

## Chestnutbacked Finchlark

### Rooiruglewerik

#### *Eremopterix leucotis*

The Chestnutbacked Finchlark is distributed widely but unevenly in the drier grasslands and savannas of southern Africa, with the exception of the driest parts of the Kalahari. In South Africa it occurs from the northern and eastern Cape Province, through the Free State to most of the Transvaal, with scattered records in northern and central parts of KwaZulu-Natal. There is a concentration of high reporting rates centred on the drier grasslands of the western Transvaal, and the species becomes progressively less common in the wetter eastern grasslands. It is noticeably absent from the mountainous areas of the Transvaal escarpment and the Waterberg (2427B, 2428A). There is an isolated (resident?) population in the eastern Cape Province, at the extreme south of the range of the species, where it occurs on bottomlands with red dolerite soils (C.J. Vernon pers. comm.). It is found in the western lowlands of Lesotho and in southeastern Swaziland. In Namibia, there is a concentration of records from the Etosha Pan region and directly to the north, and from the northeastern regions. In Botswana it is found mainly in the north and east, and there are scattered records from throughout Zimbabwe. There are many records of vagrants recorded well out of the normal range. It is widespread further north in Africa, occurring in a broad band from Senegal eastward through the Sahel to northwestern Somalia and southward to East Africa.

The Chestnutbacked Finchlark is usually seen in pairs when breeding, otherwise in flocks of up to 50 birds (Maclean 1993b). The atlas records appear to be reliable and comprehensive. The only other male finchlark with a chestnut back is the Blackeared Finchlark *E. australis*, which has a brown rump and lacks any white in the plumage. The female Chestnutbacked Finchlark is similar to the female Blackeared Finchlark but differs in having a black belly and a pale rump. Confusion between the Chestnutbacked Finchlark and other finchlarks in southern Africa was limited because of differences in distribution and preferred habitat. The Chestnutbacked Finchlark can, however, be confused with the Greybacked Finchlark *E. verticalis* with which it co-occurs widely.

**Habitat:** It is present in open savanna woodlands with bare areas, in recently burnt savanna and grassland, in croplands and fallow fields, road verges and airstrips. The vegetation

analysis shows the species' preference for savanna and drier grassland habitats.

**Movements:** The Chestnutbacked Finchlark appears to be resident in some parts of its range and nomadic in others. In Zimbabwe it may be an erratic winter visitor to the Mashonaland Plateau but is apparently resident in the Zambezi Valley (Irwin 1981). Irruptions in dry years have been observed in relatively mesic parts of Botswana and Zimbabwe (Brewster 1991, 1996; A.J. Tree pers. comm.). In Lesotho it may be a winter visitor (Bonde 1993). In the Transvaal it is largely nomadic, but is resident on the Springbok Flats (2429C) and may increase in the southwestern Transvaal during the winter (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). Further north in Africa the species also shows complex patterns of movement (Keith *et al.* 1992).

The models show interesting, if perplexing, patterns. Most Zones show lowest reporting rates during mid-summer, highest reporting rates in autumn and spring, and a distinct dip in reporting rates in midwinter. Zimbabwe (Zone 4) is the obvious exception, showing higher reporting rates throughout the autumn, winter and spring periods, compared with midsummer. The autumn and spring peaks in reporting rates in the models, however, largely correspond with the peak breeding periods, suggesting that increased conspicuousness due to breeding displays and songs is at least partly responsible for variations in reporting rate.

