

## Mountain Chat

### Bergwagter

#### *Oenanthe monticola*

The range of this southern African endemic extends from southwestern Angola along the western parts of Namibia and South Africa, across the Karoo areas of the Cape Province to the highveld of the Free State, Transvaal, Lesotho, KwaZulu-Natal and Swaziland. The Mountain Chat is essentially absent from the Kalahari, wooded areas of the northwestern Cape Province and northern Transvaal, the lowveld and the eastern and southern seaboard, as well as the dune fields of the southern Namib Desert. It occurs more patchily and thinly in those parts of its range where areas of suitable habitat are separated by wide, flat plains as in Bushmanland in the northern Cape Province, and the Transvaal highveld. Areas with high reporting rates are not well consolidated, this being consistent with the patchy distribution of rocky and montane habitats.

There is a suggestion of a break in the distribution between 26° and 28°S in southern Namibia; this may correspond to the limits of two races, namely *O. m. monticola* to the south and *atmorii* to the north (Clancey 1980b; Keith *et al.* 1992). The small gap further north around 21°S coincides with the Ugab River valley. There is no break in distribution visible between *monticola* in the south and *griseiceps* to the northeast. In the Transkei, the species appears to be more common than in coastal areas to the north and the south; this may be the result of suitable habitat resulting from denudation and erosion in that area.

Although the male occurs in a variety of colour morphs, this species is conspicuous and easily identified. Some confusion does occur between grey-morph males and Karoo Chats *Cercomela schlegelii*, and also between females and Anteating Chats *Myrmecocichla formicivora*, but this is not believed to have affected the atlas data significantly.

**Habitat:** It is always in rocky habitats in mountains, hills, koppies, scarps, quarries and also on boulder-strewn, level ground. Vegetation can vary from scrub to grass. It will utilize human habitations if these occur near suitable habitat, especially where dry-stone kraals have been erected. In Lesotho it remains below 2500 m. The vegetation analysis indicates a strong association with Karoo vegetation types and the Namibian Escarpment, followed by the various grassland types. The association with Kalahari types appears to be largely restricted to South Africa and probably results from the existence of dry riverbeds and pans with steep, eroded and rocky edges.

**Movements:** It is a resident species. Slightly higher reporting rates in winter may reflect an increase in time spent foraging during the cooler months, possibly at lower altitudes.

**Breeding:** It is a spring/summer breeder with an earlier peak (October) in the winter-rainfall area (Zone 4) (Winterbottom 1968a) than in summer-rainfall areas, e.g. Namibia where the peak is January–February (Brown & Clinning in press).

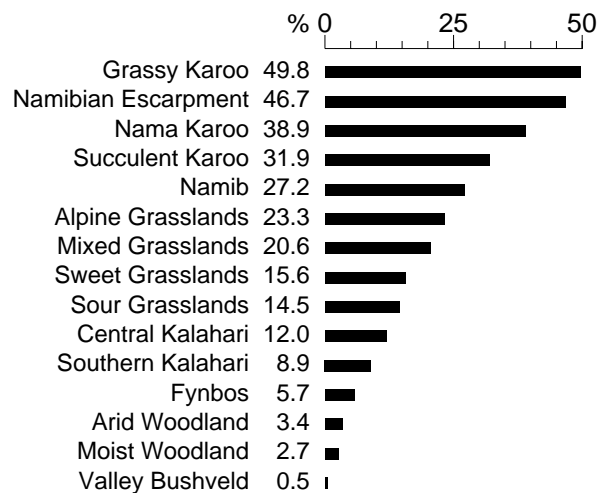
**Interspecific relationships:** It has nest-site requirements similar to those of the Familiar Chat *C. familiaris* whose old nests it occasionally uses (Keith *et al.* 1992). It is unlikely, however, that suitable nest sites are in short supply and that these two species need to compete for them. Brood parasitism by the Diederik Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx caprius* has been recorded (Rowan 1983).

