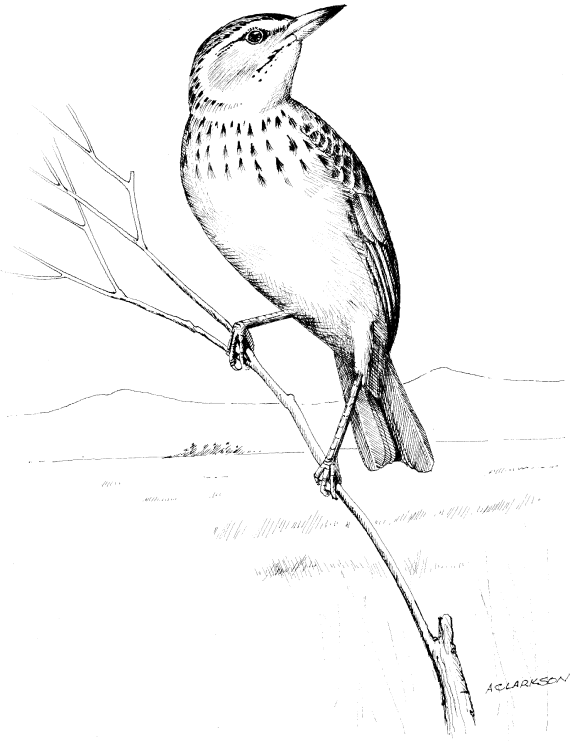


Shortclawed Lark

Kortkloulewerik

Certhilauda chuana

This southern African endemic has a restricted range with two discrete populations: there is an isolated population on the Pietersburg Plateau (2329) in the northern Transvaal and a larger population in southeastern Botswana, with scattered records to the south in the far western Transvaal, northern Cape Province and northwestern Free State. The South African population numbers 500–5000 birds (Brooke 1984b). It is fairly common in southeastern Botswana where over 10 000 pairs might occur (Herremans 1993d). It is localized within its distribution (Hunter 1991; Herremans 1993d,f) but can be locally abundant (Wilson 1984; Herremans & Herremans 1992a), e.g. 46 territorial birds were counted in 35 ha in *Acacia tortilis* savanna near Kgoro Pan (2525A) (pers. obs).

The species is poorly known (Maclean 1985a), and even features such as plumage and display have until recently been described erroneously (see comments by Hunter 1990a; Herremans *et al.* 1994c). It is therefore easily misidentified, but the atlas records were carefully checked to ensure that only substantiated records were admitted to the dataset. The two larks with which it is most easily confused are the Longbilled Lark *C. curvirostris* and Rufousnaped Lark *Mirafra africana.*

Habitat: The Shortclawed Lark prefers open habitat, sparsely vegetated with short grass and scattered bushes. In southeastern Botswana it is restricted to areas with traditional rural agricultural practices. The most typical habitat is recently fallow land, heavily grazed by livestock and with coppicing Umbrella Thorn *Acacia tortilis* bushes (Herremans 1992g; Herremans & Herremans 1992a). In South Africa it is also associated with *Tarchonanthus* bushveld (Brooke 1984b). Soil, ecoclimatological conditions and habitat structure are probably the limiting factors to its distribution (Herremans 1993d), and the biome associations from the atlas are not particularly meaningful. The species' distribution is centred on luvisols and lixisols on granite substrate and it does not occur on well-drained, deep Kalahari sands. It avoids habitat with tall trees, and tall, dense grasses. The available habitat therefore expands with the state of overgrazing during drought and is reduced during wet cycles.

Movements: The species is resident within its range (Wilson 1984; Hunter 1991; Herremans & Herremans 1992a). The pattern in the models is a result of increased conspicuousness during the spring and early summer breeding season and a lower profile during moult later in the wet season (Herremans & Herremans 1992a). Two populations with different dialects are separated by minute geographical and habitat barriers in southeastern Botswana, indicating very limited dispersal (Herremans 1993d,f). However, males could not be relocated more than two months after colour-ringing (pers. obs) and in view of the transient nature of the optimal habitat, there must be considerable territorial dynamics.

