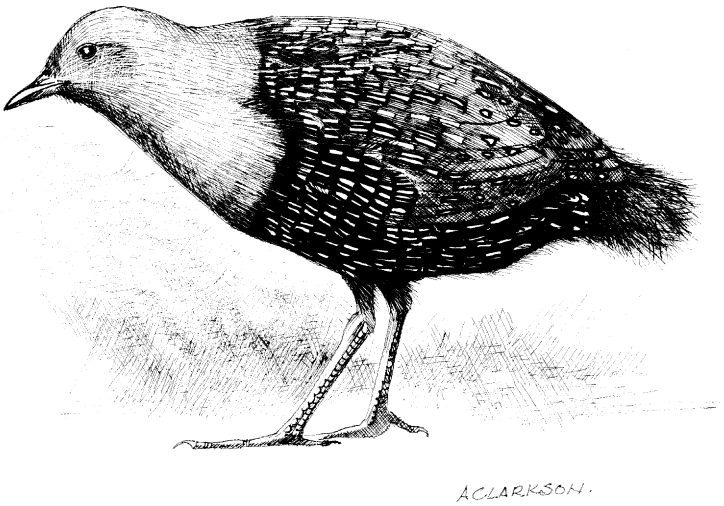


Redchested Flufftail

Rooiborsvleikuiken

Sarothrura rufa

The Redchested Flufftail is the most widely distributed flufftail, being a relatively common resident of wetlands in sub-Saharan Africa, with isolated populations in Ethiopia and in West Africa east to Gabon, and a more continuous range from Cameroon east to Kenya and south to the Cape Province (Urban *et al.* 1986). Atlas data confirm its local occurrence in Zimbabwe, the Okavango area of Botswana, and in the Transvaal, KwaZulu-Natal and Swaziland (Irwin 1981; Urban *et al.* 1986; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Maclean 1993b; Parker 1994). It has a predominantly coastal distribution in the southern Cape Province; the cluster of records from the southwest reflects the relatively large number of suitable wetlands there.

The difficulty normally experienced in locating and identifying this species means that it is consistently underrecorded. In KwaZulu-Natal, detailed surveys and assessments of habitat availability (Taylor 1994) suggested that it is much more widespread and numerous than is indicated by either Cyrus & Robson (1980) or the current atlas data.

Habitat: It inhabits a wide range of wetland vegetation types, occupying almost any area which provides dense cover but is not so uniformly deeply flooded as to have no mud, firm ground or short vegetation on which to forage (Taylor 1994). Occupied habitat varies from seasonally wet hygrophilous grassland and sedge meadow to permanently flooded reedbeds up to 3 m tall. Nests are often built in moist or flooded grass at the edge of marshy areas (Keith *et al.* 1970; Hopkinson & Masterson 1984; Taylor 1994).

The vegetation analysis indicates the relative scarcity of habitat in arid regions, while the high reporting rates from the eastern Zimbabwe highlands probably reflect greater observer awareness.

Movements: There is no evidence for seasonal movements, and isolated records away from normal habitat probably represent vagrants (Keith *et al.* 1970; Urban *et al.* 1986). The low reporting rates in the nonbreeding season shown by the models reflect the lack of advertising calls and the less intensive territorial calling during this period (Taylor 1994). In KwaZulu-Natal, it is permanently territorial and entirely sedentary for as long as occupied habitat remains suitable. Very localized seasonal movements occur only in the face of drastic reductions in habitat availability, e.g. by burning (Taylor 1994). Dispersal of immatures occurs at any time between December–October, mostly April–September (Taylor 1994).

Breeding: Atlas records mainly spanned August–January. In southern Africa breeding occurs during the rains (Keith *et al.* 1970; Urban *et al.* 1986) and 27 breeding records from KwaZulu-Natal in 1988–92 occurred September–March (Taylor 1994).

Interspecific relationships: In Zimbabwe it is sympatric with the Streakybreasted Flufftail *S. boehmi*, which occurs only during the rains and normally occupies shorter, less dense, temporarily flooded grasslands (Benson *et al.* 1971; Irwin 1981). In southern Africa it is sympatric with the rare Whitewinged Flufftail *S. ayresi*, which may occur for long periods in vegetation too deeply flooded for occupation by Redchested Flufftails, but only for relatively short periods in the latter's preferred habitats during the breeding season (Taylor 1994).

