

## Doublebanded Courser

### Dubbelbanddrawwertjie

#### *Smutsornis africanus*

Like Burchell's Courser *Cursorius rufus*, the Doublebanded Courser is mainly a bird of the dry west, but it is more widespread. It occurs throughout the Karoo, Botswana, the western South African highveld and Namibia, but uncommonly in southern Namibia (Maclean 1960). In the southwestern Cape Province it is an uncommon localized resident, confined mainly to the drier country in Namaqualand and the Karoo (Hockey *et al.* 1989). Its distribution in the Free State is mainly in the central parts where it is a nomadic resident (Earlé & Grobler 1987). In the Transvaal it is confined almost entirely to the southwestern corner west of Potchefstroom (2627CA), numbers being greatest during droughts (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). This is also the case in the southern Kalahari populations which move away from regions of good rainfall when the vegetation becomes too dense (Maclean 1967). In the eastern Cape Province it occurred as far east as Tarkastad (3226AB) and Grahamstown (3326BC), at least until the 1960s (Skead 1967a), and may still do so at times. It is a vagrant to the northern Transvaal. It has been found to be a sparse resident in the Hwange National Park in western Zimbabwe (A.J. Tree pers. comm.).

Four subspecies have been described in the region (Clancey 1980b); *S. a. traylori* has well-defined strongholds in the lacustrine depressions of Etosha (1816) and the Makgadikgadi (2025).

It is usually solitary or in pairs, rarely in a family group of three or four birds, unlike the *Cursorius* coursers (Maclean 1967, 1993b), and in its habitat is the only courser with patterned dorsal plumage and two black breast-bands. Since it is partly nocturnal or crepuscular, it is likely to be overlooked at times; even during the day it is difficult to see unless it runs. Macdonald (1957) stated: 'Birds were well camouflaged on the ground and it is quite likely that the species was frequently overlooked.'

**Habitat:** Its biome preferences are similar to those of Burchell's Courser, but it occurs far less regularly in the

Namib. It inhabits open plains of short grass, especially near pans (Smithers 1964), stony or gravelly semi-desert with low shrubs, dry flat riverbeds, and eroded or overgrazed grassveld (Maclean 1967). Its apparent association with Mopane woodland is a reflection of the general flatness of this biome and the resulting occurrence of pans and floodplains which are bare or only sparsely grassed in the dry season and therefore suitable for occupation by coursers (including Temminck's Courser *C. temminckii*). Also, Mopane scrub is often associated with the edge of calcrete, a substrate favoured by this species, as shown by its concentration in the Kalahari Basin from the northern Cape Province to Makgadikgadi, and Etosha.

**Movements:** It is highly nomadic throughout its range, e.g. in northwestern Botswana (Tree 1972c). In the Transvaal and Kalahari, numbers are greatest during droughts (Maclean 1967; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). It is more of a nomad than a regular migrant, which is reflected in the relatively large scatter of reporting rates in the models where the fluctuations do not reveal any clear patterns.

**Breeding:** It breeds in spring or early summer in the western Transvaal (Farkas 1962), but in any month during drought periods (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). Other data from the Kalahari and Namibia confirm breeding from all months with a summer peak (Maclean 1967; N.J. Skinner *in litt.*; Brown & Clinning *in press*). In the southern Kalahari, breeding reaches a peak during dry periods when populations are greatest (Maclean 1967). The atlas records also indicate an extended season – or lack of a season – most records coming from summer.