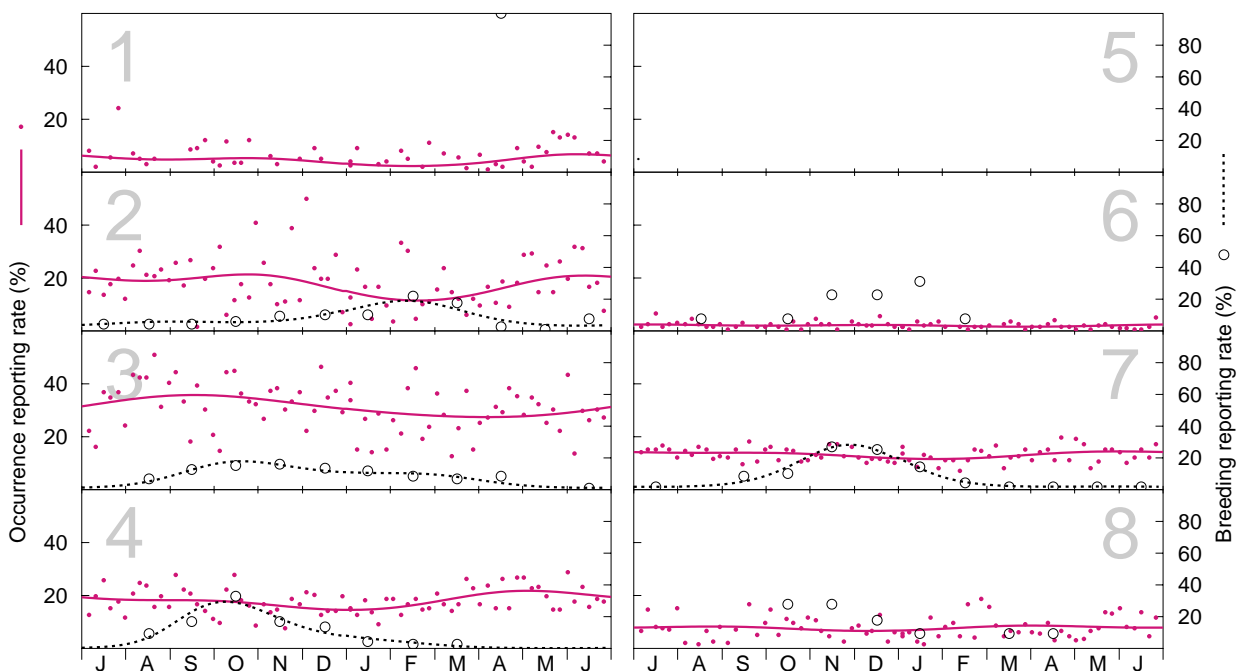
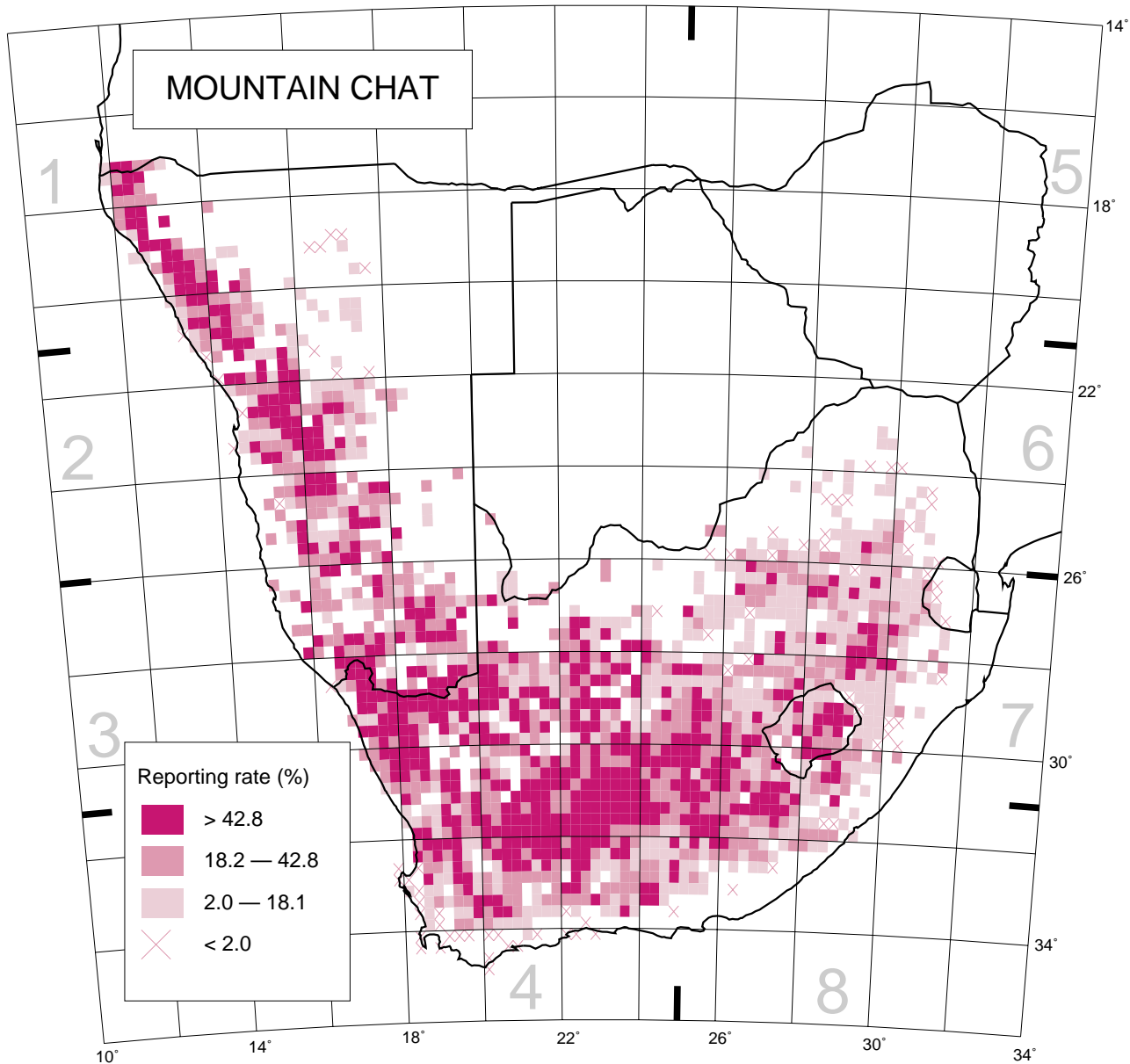
**Historical distribution and conservation:** Major historical changes in distribution are unlikely. Its preferred habitat remains relatively secure and the species is under no immediate threat. The relatively large number of records from the Transkei portion of the eastern coastal belt suggest that the Mountain Chat may benefit from the overgrazing and deep erosion gullies which are features of the Transkei landscape.

J.A. Harrison

Recorded in 1677 grid cells, 37.0%  
Total number of records: 17 718  
Mean reporting rate for range: 22.1%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 156, 628, 1726, 1595, 0, 233, 2597, 427; Breeding: 2, 68, 87, 66, 0, 13, 48, 11.