

## Cape Rock Thrush

### Kaapse Kliplyster

*Monticola rupestris*

The distribution of the Cape Rock Thrush coincides with the distribution of mountainous terrain in the mesic parts of South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland, to which countries it is almost endemic. West of 22°E it is confined to the Cape fold mountains and it does not occur on the escarpment of the Great Plateau where more arid conditions prevail. East of 22°E it occurs from the coast inland to the escarpment and beyond, but not into the relatively arid central and western interior. At the eastern extremity of its range it occurs on the Lebombo range of far northern KwaZulu-Natal, eastern Swaziland and extreme southern Mozambique (Maclean 1993b; Parker 1994). In the Transvaal the distribution is less fragmented than previously believed (e.g. Maclean 1993b); it is found on the escarpment and other mountain ranges, with the Soutpansberg (c. 23°S) being the most northerly outpost. It does not occur in Botswana; records, including a specimen, are misidentifications of the Shorttoed Rock Thrush *M. brevipes* (Borello 1992b). The Cape Rock Thrush is considered monospecific (Clancey 1980b).

Roughly 1 pair/km was recorded along the Bokong River in Lesotho (Tarboton *et al.* 1993). The species is encountered singly or in pairs and is moderately conspicuous. It can be confused with the similar Sentinel Rock Thrush *M. explorator* which occupies similar habitat, and with the Shorttoed Rock Thrush with which the overlap is smaller. The distribution map is not likely to have been distorted by these identification problems.

**Habitat:** It is typical of rocky, mountainous habitats in relatively high-rainfall regions, but it also occurs in gorges, incised river valleys, foothills and in lowlands adjacent to mountains. In Lesotho it is largely restricted to lowlands, river valleys and altitudes below 2500 m (Osborne & Tigar 1990; Bonde 1993; Tarboton *et al.* 1993).

**Movements:** It is considered to be a resident species (Maclean 1993b). The models show decreased reporting rates in summer, particularly in the second part of the breeding season, which could reflect decreased conspicuousness during post-breeding moult. Local movements have, however, been observed in Lesotho (Osborne & Tigar 1990), and higher reporting rates in winter as seen in Zone 8 are compatible with altitudinal movements which result in more birds coming into contact with observers at lower altitudes during winter.

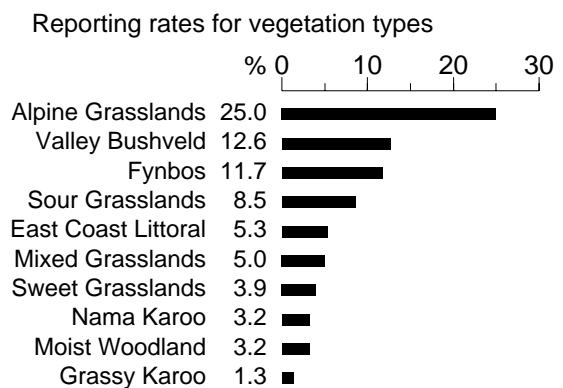
**Breeding:** The breeding season is in spring and summer, September–February (Maclean 1993b). The atlas data follow a similar pattern, but also indicate later breeding in the east; this may be linked to differences in rainy season or to more severe winter temperatures at the higher altitudes of the Drakensberg in the east. Breeding is earliest in the winter-rainfall region (Zone 4).

