Greater Kestrel

Grootrooivalk

Falco rupicoloides

The Greater Kestrel is widely distributed in central and western southern Africa, especially in open habitats such as arid areas and grasslands. The centre of its abundance is in the Kalahari of Botswana. Other areas with high reporting rates were in the northwestern and northeastern Cape Province and the southwestern Transvaal.

It is conspicuous, perching prominently on tall trees and utility poles. A long-term study in the Transvaal showed that adults remain with the same mates on the same territories for many years, perhaps for life (Kemp 1984). The size of this breeding population also remained essentially constant. However, road counts in Namibia indicated that population sizes change in relation to rainfall, being greatest in years of high rainfall (Brown *et al.* 1987a). Population densities measured in four areas were rather similar: 18.5 (Settlers, 2428DC), 28.5 (Bronkhorstspruit, 2528DC), 23 (central Namib) and 23.7 km^2/pair (Etosha, 1816) (Tarboton & Allan 1984; Brown *et al.* 1987a; Brown 1988a) but the heterogeneous pattern in reporting rates within its range suggests that its abundance can vary widely.

Habitat: High reporting rates were recorded in all open, arid and grassland habitats, especially the group of Kalahari and Karoo vegetation types. In Namibia, densities obtained during road counts were higher in the southern Namib and in Etosha than in any other habitat (Brown *et al.* 1987a), while densities were greatest in South Africa on the Pietersburg Plateau (2329C,D), Springbok Flats (2429C) and western Transvaal highveld (Tarboton & Allan 1984); no comparative data have been published from the core distribution in Botswana. The clearing of woodlands for cultivation often provides suitable new habitats, such that small isolated populations may be found in areas which are otherwise unsuitable. The atlas data show it to be consistently absent from low-lying, tropical and mesic habitats, and from tall, dense woodlands.

Movements: Atlas reporting rates do not indicate regular migratory movements. Long-distance movements in the western regions, however, have been demonstrated by ringing recoveries (SAFRING). The only two recoveries in Namibia were over distances of 312 and 314 km, while the longest distances reported by 32 recoveries and recaptures in the Transvaal were 84 and 93 km. Twenty-one of the Transvaal recoveries were within 10 km of the ringing site. The species is probably more mobile in the arid, western regions, where quick adjustment of populations to local rainfall conditions have been recorded (Brown *et al.* 1987a).

Breeding: It is a strictly seasonal breeder. Most atlas breeding records span August–December, peaking September–October. In the Transvaal, the majority of clutches are laid August–October, peaking in September (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b), while in Namibia, laying peaks September–October (Brown & Clinning in press). Most egglaying in Botswana is August–November (N.J. Skinner *in litt.*). Most egglaying therefore takes place prior to or at the start of summer rains. Eggs are laid earlier if rainfall the previous summer is high; such rainfall determines vegetation quality, and presumably prey abundance, at the time of laying (Kemp 1991).

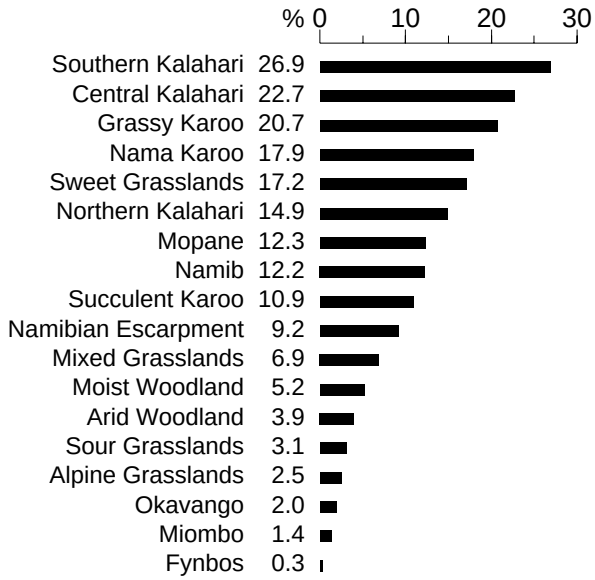
Interspecific relationships: It is dependent on the use of nests built by other large birds, especially the stick nests of Pied *Corvus albus* and Black *C. capensis* Crows. This dependence may limit the distribution of breeding birds (Hustler 1983a).