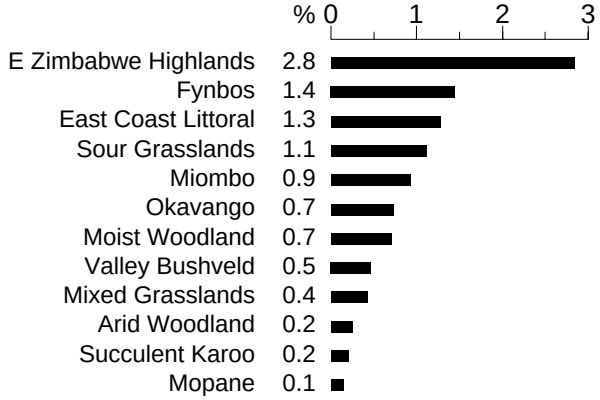
Historical distribution and conservation: The historical distribution is difficult to assess because of the paucity of information before the 1970s, subsequent to which tape recordings have facilitated identification of the bird by its common calls. Its overall distribution has probably not changed significantly in the recent past.

The Redchested Flufftail is not under any immediate threat, but its numbers must be decreasing as a result of the continual destruction of its wetland habitats (Taylor 1994). Although it is a successful colonist of artificially created, often very small, wetland patches, these only partially compensate for the areas lost (Taylor 1994).