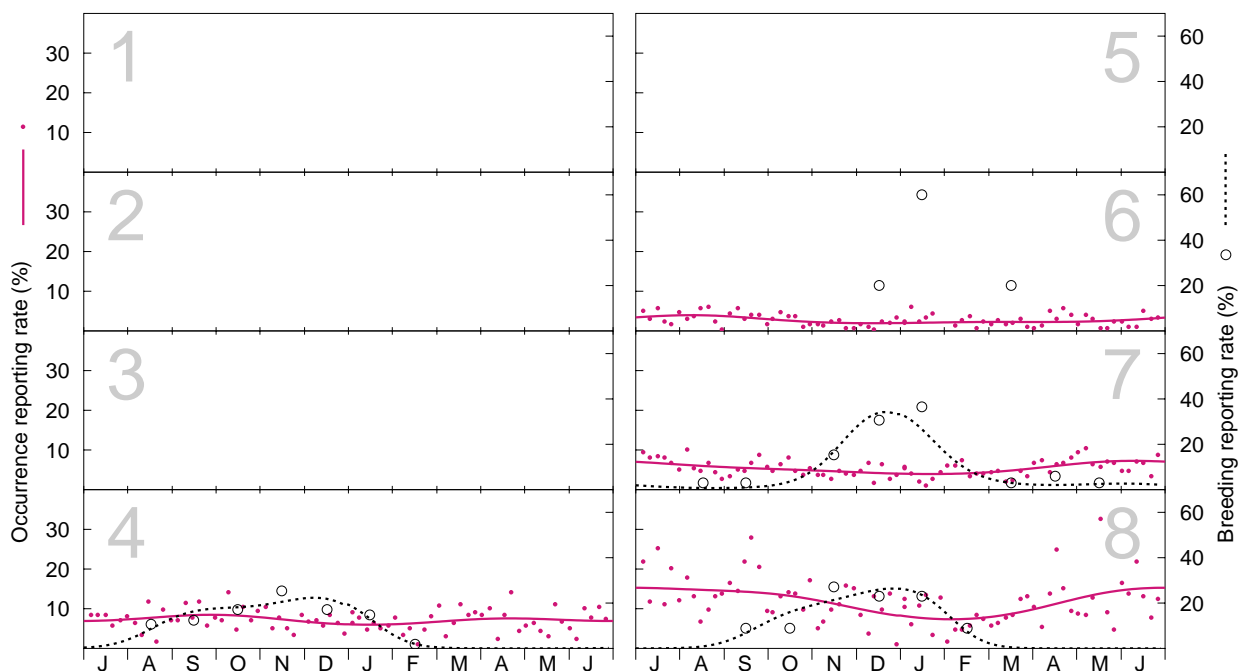
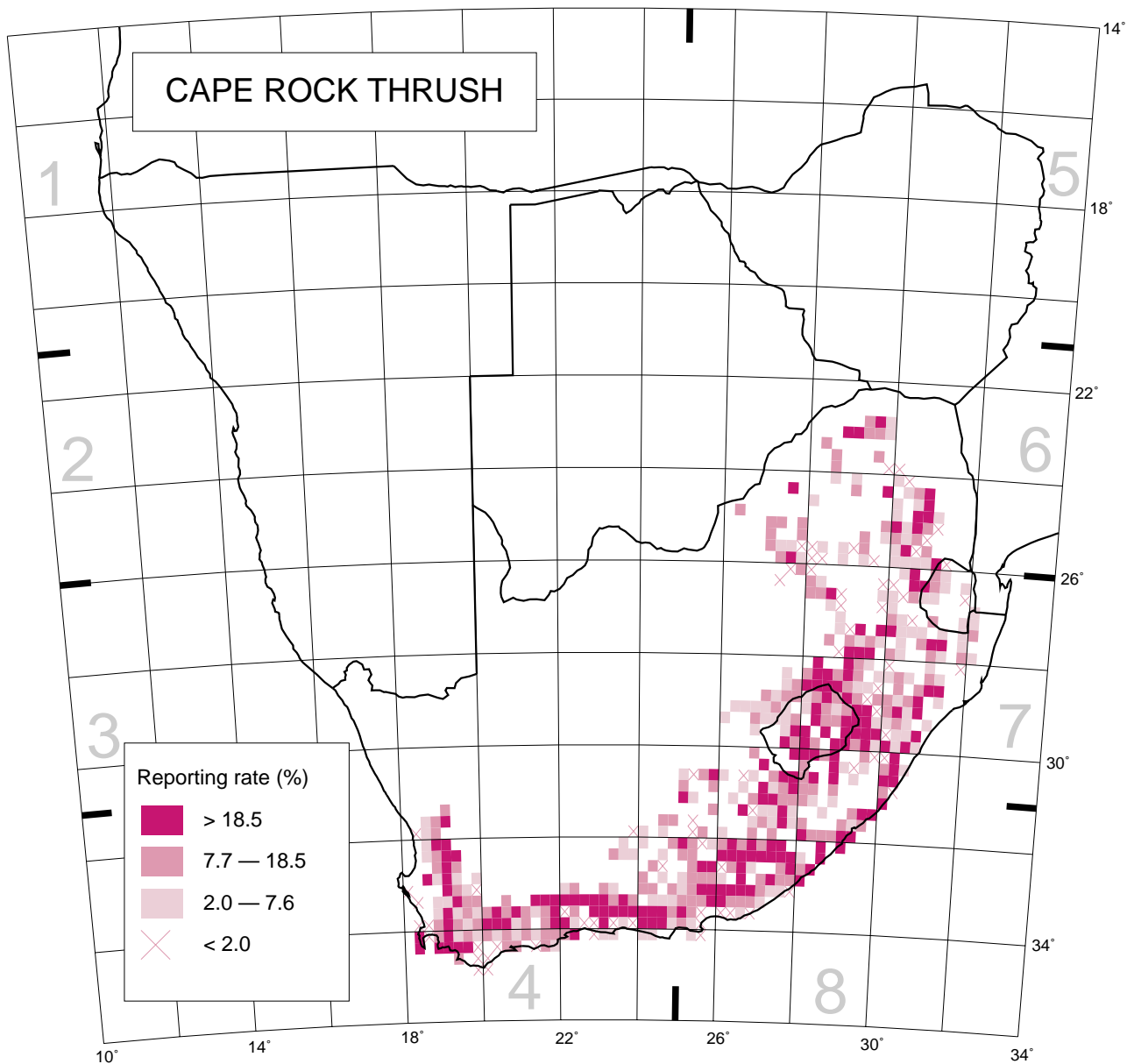
**Interspecific relationships:** The partitioning of the environment by the closely related and similar Cape and Sentinel Rock Thrushes appears to be based largely on different altitudinal ranges, with the larger and possibly dominant Cape Rock Thrush predominating at lower altitudes with milder winter temperatures. During winter, when the Sentinel Rock Thrush often moves to lower altitudes, different habitat preferences appear to maintain a separation, with the Sentinel Rock Thrush frequenting grasslands (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b).

**Historical distribution and conservation:** Given its habitat preferences, the Cape Rock Thrush is unlikely to have undergone changes in distribution in historical times. The construction of large dams and the resultant flooding of habitat is likely to have caused local extinctions, particularly in Lesotho where the species is largely restricted to river valleys.

J.A. Harrison

Recorded in 586 grid cells, 12.9%  
Total number of records: 7367  
Mean reporting rate for range: 11.6%





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 0, 0, 0, 633, 0, 302, 1058, 650; Breeding: 0, 0, 0, 47, 0, 5, 33, 22.