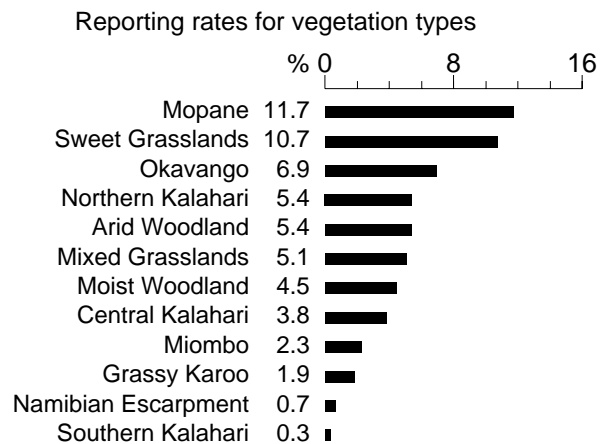
**Breeding:** The atlas data show that breeding can occur throughout the year, but with evidence for bimodality, i.e. breeding peaks in spring and autumn. This is confirmed by egg-laying data from the Transvaal (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b) and Zimbabwe (Irwin 1981).

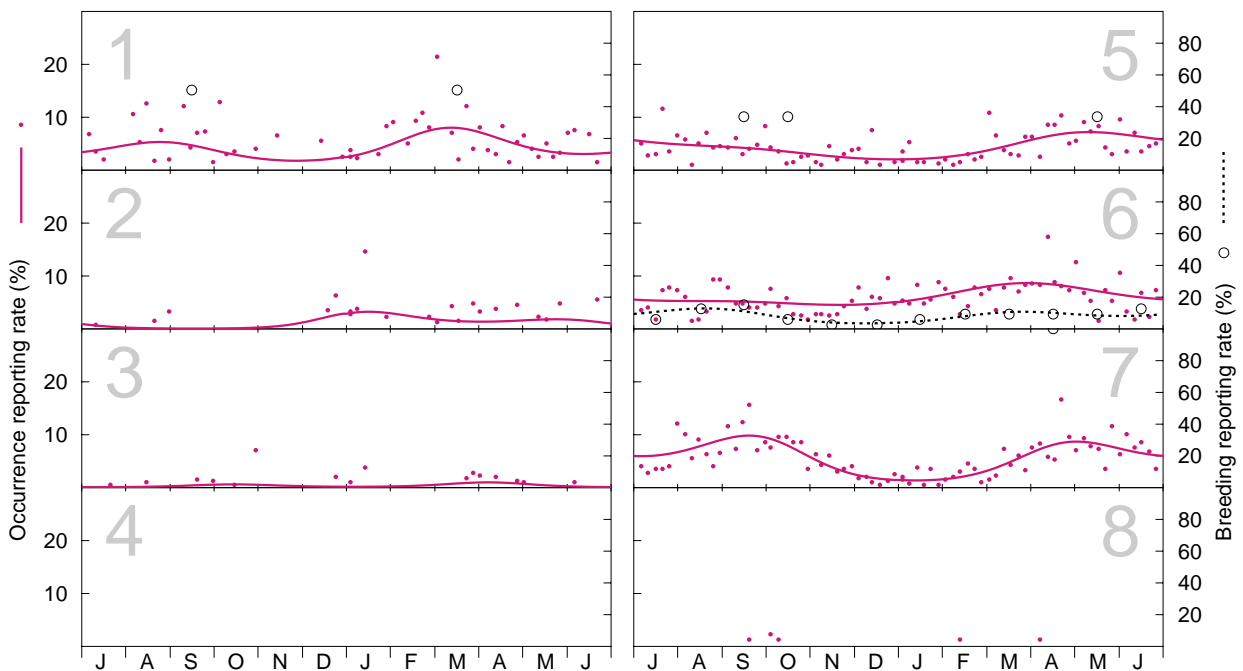
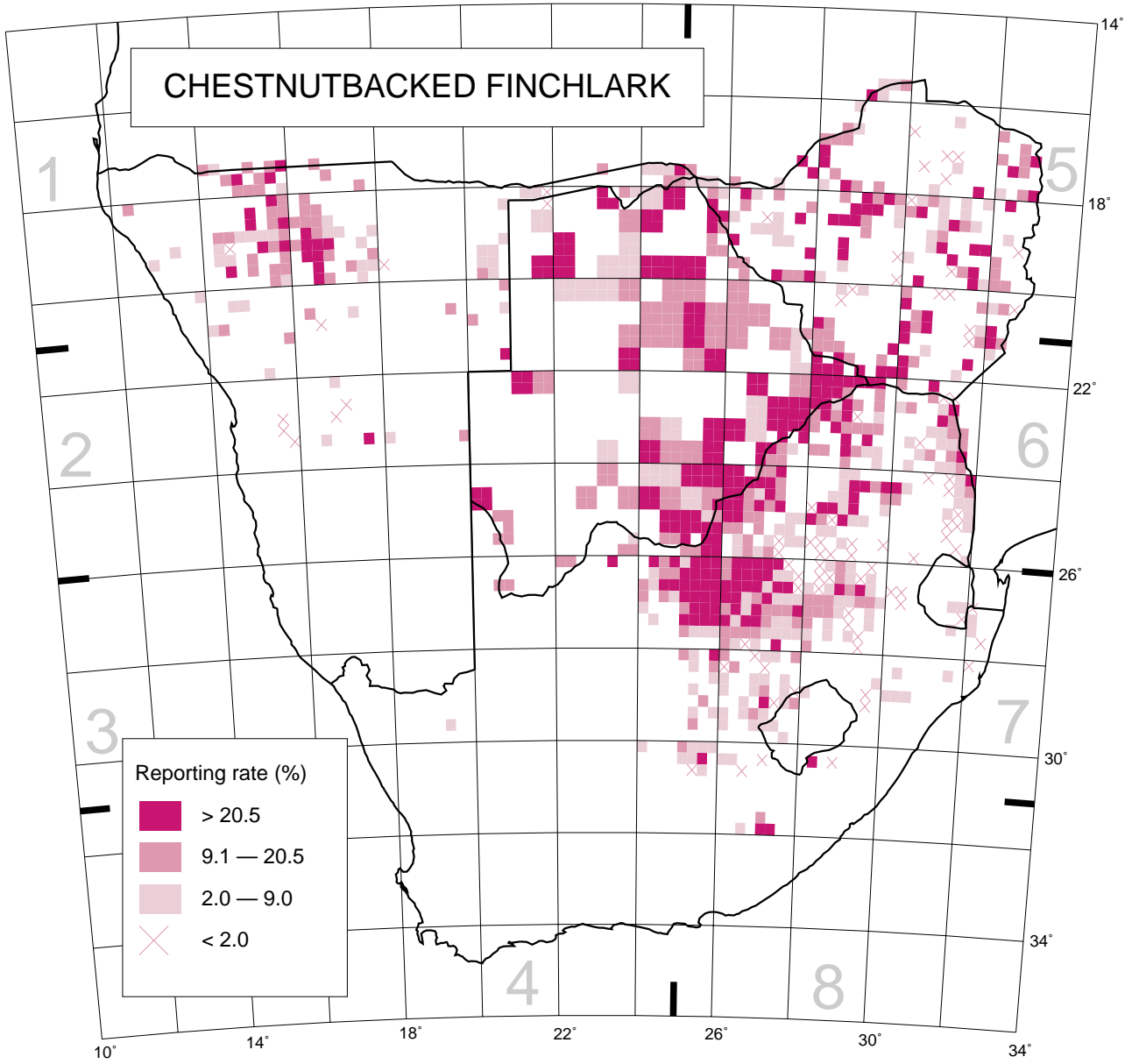
**Interspecific relationships:** The Chestnutbacked Finchlark overlaps in habitat with other small larks.

**Historical distribution and conservation:** There is no evidence that the distribution of the Chestnutbacked Finchlark has recently changed and it is not in need of conservation attention in southern Africa.

W.R.J. Dean

Recorded in 1031 grid cells, 22.7%  
Total number of records: 4397  
Mean reporting rate for range: 9.6%





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 150, 46, 23, 0, 383, 697, 1109, 6; Breeding: 2, 0, 0, 0, 3, 33, 1, 0.