

## Crested Francolin

### Bospatrys

#### *Francolinus sephaena*

The Crested Francolin's distribution extends over most of the savannas of eastern Africa south of the Sahara. In southern Africa, it occurs from northeastern Namibia, across northern and eastern Botswana, into Zimbabwe, the Transvaal, Swaziland and northern KwaZulu-Natal. In Zimbabwe, it is largely absent from the northeastern and central regions.

According to Crowe *et al.* (1992), it falls outside the major francolin clades, grouping with an assemblage of primarily Indo-Malaysian perdicines; its closest affinity with the African francolins is with the Coqui Francolin *F. coqui* and the red-winged group.

Kirk's Francolin, *F. s. rovuma*, presently considered a subspecies of Crested Francolin, has been accorded specific status in the past (e.g. McLachlan & Liversidge 1978). It differs from the nominate race by having a streaked lower abdomen, and replaces the nominate race in the low-lying areas of southern Mozambique from the Save River northwards, extending through Tanzania to Somalia (Clancey 1971c; Urban *et al.* 1986).

It occurs in pairs when breeding and in family parties of up to seven birds at other times (Urban *et al.* 1986; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). It is conspicuous and highly vocal, frequently seen along roadsides, and is easily distinguished from other francolins by its bantam-like build, with a cocked tail.

**Habitat:** It generally inhabits woodlands with a dense scrub component. It favours areas with bush encroachment in savannas and tolerates poor grass cover. The vegetation analysis clearly shows its preference for woodlands; there is a marked avoidance of Miombo and the semi-arid Central and Southern Kalahari. It is commonest in *Acacia* woodland compared to broadleaved woodland, and Tarboton (1980b) found densities of 48 birds/100 ha in *Acacia* woodland, and 7.4 birds/100 ha in broadleaved woodland, in a central Transvaal study area. Densities in northern Botswana were close to 1 bird/10 ha in a variety of *Acacia*-dominated habitats, but differed widely in broadleaved

habitats: 1 bird/8 ha in secondary broadleaved riverine woodland, 1 bird/12 ha in Mopane scrub and tall Okavango riparian woodland, 1 bird/150 ha in tall miombo-like and *Baikiaea* woodlands, and 1 bird/250 ha in tall Mopane woodlands (M. Herremans pers. comm.). In Zimbabwe it is associated with thickets below 800 m, but it occurs up to 900 m in the drier west (Irwin 1981).

**Movements:** There are no previous reports of seasonal movements, which suggests that the seasonal fluctuations in reporting rates, particularly marked in Zone 6, are probably due to seasonal variations in conspicuousness.

**Breeding:** Egg-laying in both Zimbabwe and the Transvaal spans October–May, mainly October–March in both regions (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). The atlas data probably represent mainly sightings of chicks. A trend of earlier and more restricted breeding seasons with increasing

latitude is suggested by the models. Breeding records peak in February–May in Zones 1 and 5 (northeastern Namibia, northern Botswana and Zimbabwe), December–February in Zone 6 (Transvaal), and November–February in Zone 7 (KwaZulu-Natal and Swaziland). Brooke (1971f) also suggested that the peak breeding months might be as late as March–May in Zimbabwe.

**Interspecific relationships:** In the drier savannas of the Transvaal and Zimbabwe, it is often sympatric with Coqui, Shelley's *F. shelleyi*, Swainson's *F. swainsonii* and Natal *F. natalensis* Francolins. However, the Crested Francolin usually favours denser stands of scrub and thicket than Coqui, Shelley's and Swainson's Francolins and drier sites than the Natal Francolin.

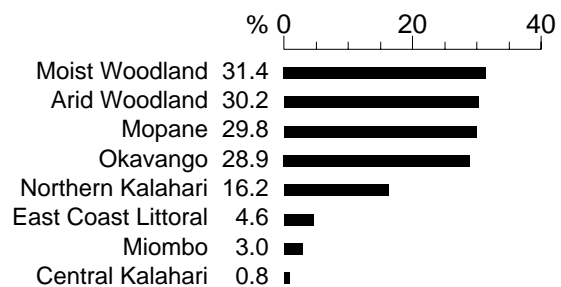
**Historical distribution and conservation:** Although it might fluctuate locally in population size and distribution according to changes in habitat quality, there is no evidence of any long-term extensive distributional changes.