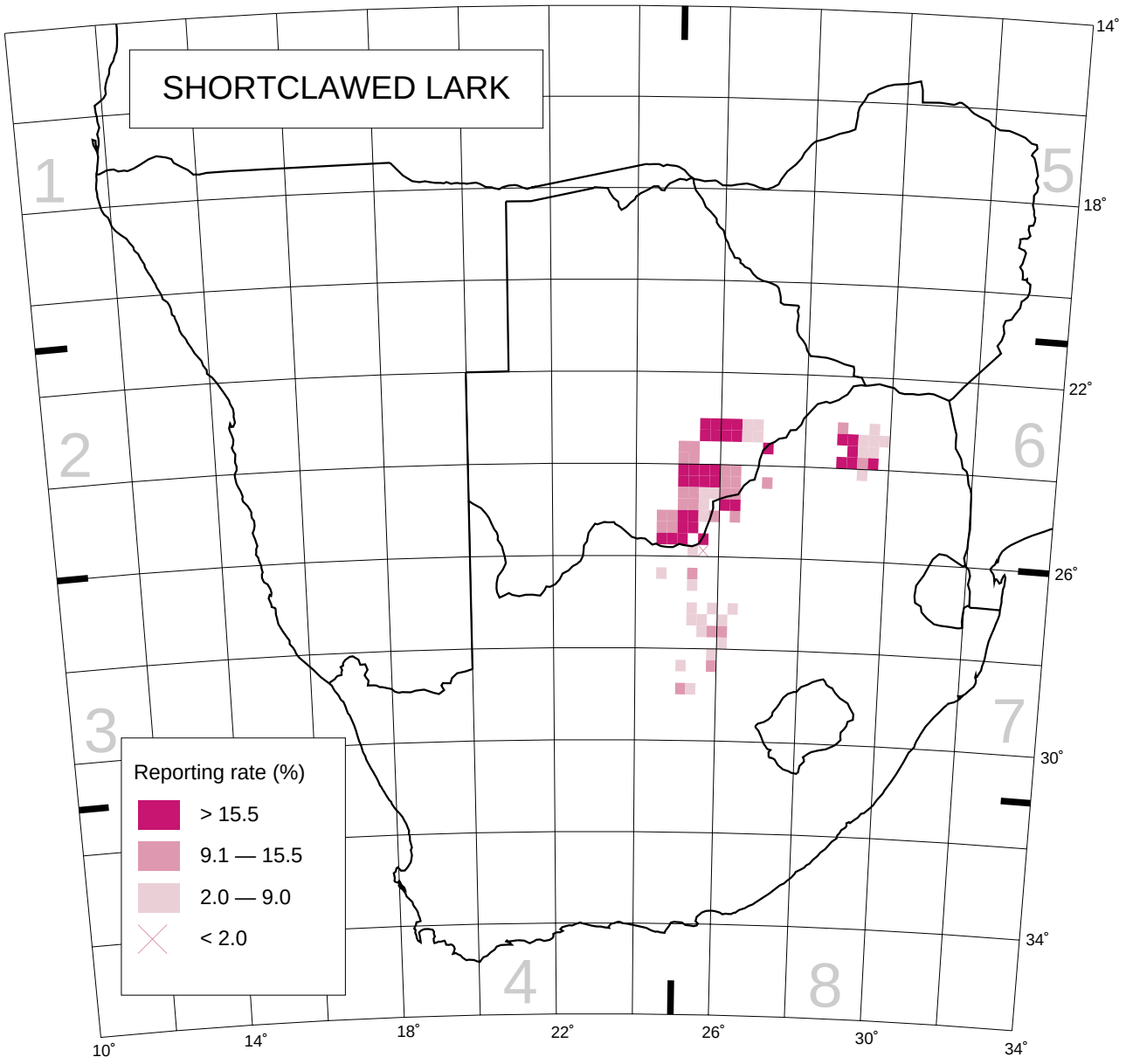
Breeding: The atlas provided little breeding information, but egglaying in Botswana has been reported for September (1), October (12), November (16), December (1) and January (1) (Hunter 1991; Herremans & Herremans 1992a; pers. obs. since 1992), while the single egglaying record from the Transvaal comes from March (Hustler 1985a). The species is single brooded (Herremans & Herremans 1992a).

