



Rock Kestrel

Rooivalk

Falco tinnunculus

The Rock or Common Kestrel is a widespread species found throughout most of the Old World. The southern African population belongs to the race *F. t. rupicolus*. Although it was recorded from all the countries of southern Africa, the distribution map shows marked differences in abundance, reflected in reporting rates, in different regions. It is most abundant in western Namibia, southern and western South Africa and Lesotho. It is less common, but still widespread in most of northeastern South Africa, extending into western Swaziland. In Zimbabwe it is restricted to the high-lying central and eastern regions, and it occurs widely, but sparsely, in Botswana. It is scarce in northeastern Namibia, central and northern Kalahari, and the tropical low-lying regions of Zimbabwe, the Limpopo Valley, the eastern Transvaal lowveld, and northern KwaZulu-Natal.

The Transvaal population was estimated to be in excess of 1000 pairs (Tarboton & Allan 1984) with densities of at least 2 pairs/100 km² in prime habitat. Breeding densities of 19 and 29 pairs/100 km² were measured in the Tarkastad district (3126CC) (Van Zyl 1993).

The Rock Kestrel is a relatively easy bird to identify although it may be confused with the Greater Kestrel *F. rupicoloides* and especially the male Lesser Kestrel *F. naumanni* (Steyn 1982b).

Habitat: The large number of vegetation types in the vegetation analysis reflects the wide variety of habitats exploited by this versatile species. The highest reporting rates came from the Alpine Grasslands, Karoo and Fynbos regions, and the species appears capable of inhabiting the entire span of arid to mesic conditions in the region. The distribution, especially for breeding, is strongly influenced by the distribution of mountainous areas.

Movements: It is highly conspicuous as it often hunts from roadside telephone poles and electricity pylons (Steyn 1982b). However, it uses such structures less frequently during the breeding season, when it tends to hunt closer to nest sites, usually situated on cliffs. In addition, the visible breeding population is also effectively halved when females are incubating eggs or

brooding young. Therefore the small increase in reporting rates in six of the eight Zones during winter is probably related to seasonal changes in conspicuousness, rather than to any large-scale influx of migrants from outside the region. Reporting rates for the Tarkastad district, for example, increased during winter, while direct observation showed that over half of the population actually left the area (Van Zyl 1994b). Although the models do not suggest movements within southern Africa, a more detailed analysis of Rock Kestrel movements in South Africa, largely based on a more refined examination of atlas reporting rates, suggested a northerly and easterly movement away from south-western breeding areas during winter (Van Zyl *et al.* 1994).

Breeding: Breeding was recorded in all Zones, mainly September–January, peaking October–December. There are no obvious seasonal differences between the Zones, although in the eastern Cape Province (Zone 8) it bred slightly later than in the rest of the region.

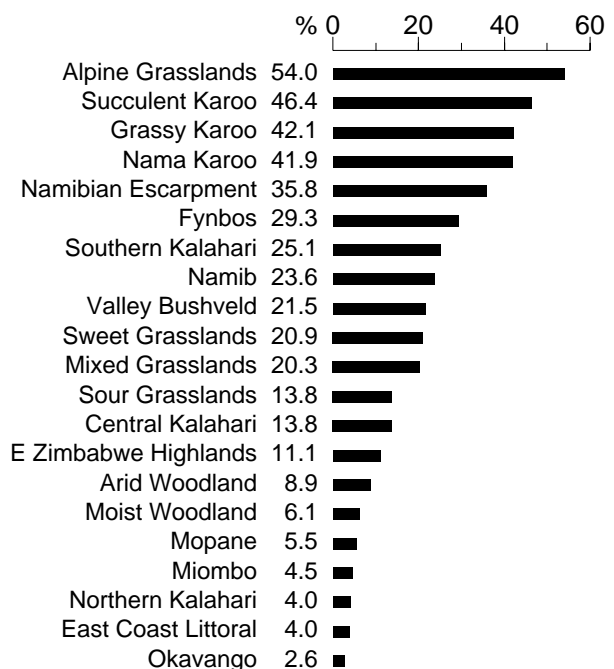
Interspecific relationships: It overlaps widely with Greater and Lesser Kestrels in southern Africa. It moves into the eastern grassland habitats most exploited by the Lesser Kestrel during the winter when that species is absent (Van Zyl *et al.* 1994).

