

Redcapped Lark

Rooikoplewerik

Calandrella cinerea

The Redcapped Lark is a common resident and local nomad, and is widely distributed in Africa south of the Sahara. In southern Africa it occurs throughout the Cape Province, Free State, southcentral Transvaal, northwestern and western KwaZulu-Natal, Lesotho and western Swaziland. There are scattered records from Zimbabwe, mainly from the northeastern central plateau, from Botswana, mainly in the south and north, and from Namibia. The atlas data show a cluster of records from the Etosha area in northern Namibia, indicating that there may be a sedentary, isolated population in this area. Elsewhere in Africa, this species occurs patchily in central, eastern and northeastern Africa, and there is an isolated population in Nigeria (Keith *et al.* 1992).

It is gregarious and usually seen in groups of 20–30 birds and, when not breeding, occasionally in flocks of hundreds. The Redcapped Lark cannot be confused with any other lark in southern Africa and the atlas data can be considered reliable and comprehensive for this species. Good field characters are the red or rufous breast patches, the red crown and the plain underparts. The display flight and song are typical of the *Calandrella* larks: males fly up almost vertically into the wind, rising and dipping, and sing continuously or sporadically.

Habitat: The Redcapped Lark inhabits short grasslands that have been heavily grazed or burnt, ploughed lands and fallow fields, or recently harvested croplands, airstrips with or without vegetation, bare or sparsely vegetated road verges in the Karoo, and dry pans and dams. It also forages and nests in quite moist grassland around the edges of endorheic and ephemeral pans.

Movements: The models and seasonal distribution maps suggest that there may be movement into the karroid and grassland vegetation zones of South Africa and into Zimbabwe during winter, and a dispersal from these areas northward and westward into the northern Transvaal, Bot-

swana and Namibia during summer. It is clear that these are partial migrations. In higher-rainfall areas it has been viewed as essentially migratory with occasional over-summering in drought years (Tree 1975e). The elevated reporting rates in South Africa during late winter and spring may also be the result of increased conspicuousness just prior to the breeding season. Clancey (1953) suggested that there may be altitudinal movements in this species in winter in KwaZulu-Natal, but this is not supported by the atlas data. The movement patterns of this species are unclear and warrant further study.

Breeding: Most breeding starts in about August and ends by about January in the eastern Zones, extending longer, up to about May, in the western Zones. Peak breeding in most regions occurs September–December, but breeding was recorded in every month of the year. Egg-laying in Zimbabwe spans March–October, with one December record and peaking August–September (Irwin 1981). Egg-laying in the Transvaal spans July–February, with one April record, and again peaking August–September (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). Egg-laying in the western Cape Province spans August–December, with a September–October peak (Winterbottom 1968a).

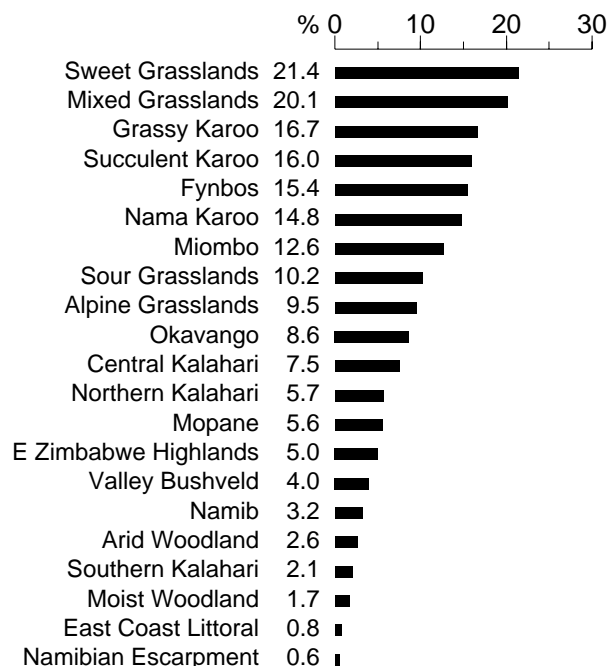
Interspecific relationships: The Redcapped Lark overlaps in habitat with a number of other lark species. Aggressive interspecific territorial defence behaviour has been observed (Winterbottom & Wilson 1959).