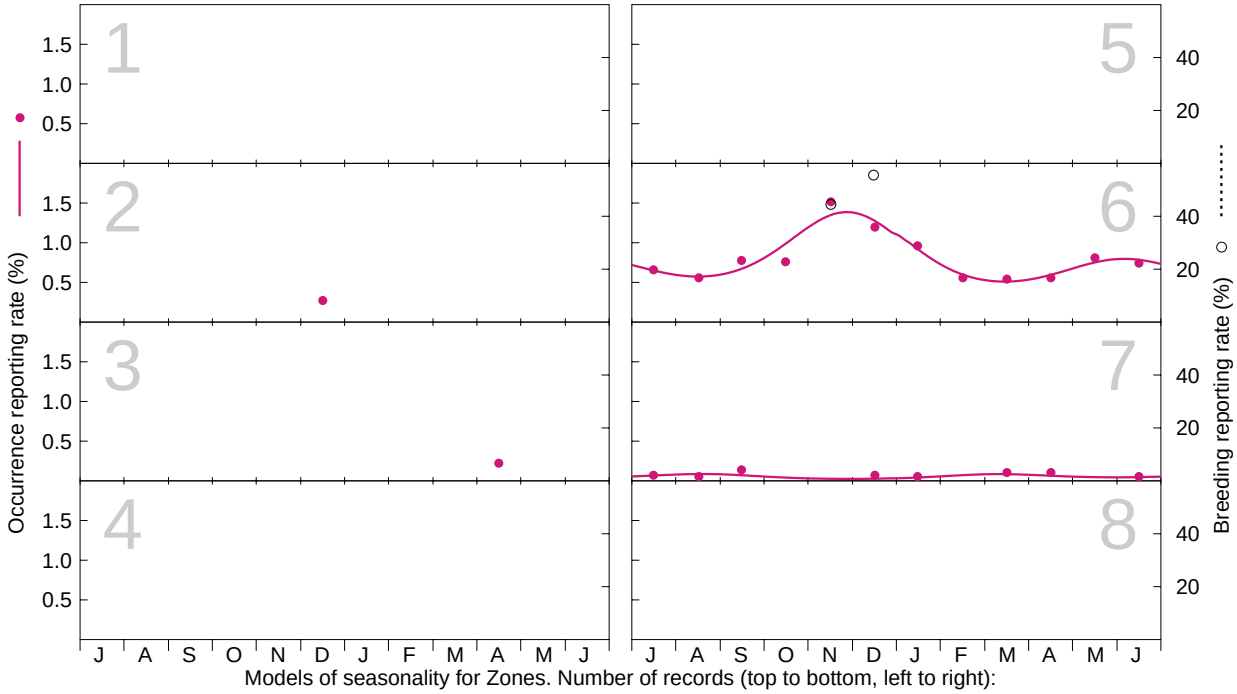
Interspecific relationships: The Shortclawed Lark is frequently sympatric with the Rufousnaped Lark (the latter is present in 71% of territories of the former) and the Sabota Lark *M. sabota* (62%), as well as seven other lark species. In aggressive encounters the Shortclawed Lark is dominant over these other species (Herremans 1992g). The Shortclawed Lark is allopatric with the congeneric Longbilled Lark and these two species inhabit distinctly different habitats.

Historical distribution and conservation: No decrease in distribution or abundance has been documented for this species, but in view of its habitat preference it is likely that commercial farming, with distinct and stable boundaries between tall bush and large areas of permanent cropland, has fragmented the range, particularly in South Africa. The Shortclawed Lark is classified as globally near-threatened (Collar *et al.* 1994) and is included in the South African Red Data book (Brooke 1984b). Most of the world population now occurs in southeastern Botswana on man-made habitat, and any change in agricultural policies, e.g. subsidies for ploughing or fencing or pest-control measures, could affect its numbers dramatically.

M. Herremans

Recorded in 91 grid cells, 2.0%
Total number of records: 228
Mean reporting rate for range: 11.6%





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
Occurrence: 0, 2, 2, 0, 0, 196, 25, 0; Breeding: 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 9, 0, 0.