

## Clapper Lark

### Hoëveldklappertjie

*Mirafra apiata*

The Clapper Lark is a southern African near-endemic resident which also occurs in the Barotse Province of southwestern Zambia (Benson *et al.* 1971). Atlas records show two centres of distribution in South Africa, with the majority of records from the northeastern and eastern Cape Province, Free State, southwestern and southcentral Transvaal, and the Kalahari in Botswana. There are scattered records from the Nama Karoo and Namibia (with a cluster of records at Etosha National Park in northern Namibia). The population in the eastern Caprivi is continuous with that of the Zambezi plains in Zambia. The second area of relatively homogeneous distribution is in the southwestern and western Cape Province. It is usually seen singly or in pairs.

The Clapper Lark is a medium-sized, mostly rufous bird with white outer tail feathers; races in the southwestern and western Cape Province are greyer. It has a distinctive wing-clapping display (Keith *et al.* 1992; Maclean 1993b) different from the Flappet Lark *M. rufocinnamomea*, and is unlikely to have been misidentified during the breeding season. Clapper Larks are easily overlooked unless calling and displaying; this may have affected the reporting rates outside of the breeding season.

**Habitat:** It is mainly a grassland species, especially where the grass is tall and there are scattered bushes and boulders, particularly on hillsides. It is not confined to grasslands and occurs in succulent dwarf shrublands and sand-plain fynbos on the west coast. It is the only lark that occurs in mountain fynbos on the Cape Peninsula, where it is present in the Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve (3418AD) (Hockey *et al.* 1989). It is also present in sparse perennial grasslands on sands in the northwestern Cape Province and in the Kalahari, where it occurs particularly in interdune valleys, fossil riverbeds and near pans. Reporting rates suggest that the species is commonest in Grassy Karoo, followed by the Central Kalahari and Sweet Grasslands.

**Movements:** The models show a pattern of fewer records in the autumn and winter in all Zones. This is probably due to reduced detectability when the birds are not displaying

and calling, and is unlikely to represent seasonal movements. There are, however, local movements in this species, particularly in arid areas where rainfall is irregular and patchy. Nevertheless, it was considered by Maclean (1970c) to be resident in the Kalahari Gemsbok National Park (2520).

**Breeding:** The data indicate spring/summer breeding August–May, mainly August–December, and suggest a somewhat earlier breeding season in the southwestern Cape Province (Zone 4). This is confirmed by egg-laying data from the western Cape Province (August–October) (Winterbottom 1968a) and the Transvaal (October–February; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b).

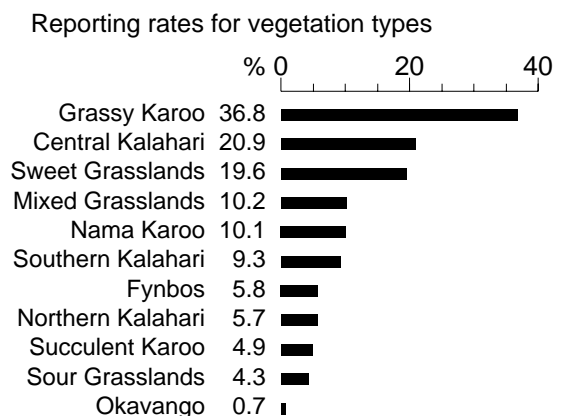
**Interspecific relationships:** The Clapper Lark overlaps in habitat with several other lark species, but there are no published observations of competitive interactions or mutualistic associations with any other bird species. There is an area of overlap with the closely related Flappet Lark in northern Botswana and northern Namibia (Hunter 1990a; Penry 1994; C.J. Brown pers. comm.).

