



## Purple Roller

### Groottrouphant

*Coracias naevia*

The Purple Roller occurs in a variety of savannas and woodlands in sub-Saharan Africa. There are two races whose ranges do not meet: the nominate race *C. n. naevia* occurs in the northern tropics, and *mosambica* in the southern tropics, as far north as Zambia and Zaire (Fry *et al.* 1988). In southern Africa, the species is widespread north of 28°S; its distribution is similar to that of the Lilac-breasted Roller *C. caudata*, except that it occurs further west on the Namibian escarpment. In roadside counts in Namibia and Botswana, the overall average density was 1 bird/35 km, but there was wide variation according to biome (1 bird/16–260 km) and season (1 bird/11–874 km) (Herremans *et al.* 1993b; Herremans & Herremans-Tonnoeyr 1994g).

It is usually solitary or in pairs (Fry *et al.* 1988; Ginn *et al.* 1989; Maclean 1993b). It is less conspicuous than the Lilac-breasted and European *C. garrulus* Rollers, but the atlas data are probably similarly reliable and comprehensive for these three species.

**Habitat:** It has the narrowest habitat tolerance of the three common *Coracias* rollers in the region (compare the number of biomes from which the species are reported). It has a lower preference for the woodland–grassland ecotone than the Lilac-breasted Roller and accepts (or even prefers) more uniform bushveld and woodland, both broadleaved and *Acacia*, but the habitat overlap between the two species is large; of the eight biomes where Lilac-breasted Roller is most common, seven are also preferred by Purple Roller. It is absent at high altitudes and in forests, but occurs further west in the arid areas of the Namibian Escarpment than does the Lilac-breasted Roller.

**Movements:** It is generally considered resident in southern Africa with some local movements (Irwin 1981; Fry *et al.* 1988; Newman 1989; Maclean 1993b; Sinclair *et al.* 1993). The models have too much scatter to reveal reliable variation in reporting rate in the northwestern Zones 1 and 2 where it is most common (see also Herremans *et al.* 1993b), but there is a slight increase during winter in the northeastern Zones 5 and 6. In Swaziland it was found to be mostly a winter visitor (Parker 1994). Inspection of the ranges in seasonal distribution maps did not indicate a clear shift in distribution, and any movements must therefore be partial. Nevertheless, field evidence indicates clear seasonal movements, varying in intensity between years, to wintering grounds in Zambia, Zimbabwe, the northern Transvaal and eastern Botswana (Irwin 1981; Benson 1982b; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Ginn *et al.* 1989; Fry *et al.* 1992; Herremans & Herremans-Tonnoeyr 1994g). Many birds migrate to these areas March–October, and movements continue further to the northeast and east into more mesic areas in years when the Kalahari basin is drought-stricken (Ginn *et al.* 1989; Herremans & Herremans-Tonnoeyr 1994g).

**Breeding:** Atlas breeding records were October–April in Zones 2–3, confirming the general pattern of breeding in the wet season (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Maclean 1993b; Skinner 1996a). The records from Zone 1 span most of the year except late winter; records from the Transvaal lowveld are also spread over a broader period (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). Compared to the Lilac-breasted Roller, breeding is less concentrated in the early rains.

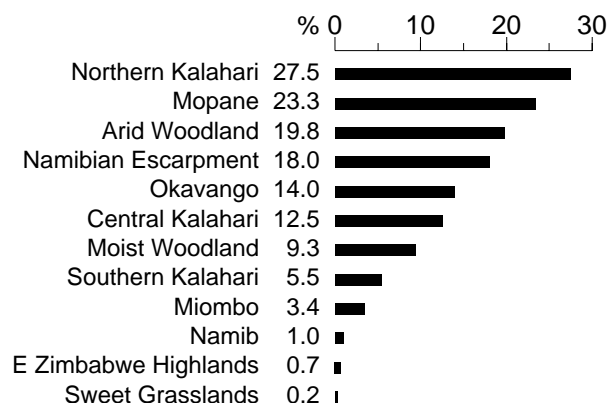
**Interspecific relationships:** It is outnumbered by the Lilac-breasted Roller in all biomes, except in the far west on the Namibian escarpment which is the only area where it is decidedly the dominant roller. Comparing the ratios between the relative abundance of Purple and Lilac-breasted Rollers, the former is particularly uncommon in Miombo, in the southern Kalahari and in the Okavango. (See also the texts for European and Lilac-breasted Rollers.)

