



## Sabota Lark

### Sabotalewerik

#### *Mirafra sabota*

This resident species is near-endemic to southern Africa but occurs as far north as Cabinda in the west. The atlas data show that there are two main centres of distribution in southern Africa: a 'western' population that occurs from the eastern Karoo northwest through Namibia to the Kunene River, and an 'eastern' population that occurs in the northeastern Cape Province, western, northern and eastern Transvaal, eastern Swaziland, southern and western Zimbabwe, Botswana and extreme eastern Namibia. The two populations represent two groups of subspecies: the western birds all heavy-billed and generally paler than the more slender-billed eastern birds (Clancey 1966d; Hall & Moreau 1970). These two groups have a narrow zone of contact in the northeastern Cape Province.

The Sabota Lark is usually solitary or occasionally seen in pairs. The density may be high in optimal habitat and Tarboton *et al.* (1987b) noted that 2 birds/2.4 ha were present in moist *Acacia* savanna at Nylsvley (2428DA). Densities in arid woodland in eastern Botswana are similarly high (1 bird/1.4 ha), but lower in the Kalahari (1 bird/10 ha on average) (M. Herremans unpubl. data).

The Sabota Lark is a fairly nondescript species, lacking the rufous wing patch typical of other larks of the *Mirafra* group. As noted above, there is some regional variation in plumage, but in all plumages it has an obvious eye-stripe, is fairly heavily streaked on the upperparts and breast, and has buff outer tail feathers. The song of this highly vocal lark is a good field character and is a medley of pleasant notes, whistles and trills, and includes some 'buzzy' sounds. It also imitates songs, calls and alarm-notes of other species.

**Habitat:** The Sabota Lark occurs in a wide range of savanna habitats, in a wide range of climatic conditions. It is present in arid open shrublands on rocks and sands on the Namib Desert edge, semi-arid *Acacia* savannas on clays, calcrete and sands, on rocky slopes with tall shrubs, bushes and trees, on the edges of wooded drainage lines and in regen-

erating Mopane woodland and mixed woodlands on stony soils. It avoids dune habitats in the Kalahari (Maclean 1970c). The vegetation analysis shows that it was recorded in a wide range of vegetation types, but most frequently from the Namibian Escarpment and Mopane.

**Movements:** There is no evidence of seasonal movements and the models show fairly uniform reporting rates throughout the year. There is some local movement by this species in response to localized rainfall events (pers. obs).

**Breeding:** The data show a summer to late-summer (November–March) peak in breeding, within the recorded months of October–May given by Maclean (1993b). There appear to be some seasonal differences between areas, the birds in the west (Zones 1–3) breeding later than those in the east (Zones 6 and 7), confirming Maclean (1993b). Egg-laying in both Zimbabwe (Irwin 1981) and the Transvaal (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b) spans October–February, mainly October–December in the former and November–December in the latter (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b).

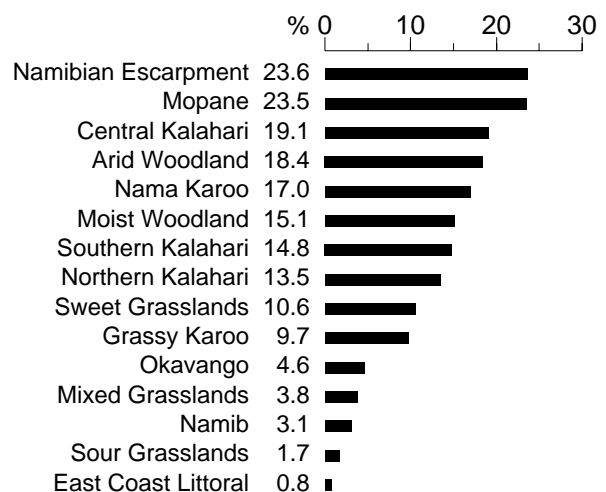
**Interspecific relationships:** The Sabota Lark overlaps in habitat with other lark species in southern Africa. Maclean (1970c) considered that it 'did not compete' with Greybacked Finchlarks *Eremopterix verticalis* on flat calcretes in the Kalahari.

**Historical distribution and conservation:** There is no evidence of any recent changes in distribution. The Sabota Lark is not considered threatened by current land-use practices and appears to be adequately protected in nature reserves and conservancies. Like other savanna lark species, it may be favoured to some extent by cattle grazing and concomitant opening up of the grass and shrub layer in the vegetation.