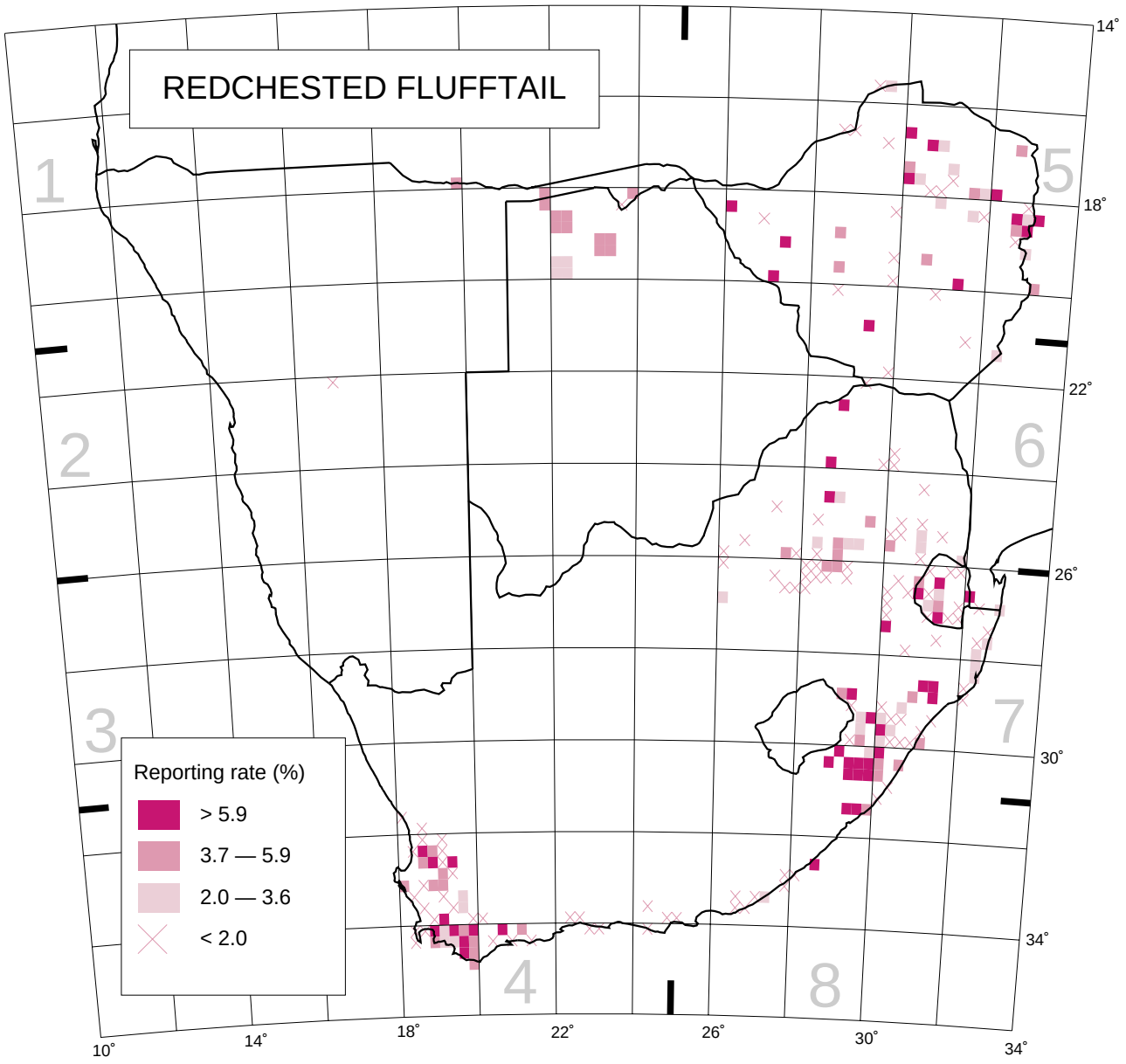
P.B. Taylor

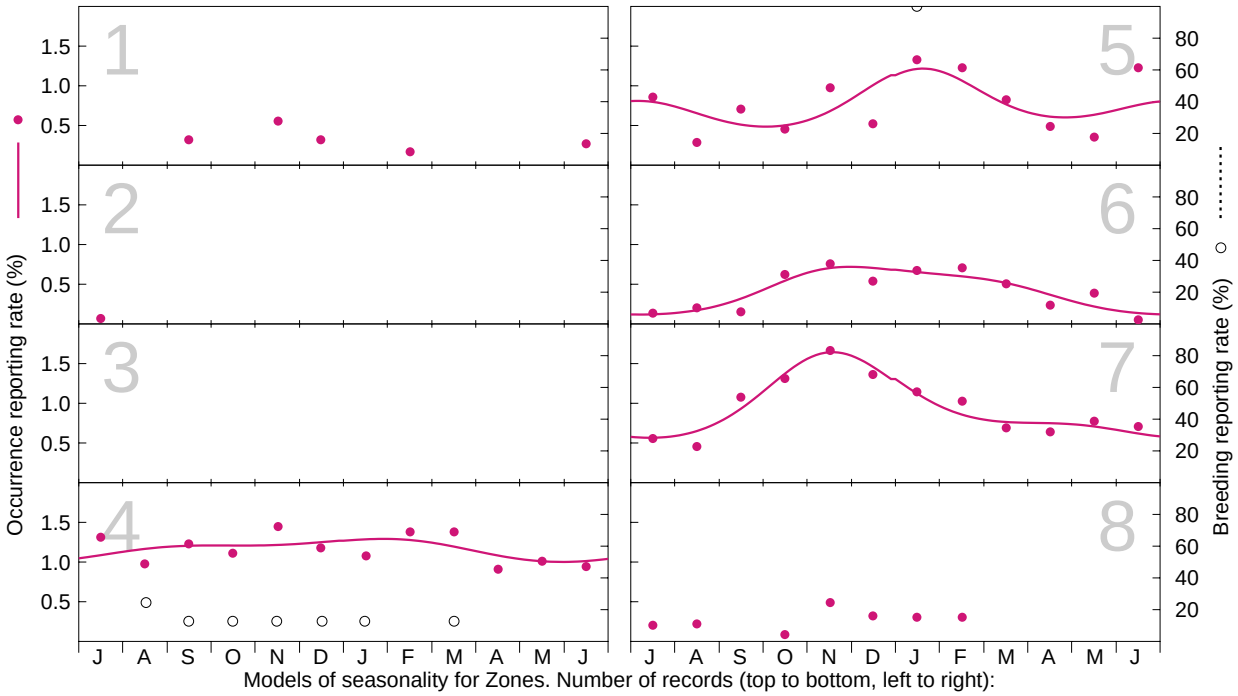
Recorded in 255 grid cells, 5.6%
Total number of records: 952
Mean reporting rate for range: 2.2%

Reporting rates for vegetation types



Also marginally in Sweet Grasslands.





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
Occurrence: 11, 1, 0, 297, 87, 102, 426, 19; Breeding: 0, 0, 0, 8, 1, 0, 0, 0.