



Spikeheeled Lark

Vlaktelewerik

Chersomanes albofasciata

The Spikeheeled Lark is a near-endemic resident of southern Africa. The distribution is almost continuous as far north as southwestern Angola, where it is common. Further north, isolated populations occur in central Angola where it is sparse and local on the central plateau and north of Arusha, Tanzania, and possibly at Amboseli Lodge, Kenya (Keith *et al.* 1992). Within southern Africa, it is distributed mainly in the Karoo and in the grasslands of the Free State, southcentral Transvaal and northwestern KwaZulu-Natal, with scattered records in southern Botswana and Namibia where the distribution tends to be patchy. There are isolated populations on the Pietersburg Plateau (2329C,D), Makgadikgadi lacustrine area and adjacent fossil drainages in Botswana, and at Etosha in northern Namibia. Spikeheeled Larks are usually seen in groups of up to 10 birds (Maclean 1993b).

A characteristic species of the arid parts of South Africa, the Spikeheeled Lark is a common, fairly conspicuous bird with a long decurved bill, short tail and rufous belly, and is unlikely to be confused with any other species of lark. Good field characters are the short, blackish tail tipped with white (conspicuous in flight) and the white throat that contrasts markedly with the rufous underparts. The atlas data can be considered comprehensive and reliable for this species.

Habitat: It is present in a range of vegetation types and rainfall regimes, from the very arid gravel plains of the Namib Desert, through arid and semi-arid, sparse, succu-

lent and non-succulent dwarf shrublands and Kalahari pans (Hunter 1991), to high-rainfall grasslands. It avoids alpine grasslands and coastal habitats, with the exception of the west coast strandveld. The Spikeheeled Lark probably occurs in the widest range of climatic conditions of any southern African lark species. Reporting rates show that it is most abundant in the Grassy Karoo, Sweet Grasslands and Nama Karoo vegetation types.

Movements: The models show a reduction in reporting rates during winter for this species in Zone 2, the most arid parts of its range, and an increase in reporting rates in winter in several of the other Zones that form the more mesic parts of its range. This may indicate some seasonal movement away from particularly arid areas in winter.

Breeding: Breeding data for the arid areas (Zones 1–3) indicate bimodal breeding, with a longer breeding season August–December, peaking in October, and a shorter season with a peak March–April. This bimodality is less clear in the data for the more mesic Zones (4, 7 and 8), but these still suggest some breeding in the autumn (March–May) after an early summer (August–December) breeding peak. Egg-laying in the Transvaal (Zone 7) mainly spans August–December, but with two March records (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). Nine out of 22 records from Botswana show egg-laying May–July, and breeding might be throughout the year (Skinner 1995).

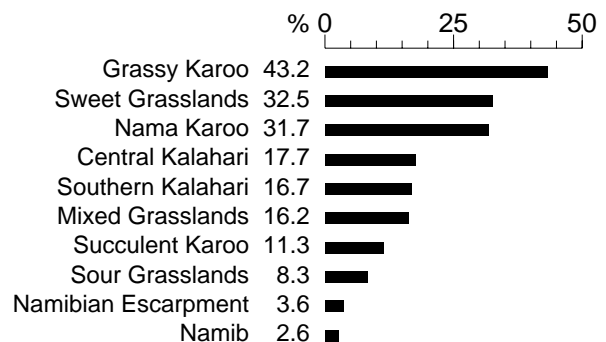
Interspecific relationships: The Spikeheeled Lark overlaps in habitat with several other lark species. Maclean (1970c) observed that in the Kalahari Gemsbok National Park (2520) it occupies different habitat from the Fawn-coloured Lark *Mirafra africanoides* and has a different diet from the Greybacked Finchlark *Eremopterix verticalis*.