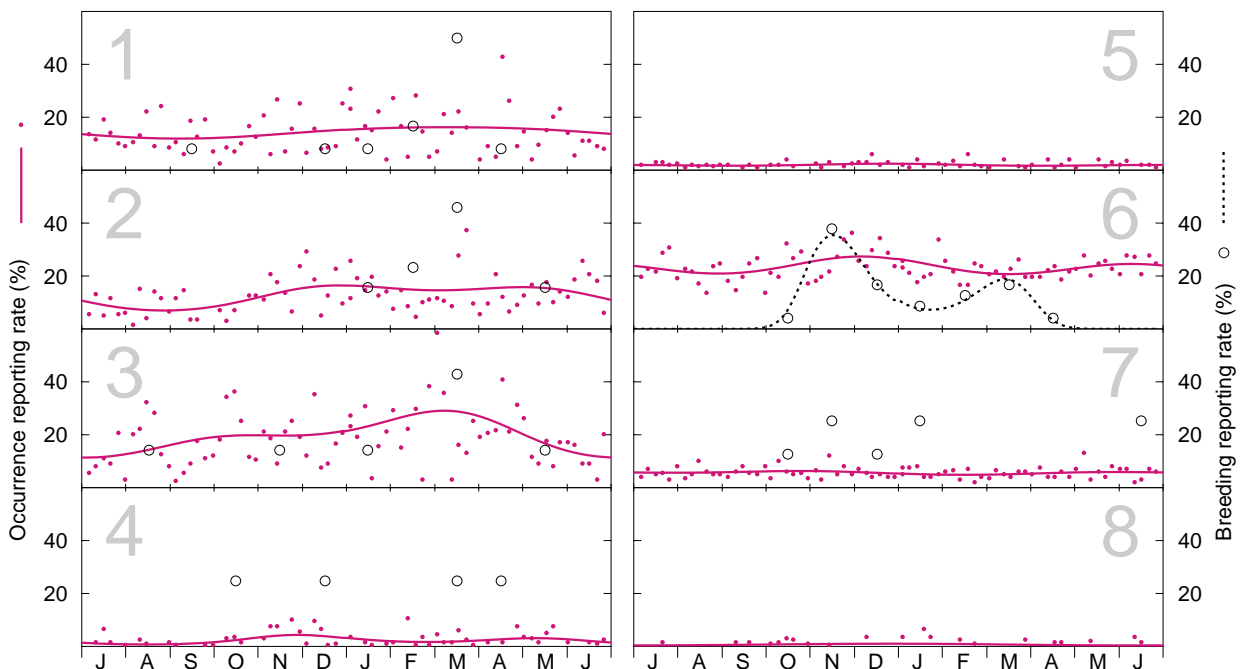
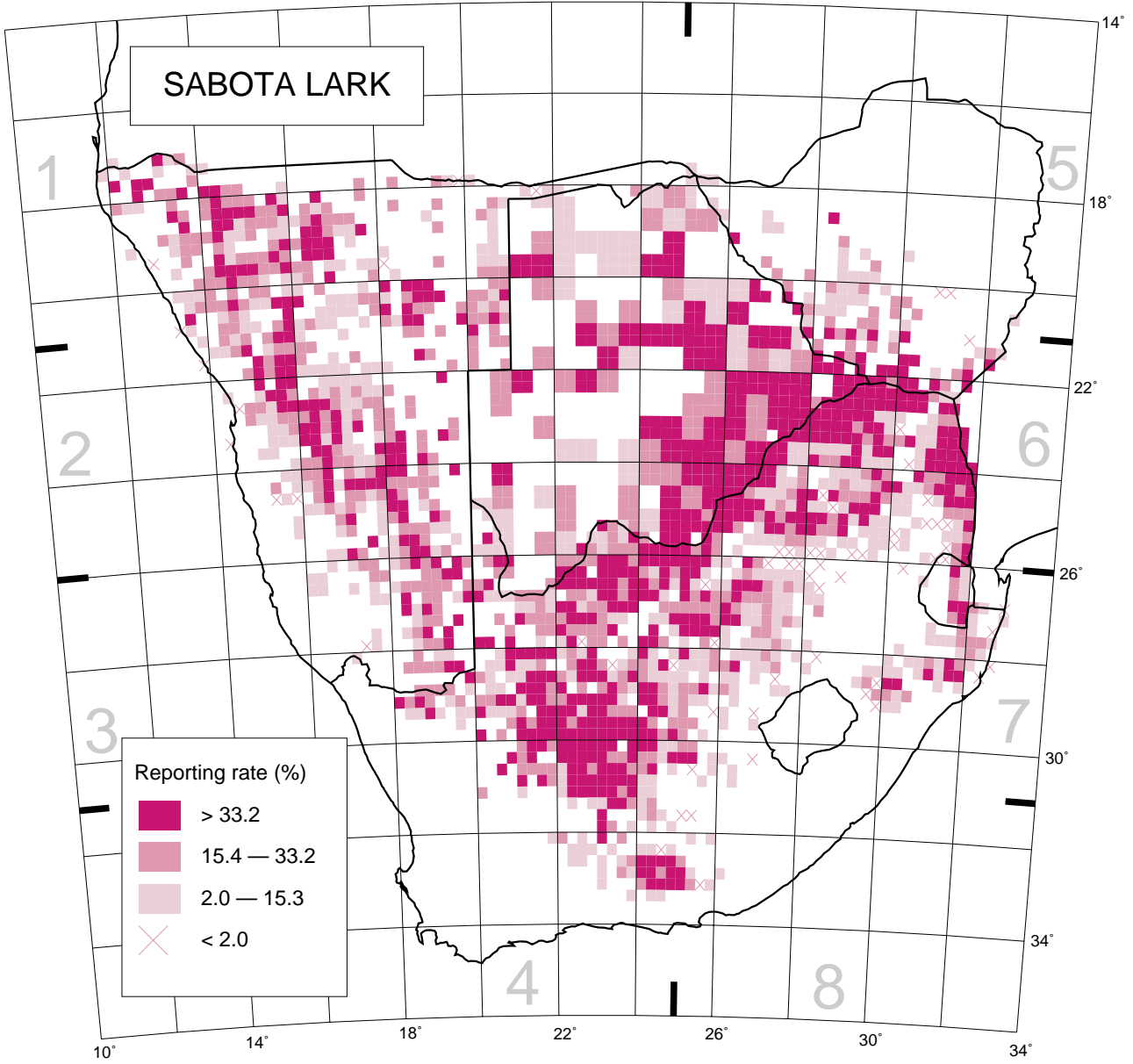
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Recorded in 2017 grid cells, 44.5%  
Total number of records: 11 995  
Mean reporting rate for range: 17.5%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types



Also marginally in Valley Bushveld.



Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 476, 463, 1070, 196, 169, 2669, 1104, 37; Breeding: 12, 13, 7, 4, 0, 24, 8, 0.