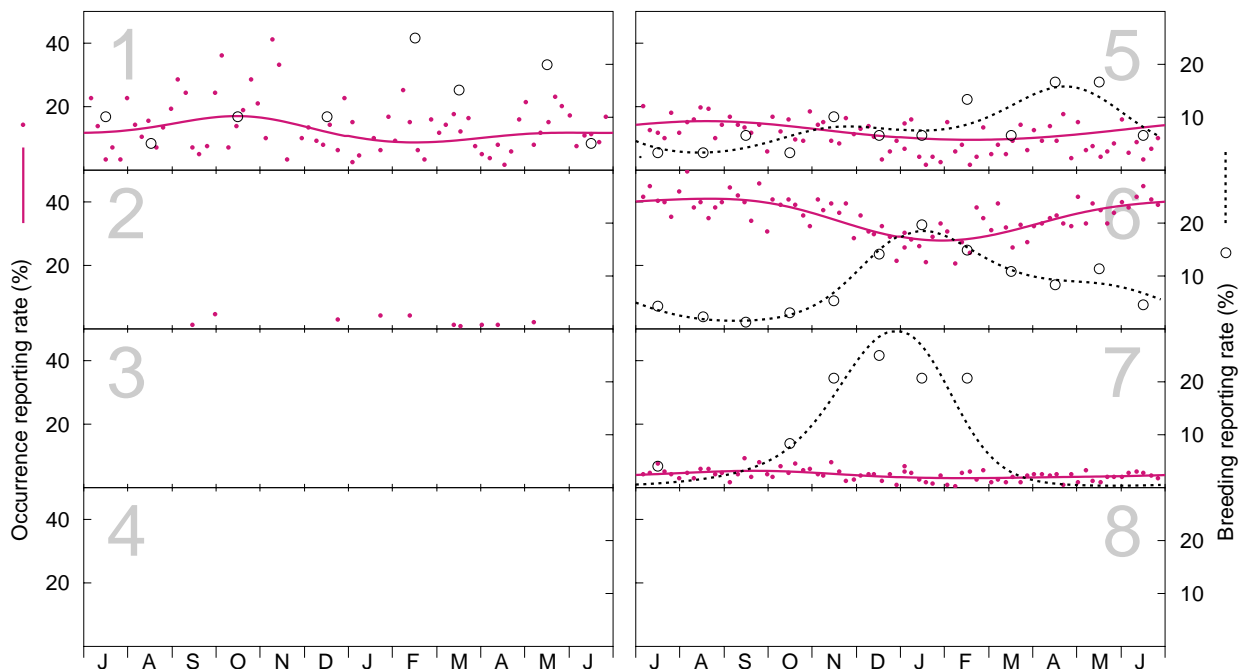
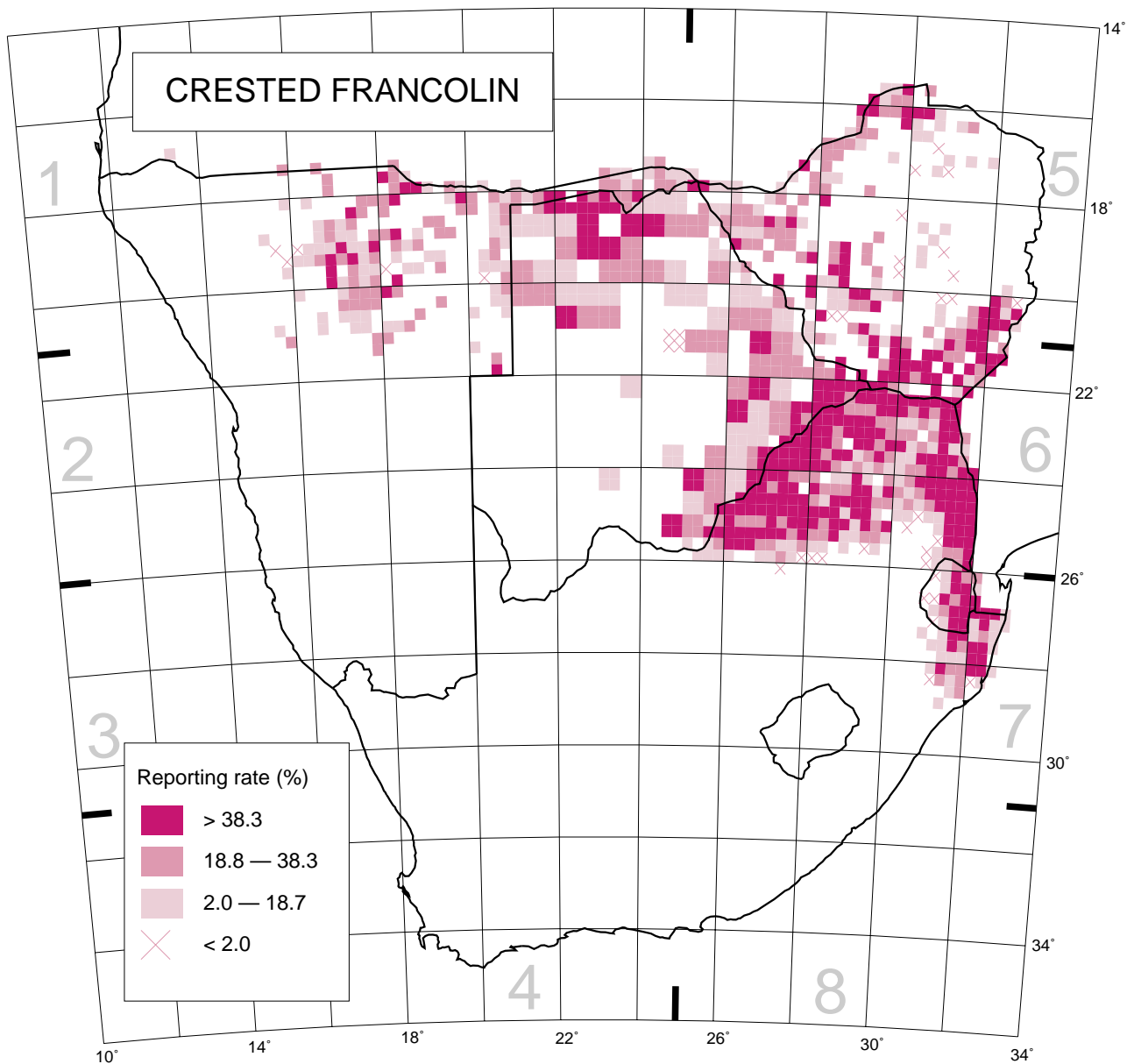
The Crested Francolin is apparently not threatened anywhere in its range, except locally where bush is cleared. Brooke (1984b) listed it as meriting monitoring.

R.M. Little

Recorded in 1046 grid cells, 23.1%  
Total number of records: 12 389  
Mean reporting rate for range: 31.8%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 408, 10, 0, 0, 1089, 4031, 769, 0; Breeding: 20, 0, 0, 0, 30, 290, 24, 0.