southeastern Transvaal, western KwaZulu-Natal and the northeastern Free State. Outside of the atlas region, it also migrates to Mozambique, Zambia, Malawi and southern Tanzania (Benson *et al.* 1971; Benson & Benson 1977; Britton 1980). It was recorded for the first time in the southwestern Cape Province (separate records in grid cells 3420BB and 3421AB) in December 1992 (Allan 1994c).

During the northern summer it breeds in the southeastern Palearctic in a broad zone stretching from Lake Baikal in southeastern Siberia, east and south into Manchuria and China (Del Hoyo *et al.* 1994).

In southern Africa it is conspicuous, so reporting rates are likely to accurately reflect relative abundance. They usually occur in flocks, often numbering hundreds, perching prominently on trees and telephone wires, and hovering over open fields and grasslands. These flocks often include Lesser *F. naumanni* and, in northwestern regions, Western Redfooted *F. vespertinus* Kestrels.

**Habitat:** It largely inhabits open and high-rainfall (sour) grasslands, although it is also found in open areas in woodland. It often forages in crop-farming regions and roosts in

towns. Large numbers are often associated with termite emergences, locust swarms, and crops harbouring various beetles and other insects (e.g. Mendelsohn 1979).

**Movements:** It arrives in most of southern Africa in early November and about a month later (early December) in the southernmost regions (Zone 8). The last birds depart by early May in most areas but by mid-March in the southernmost regions. Its migration between southern Africa and eastern Asia is one of the longest undertaken by any raptor. After breeding, it flies westwards across India south of the Himalayas, crosses the Indian Ocean to make a landfall in East Africa and continue southwards to the nonbreeding range well south of the equator. Return migration is along a more northerly route (Del Hoyo *et al.* 1994).

**Interspecific relationships:** Eastern and Western Redfooted Kestrels have their centres of distribution at opposite sides of southern Africa, the latter being common in dry and lightly wooded regions in the west. Because the two often occur in mixed flocks, this replacement is more likely to be due to their having different habitat preferences, rather than competitive exclusion. In the Transvaal, Lesser Kestrels outnumbered Eastern Redfooted Kestrels by 15:1, while they in turn outnumbered Western Redfooted Kestrels by 62:1 (Tarboton & Allan 1984). At night, these three species aggregate in large roosts in tall trees, often numbering tens of thousands of birds.

**Historical distribution and conservation:** Irwin (1981) suggested a decline in Zimbabwe, stating that one well-known roost had declined from 40 000–50 000 birds to 8000–12 000, and subsequently to none (A.J. Tree *in litt.*). There is, however, no consistent evidence for large-scale changes in the distribution and numbers in southern Africa. The grassland regions it inhabits are under intense pressure, mainly from agriculture and commercial afforestation, and the Eastern Redfooted Kestrel should be monitored closely, especially as southern Africa probably encompasses most of the nonbreeding range.

*J.M. Mendelsohn*

Recorded in 739 grid cells, 16.3%  
Total number of records: 4682  
Mean reporting rate for range: 7.1%