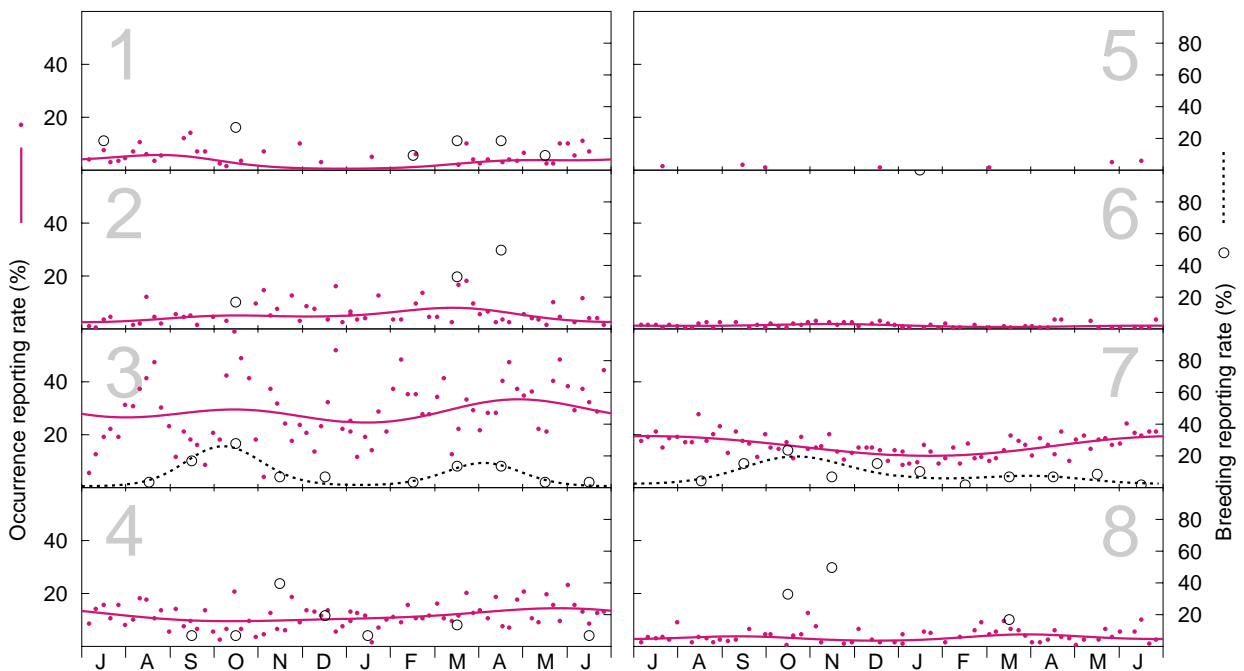
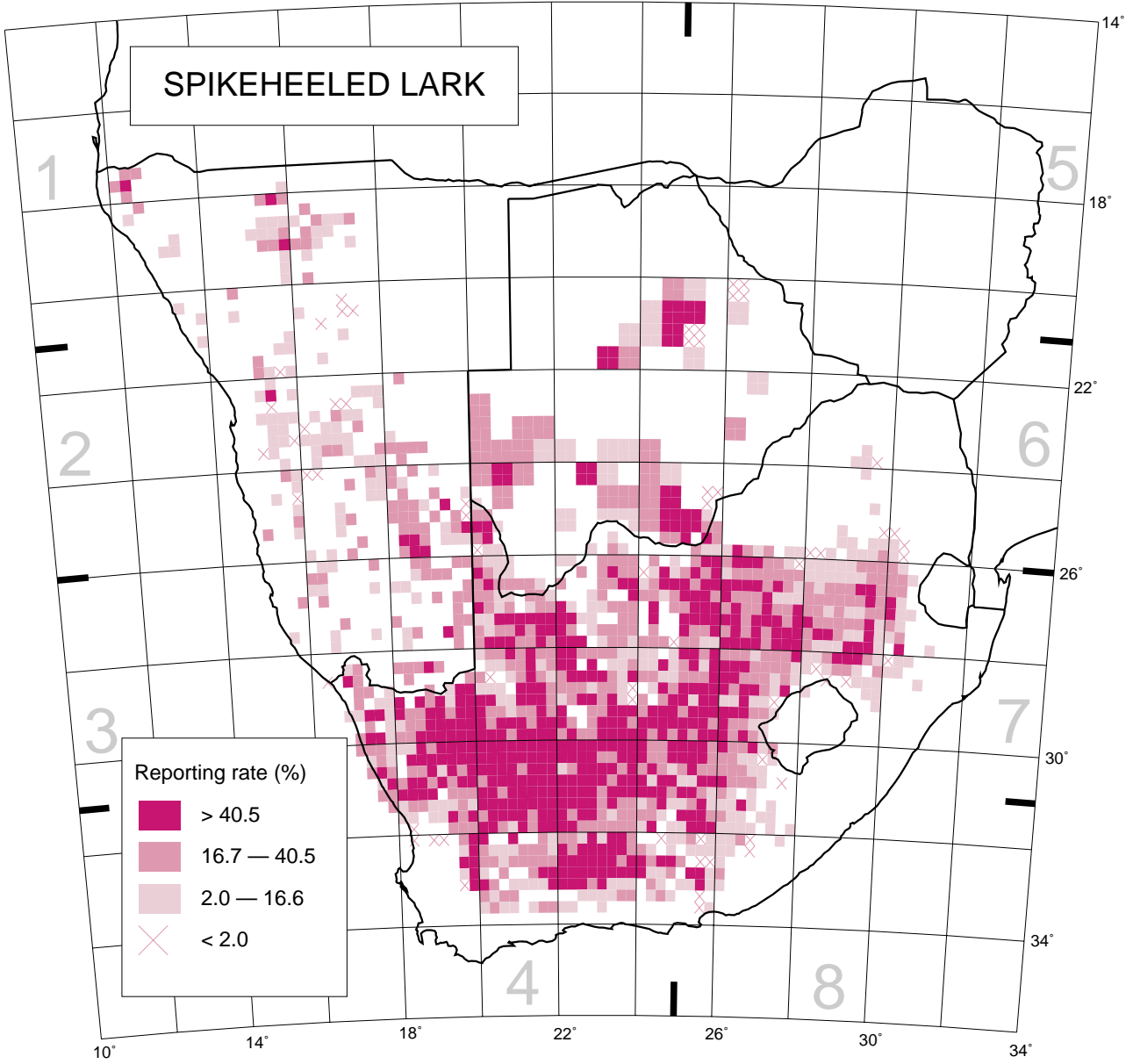
Historical distribution and conservation: There is no evidence of any change in the distribution of the Spikeheeled Lark. It is widespread and common and not threatened.

W.R.J. Dean

Recorded in 1537 grid cells, 33.9%
Total number of records: 11 500
Mean reporting rate for range: 20.8%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 108, 181, 1595, 1015, 11, 139, 3084, 180; Breeding: 11, 6, 29, 15, 0, 1, 47, 6.