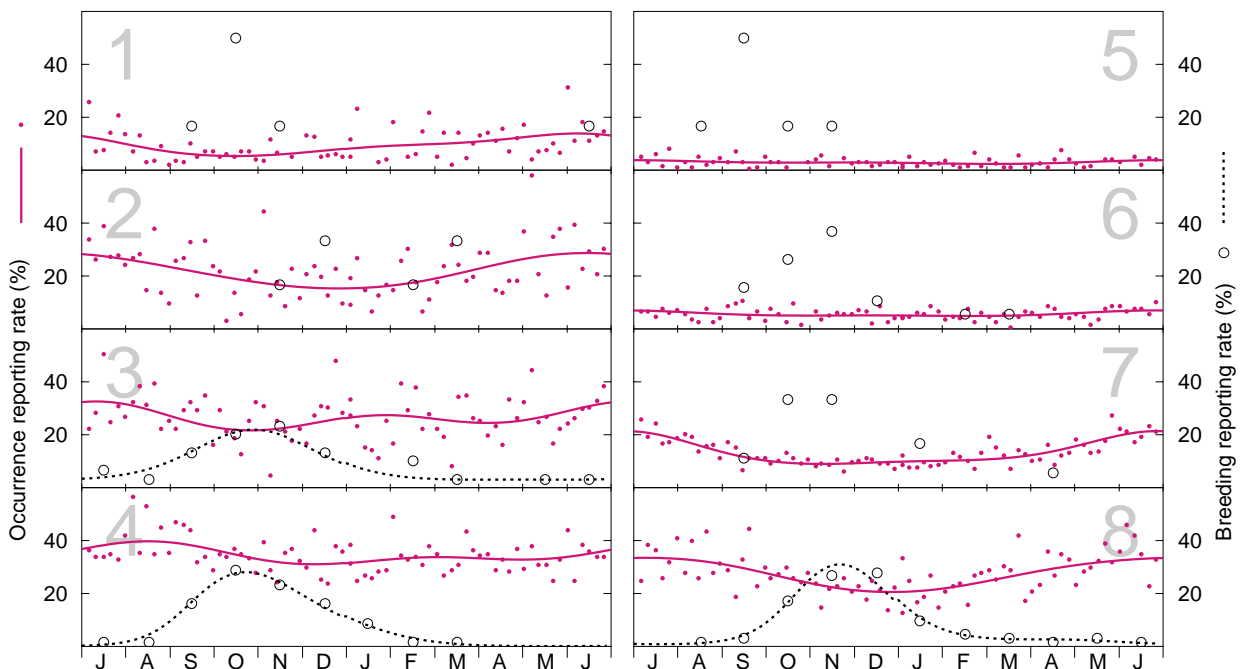
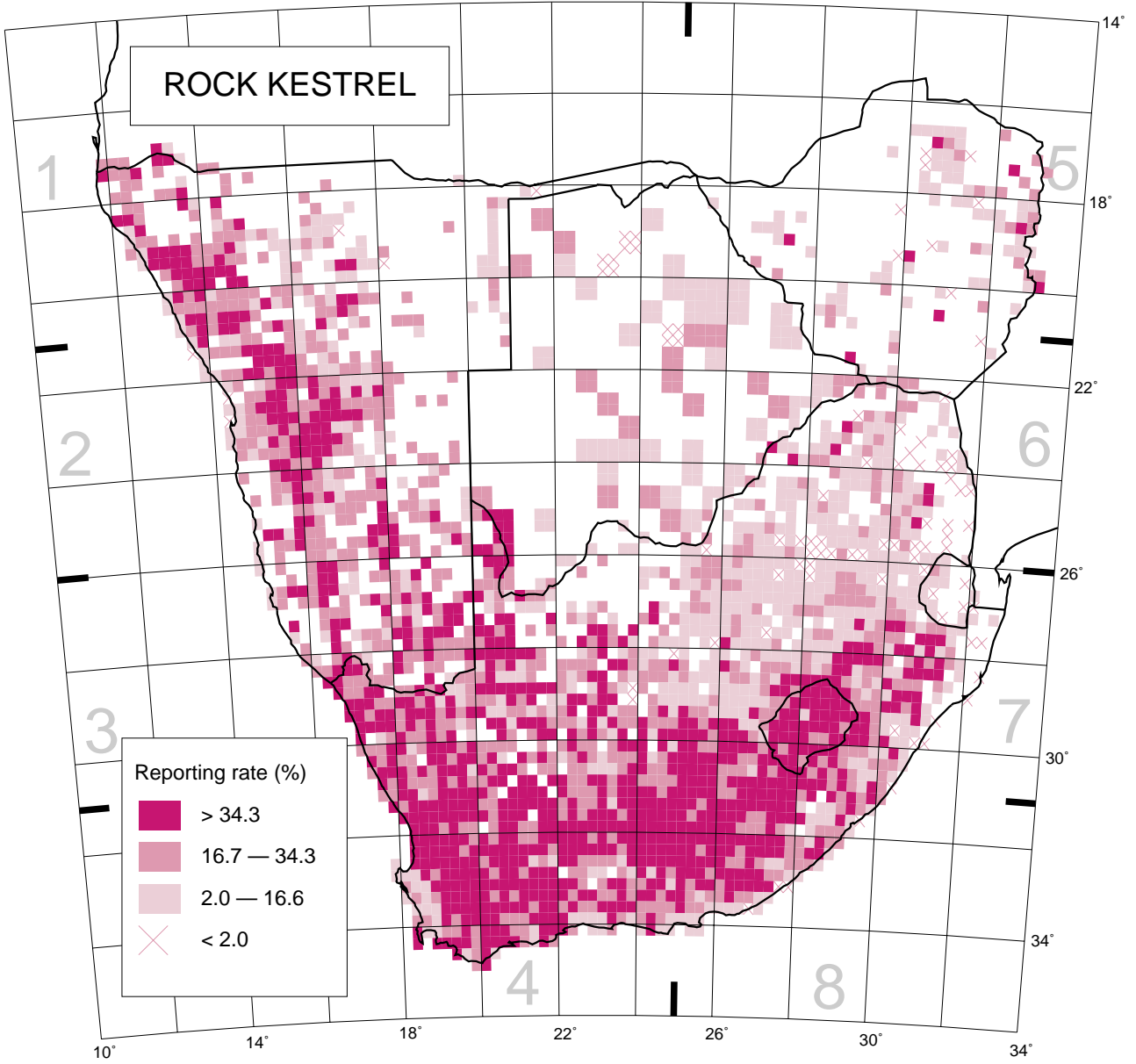
Historical distribution and conservation: Boshoff *et al.* (1983) found no difference in distribution in the Cape Province, comparing the periods 1700–1969 and 1970–79. The distribution map similarly shows no change in distribution, the species being largely absent from the central Kalahari regions and the far northeast during all three time periods, although the map shows many more records from the western Karoo, presumably due to better coverage. The Rock Kestrel is the most common of the small breeding falcons in southern Africa and it cannot be considered threatened. It has adapted well to humans, even breeding on buildings (Mendelsohn 1990). Its distribution has probably changed little because its principal habitats are little altered by agriculture; however, large-scale poisoning of locusts is likely to have a considerable influence on local population numbers.

A.J. van Zyl

Recorded in 2582 grid cells, 56.9%
Total number of records: 26 892
Mean reporting rate for range: 21.2%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 323, 815, 1481, 3018, 260, 639, 2594, 1504; Breeding: 6, 6, 30, 56, 6, 19, 18, 64.