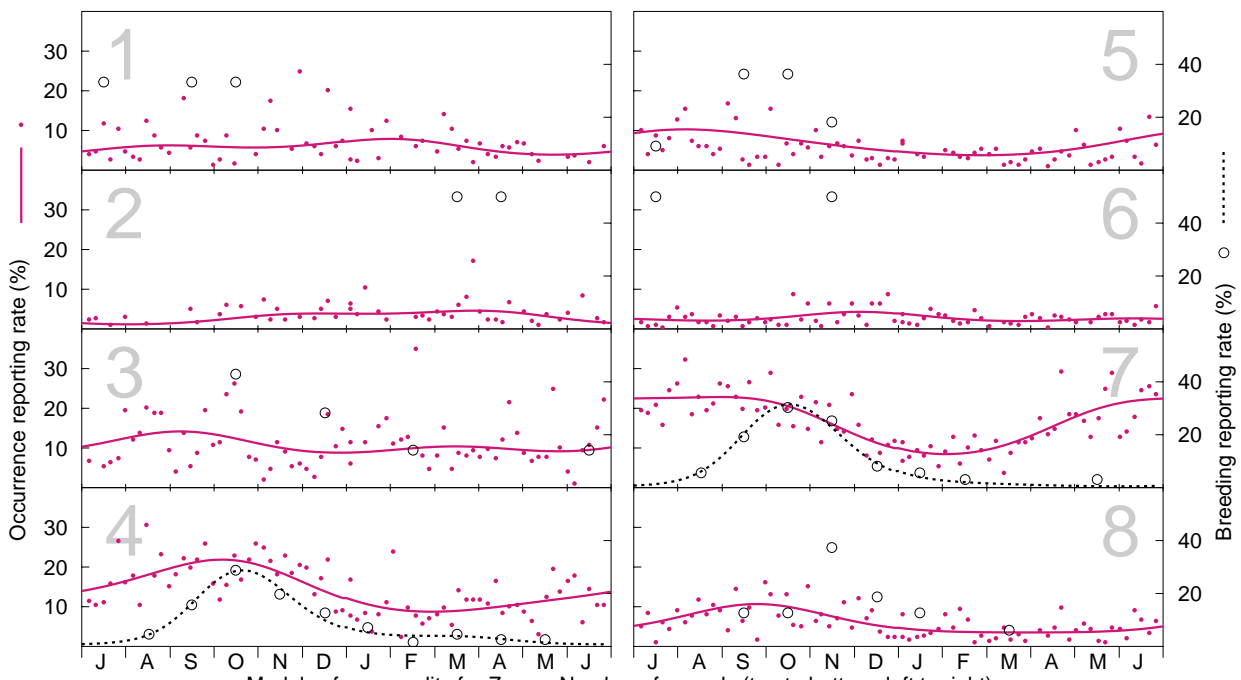
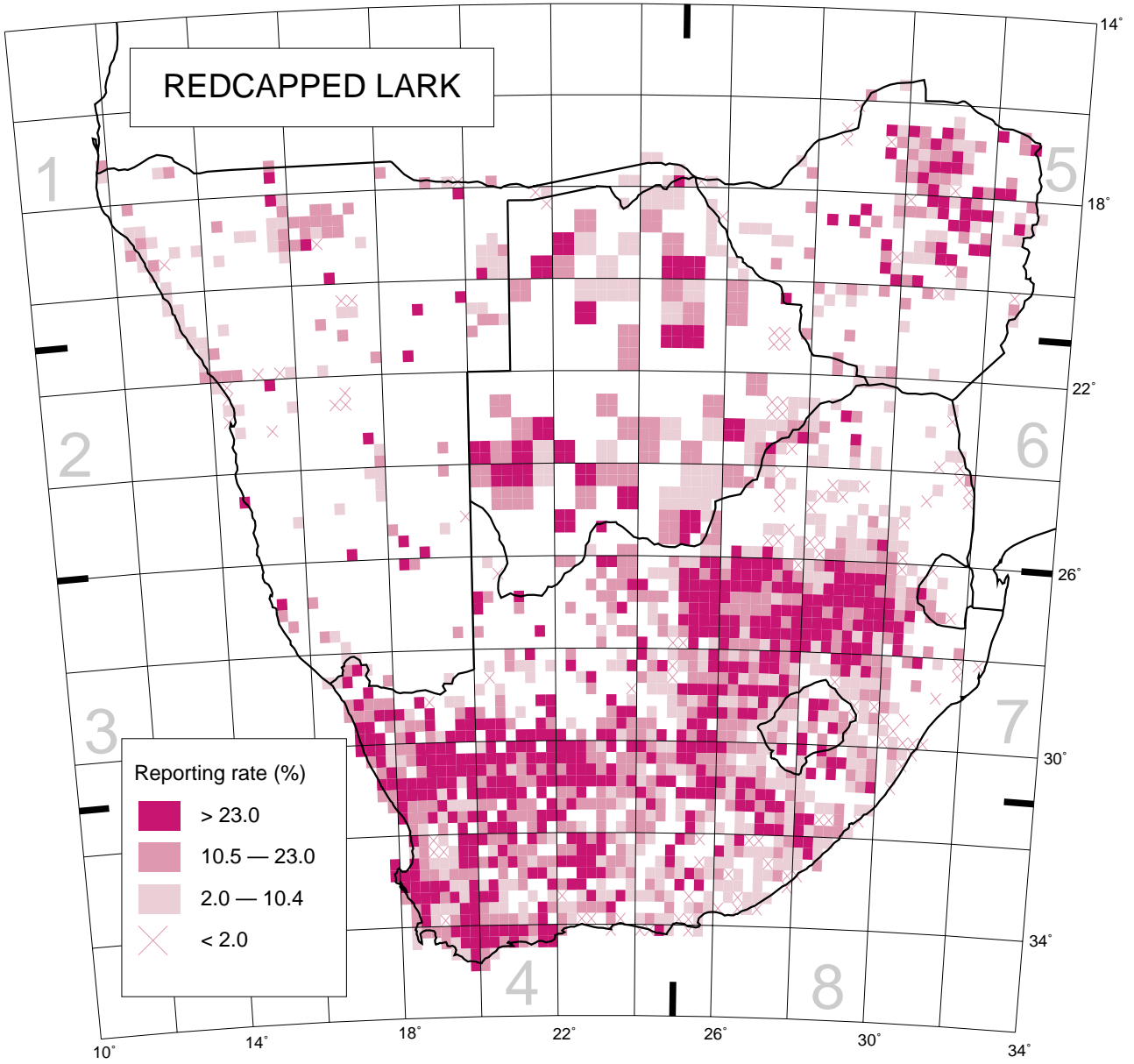
Historical distribution and conservation: There is no evidence that its distribution has changed in southern Africa. Hockey *et al.* (1989) suggested that it has increased in abundance in the southwestern Cape Province as a result of altered land-use practices. The Redcapped Lark is not threatened in southern Africa.