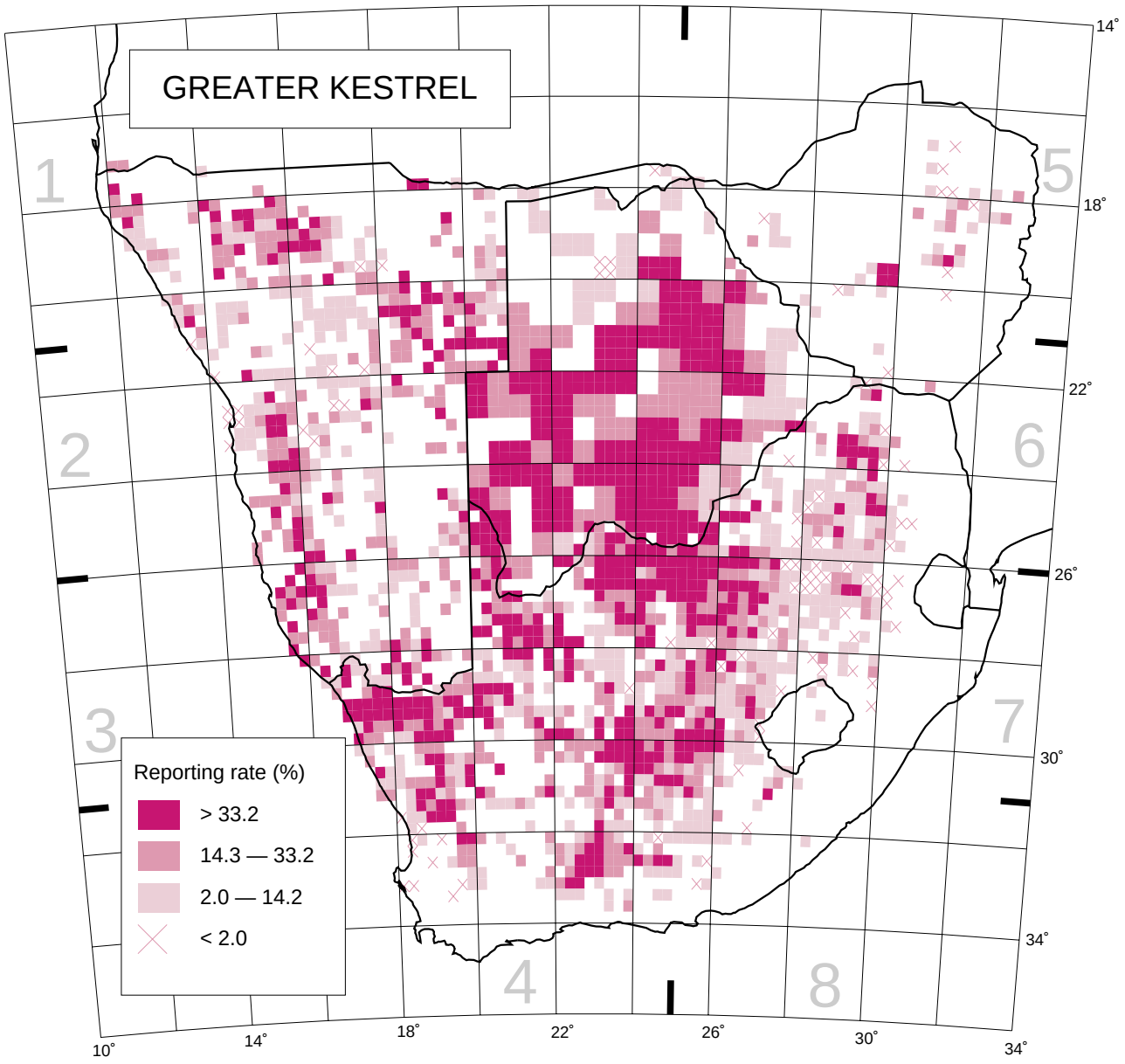
Historical distribution and conservation: The range has probably expanded as woodlands have been cleared for cultivation. Populations are therefore probably larger than before. However, the loss of natural grasslands to cultivation and degradation, e.g. by bush encroachment in response to overgrazing, is a threat.