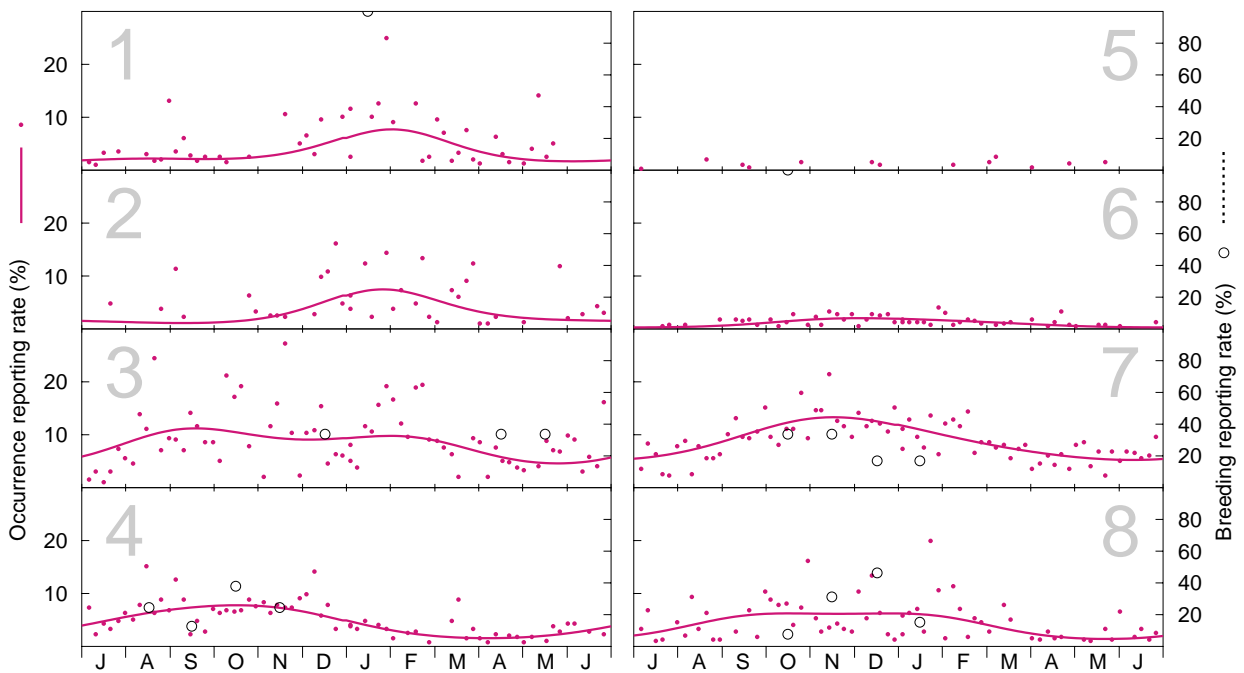
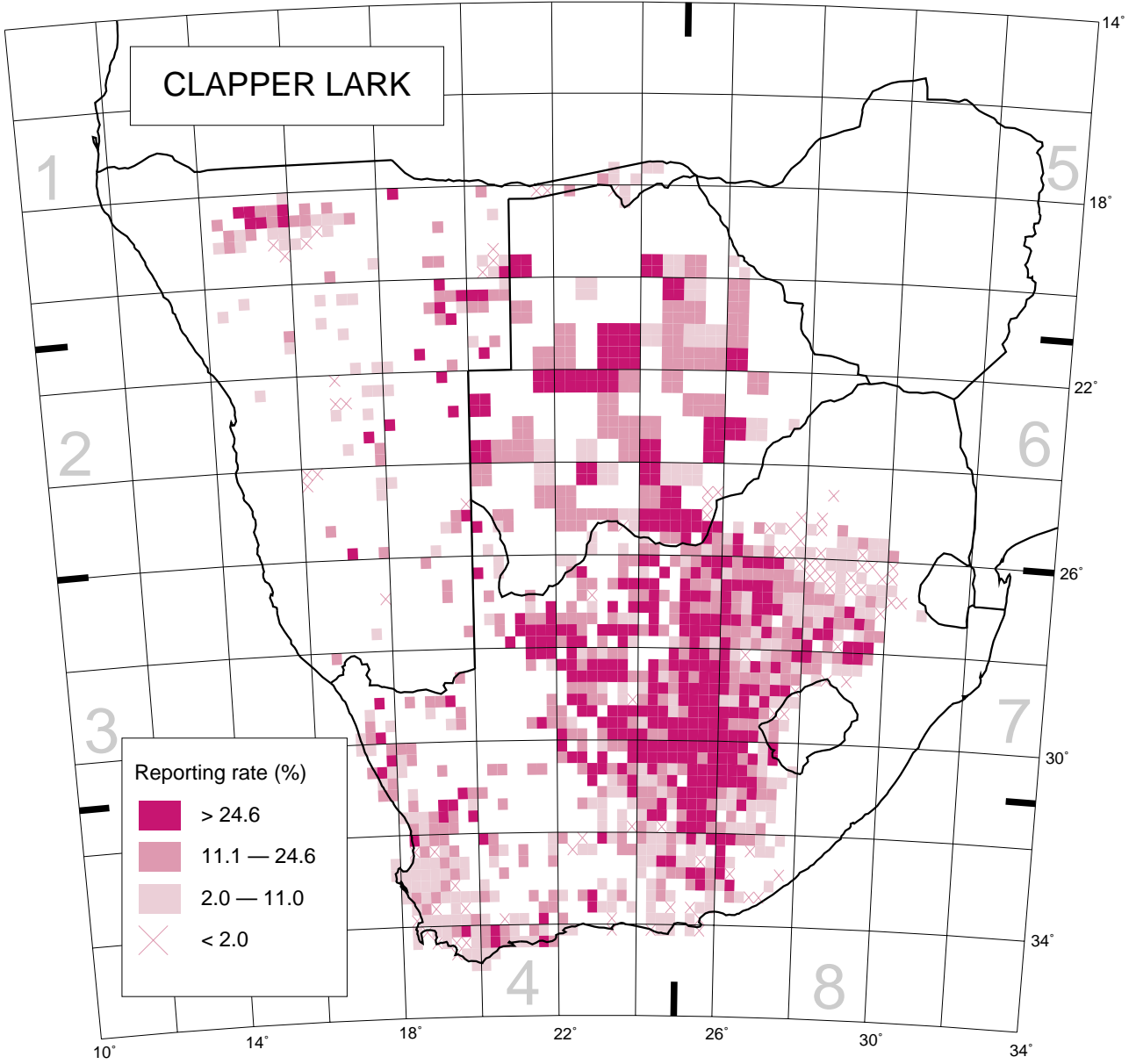
**Historical distribution and conservation:** There is no evidence that the distribution of the Clapper Lark has recently changed. Its presence on fallow wheat fields and croplands in the southwestern Cape Province possibly indicates that it has benefited from agriculture in this area. It is not a recent colonizer of the area, however, as it also occurs in natural vegetation and was considered generally common by Smith in the 1800s (in Roberts 1936). The presence of discrete subspecies in the southwestern Cape Province also suggests that it has a long history of residence in the region. Detailed historical data on the species' abundance are lacking; Hockey *et al.* (1989) suggest that it may benefit from low-intensity crop farming but avoids intensively cultivated areas in the southwestern Cape Province.

The Clapper Lark is not considered endangered or threatened and is common in numerous nature reserves and protected areas in southern Africa.

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Recorded in 1316 grid cells, 29.0%  
Total number of records: 8022  
Mean reporting rate for range: 11.5%





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 104, 108, 446, 390, 17, 122, 1736, 232; Breeding: 1, 0, 3, 8, 0, 1, 6, 13.