



Lesser Kestrel

Kleinrooivalk

Falco naumanni

The Lesser Kestrel is a nonbreeding Palearctic migrant from Europe and Asia to Africa south of the Sahara. In South Africa it is distributed mainly in the moister eastern regions encompassing the Free State, southern Transvaal and parts of the northern and eastern Cape Province. It also occurs in the northern Transvaal, KwaZulu-Natal, the southwestern regions of the Cape Province and the open southeastern parts of the Kalahari and the Makgadikgadi lacustrine area in Botswana. It is scarce, though widely reported, elsewhere in southern Africa.

It disperses out over open country to feed at an estimated average density of 1 bird/7 km² but may aggregate and forage in large flocks (Brown *et al.* 1982; Steyn 1982b). It is highly conspicuous but occasionally confused with similar resident kestrels; the male may be confused with the Rock Kestrel *F. tinnunculus*, and the female with the Greater Kestrel *F. rupicoloides*. The atlas data are regarded as generally reliable.

Habitat: It is typical of semi-arid grasslands, avoiding wooded areas, but it may also forage in agricultural fields, predominantly cereal crops. The core of the southern African distribution occurs in the Grassy Karoo, Sweet and Mixed Grasslands, and Central Kalahari vegetation types, with a small part of the population extending into the agricultural regions of the southwestern Cape Province in the fynbos biome. Siegfried & Skead (1971) also found the species congregating in large numbers in sweet and mixed grasslands of the South African highveld. It hunts from exposed man-made perches such as telephone and electricity poles and wires, and has characteristic hover-hunting behaviour. It is gregarious and roosts communally in large

trees, frequently eucalypts, usually in urban areas (Siegfried & Skead 1971; Colahan 1993).

Movements: It arrives in southern Africa mainly during November. Numbers peak January–February, and decrease rapidly during March. Arrival and departure appear to be relatively synchronous in all Zones.

Interspecific relationships: It is a very common raptor in parts of South Africa during the summer months. It often occurs together with Eastern *F. amurensis* and Western *F. vespertinus* Redfooted Kestrels and it frequently roosts communally in the same trees with the former.

Historical distribution and conservation: Although its historical distribution has not been well documented, it is thought to have been within current limits. The Lesser Kestrel is regarded as a globally threatened species (Collar *et al.* 1994) owing to dramatic declines in many parts of its Western Palearctic breeding range (Biber 1990). Surveys performed in the Free State over the past 25 years suggest a huge decline in numbers reaching South Africa, the species' single most important wintering region (Siegfried & Skead 1971; Colahan 1993). In 1967, 154 000 birds were counted at roosts in South Africa; this number may have declined by half by the mid-1980s (Del Hoyo *et al.* 1994). Although it regularly forages in agricultural fields, the decline in numbers in the Free State may be attributed in part to the conversion of natural grassland habitat to intensive agriculture, suggesting that it is vulnerable to loss of hunting habitat. The grassland biome is the least conserved of South Africa's major biomes. In addition, exposure to pesticides in agricultural fields, and in natural grasslands during locust-control programmes, may also affect this insectivorous raptor. The Lesser Kestrel requires more extensive monitoring in the region.

K. McCann

Recorded in 1112 grid cells, 24.5%
Total number of records: 5599
Mean reporting rate for range: 6.9%

Reporting rates for vegetation types