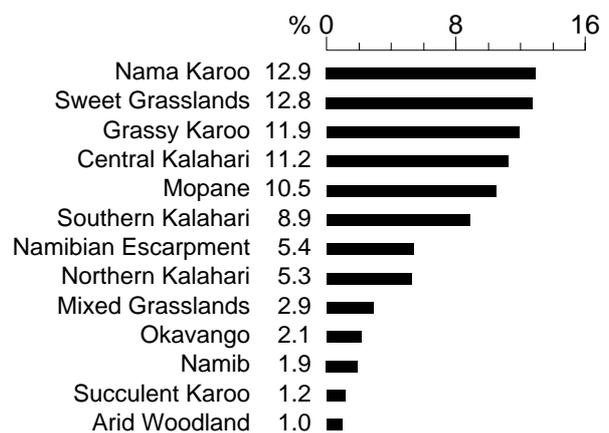
**Interspecific relationships:** Like Burchell's Courser, the Doublebanded Courser is a bird of the dry west, but the two species are seldom seen together (Macdonald 1957).

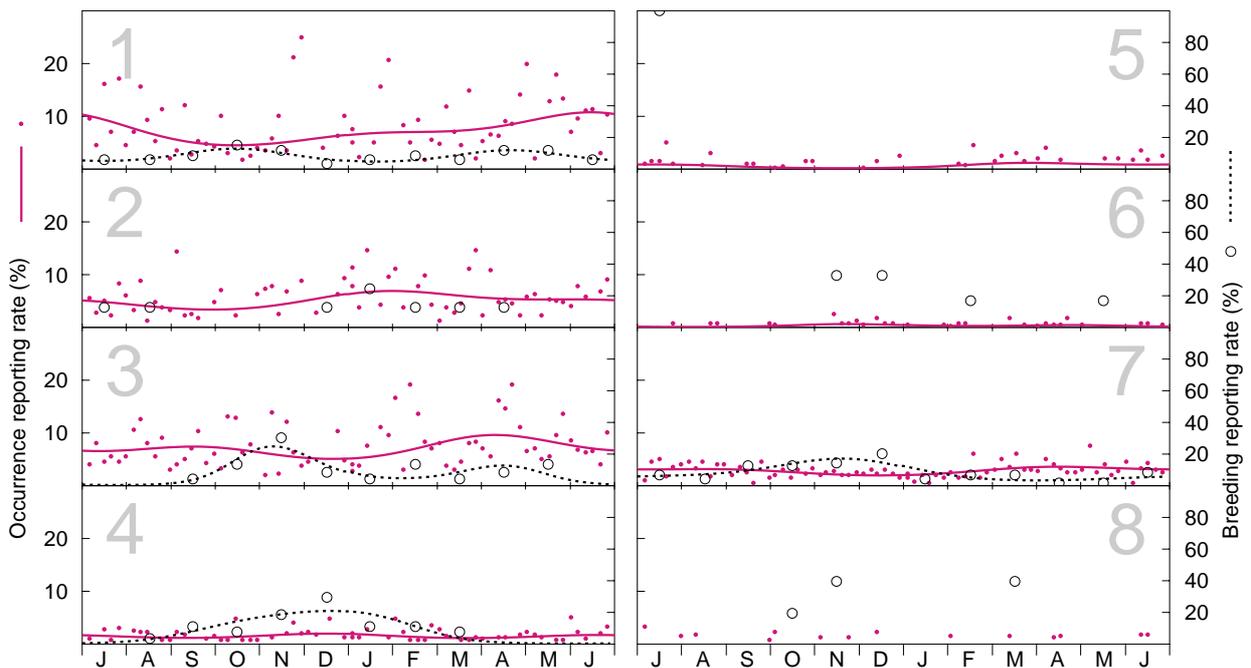
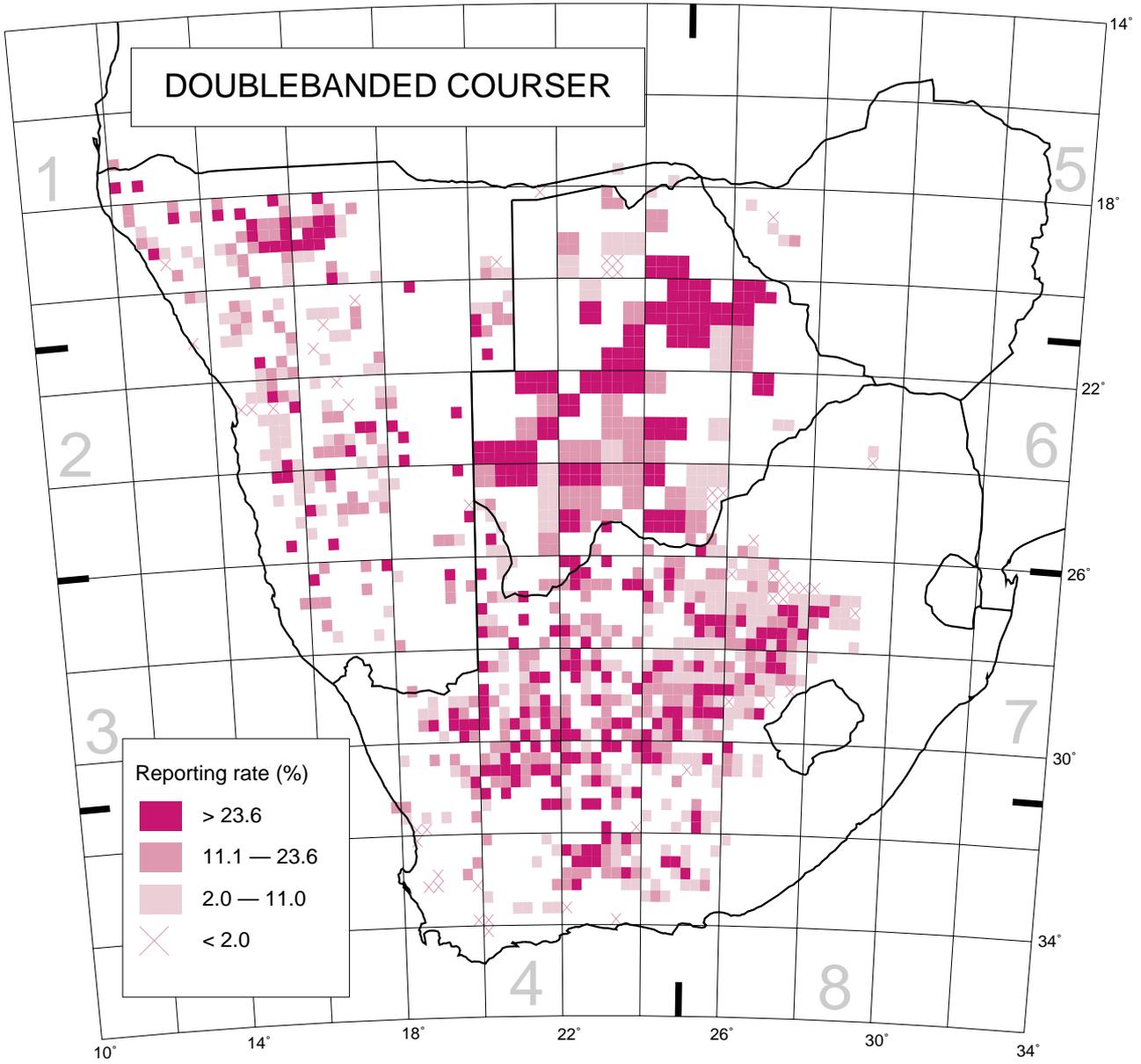
**Historical distribution and conservation:** The distribution of the Doublebanded Courser appears not to have changed in historical times, though it tends to spread eastward from its normal range during dry years. It remains fairly common and adapts to stock-farming practices, locally also to crop-farming, and therefore is probably not in need of special conservation measures.

G.L. Maclean

Recorded in 1085 grid cells, 23.9%  
Total number of records: 4329  
Mean reporting rate for range: 13.9%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 249, 188, 404, 128, 58, 38, 558, 16; Breeding: 34, 8, 23, 27, 1, 6, 48, 5.