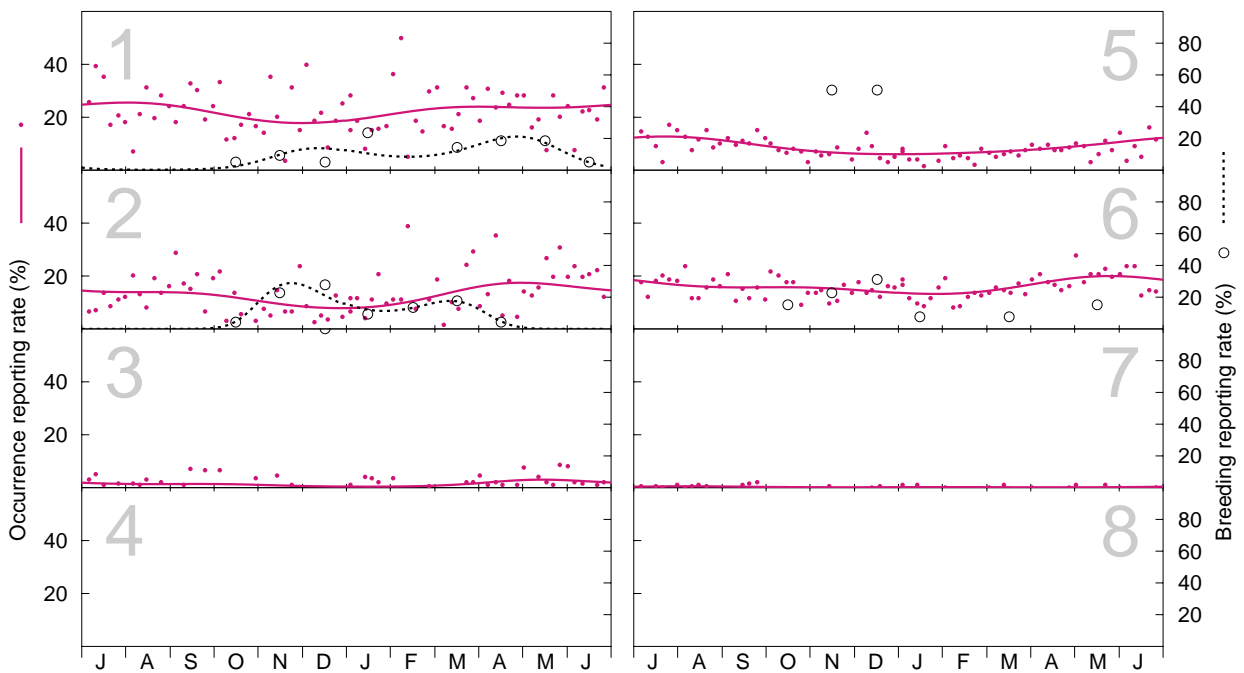
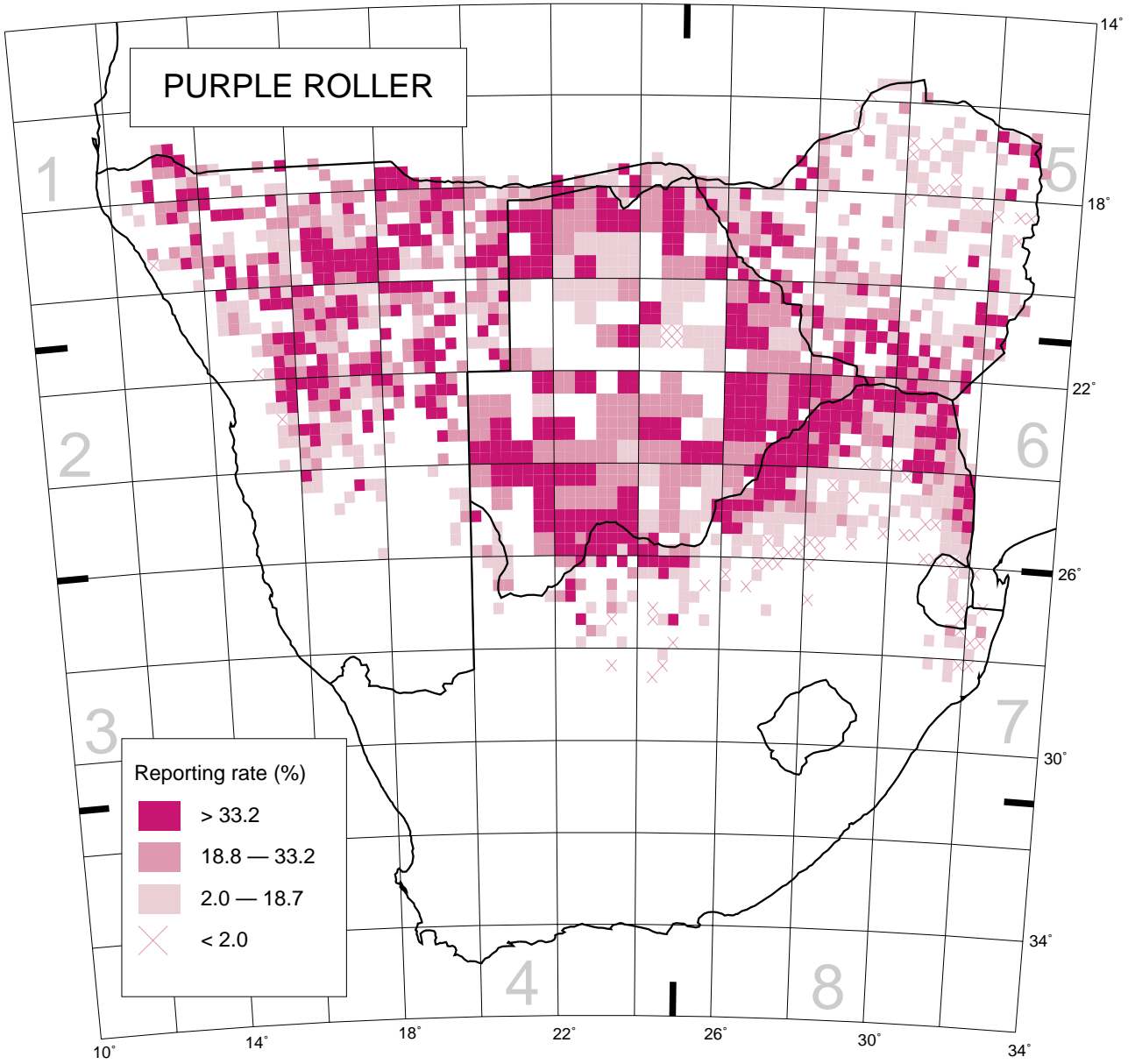
**Historical distribution and conservation:** The distribution appears unchanged from the generalized statements given by Stark & Sclater (1903). The Purple Roller does not appear to be a species of conservation concern.

*M. Herremans*

Recorded in 1709 grid cells, 37.7%  
Total number of records: 8642  
Mean reporting rate for range: 17.4%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 759, 484, 83, 0, 778, 1850, 48, 0; Breeding: 21, 22, 1, 0, 2, 13, 0, 0.