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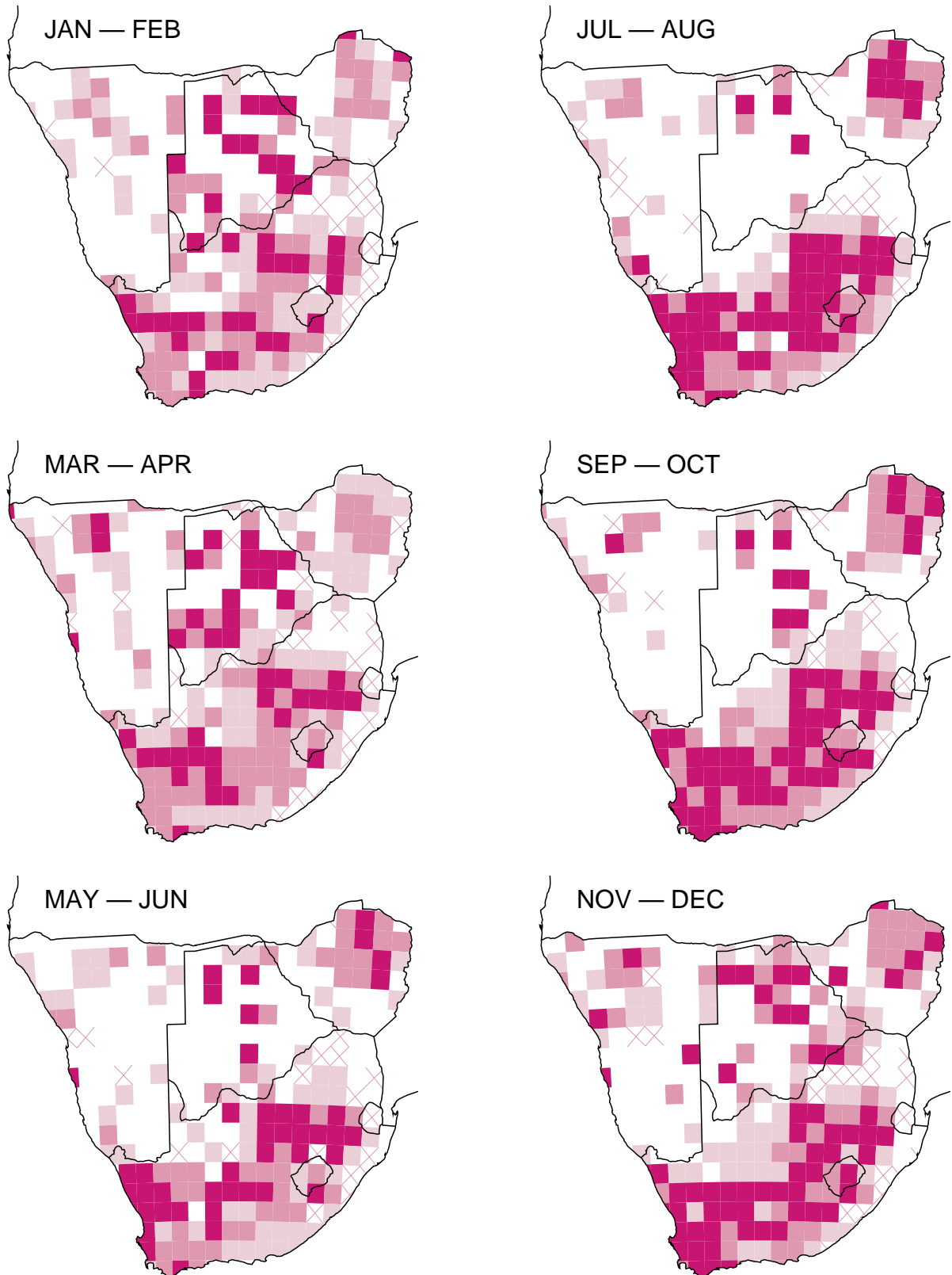
Recorded in 1872 grid cells, 41.3%
Total number of records: 14 446
Mean reporting rate for range: 14.0%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





REDCAPPED LARK



Reporting rate (%)

> 17.8

7.6 — 17.8

2.0 — 7.5

< 2.0

Seasonal distribution maps; one-degree grid.