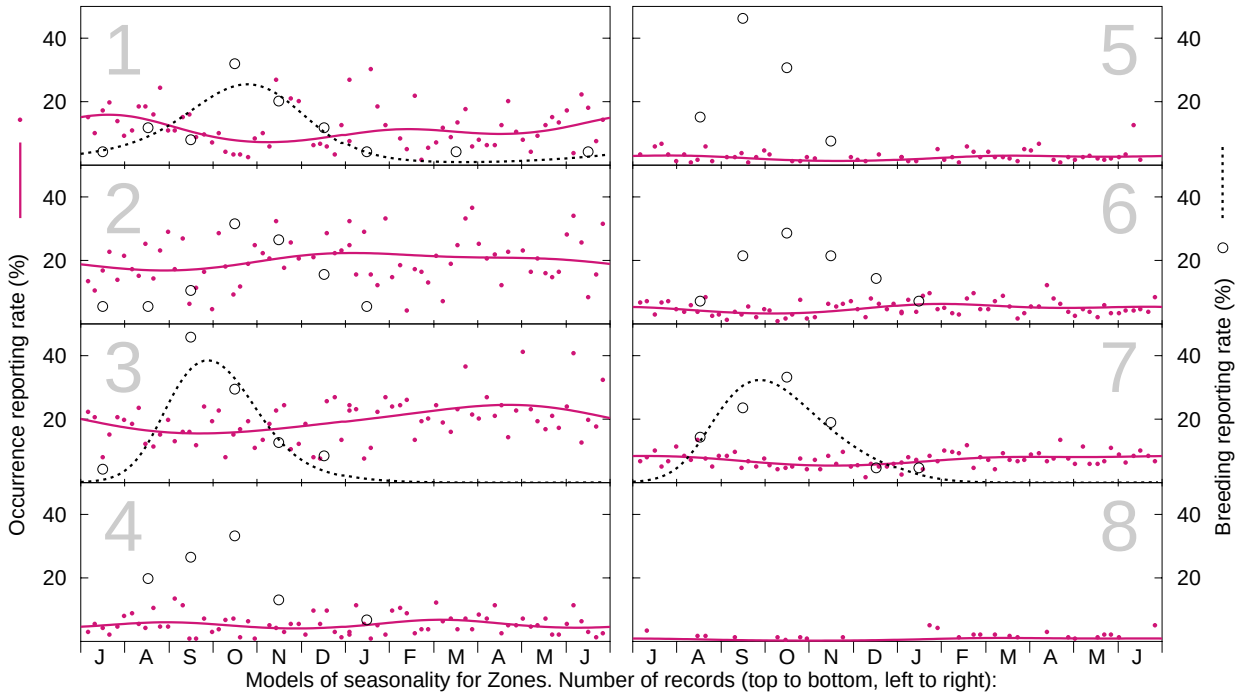
J.M. Mendelsohn

Recorded in 2044 grid cells, 45.1%
Total number of records: 9743
Mean reporting rate for range: 14.4%

Reporting rates for vegetation types







Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
Occurrence: 370, 721, 1107, 460, 209, 559, 1408, 38; Breeding: 25, 19, 24, 15, 13, 14, 21, 0.