

## Buffstreaked Chat

### Bergklipwagter

*Oenanthe bifasciata*

The distribution of the Buffstreaked Chat follows the distribution of sour grasslands closely; it is therefore endemic to South Africa, Swaziland and Lesotho, although it is apparently only marginal in Lesotho (Osborne & Tigar 1990; Bonde 1993). Nowhere does its range extend beyond the grassland biome, except in the western extension of the range in the Transvaal which is limited to a few mountains. It is markedly absent from the sour grasslands of the Witwatersrand in the southern Transvaal.

It is usually encountered singly or in pairs, or in small groups in the nonbreeding season (Maclean 1993b). The male is distinctive and unlikely to be confused with any other species, except perhaps the Stonechat *Saxicola torquata* and Capped Wheatear *Oenanthe pileata*.

**Habitat:** It is found in sour grasslands where these coincide with rocky habitat on mountains, hills, ridges and escarpments. It avoids woodlands, including plantations of alien trees. It is absent from the Natal Alpine Belt (Brown & Barnes 1984) and from similar habitat in Lesotho. It is

most frequent at intermediate altitudes of 1500–1700 m, but also occurs down to sea-level in places (Keith *et al.* 1992). Its association with Mixed and Sweet Grasslands can be ascribed to interdigitation with Sour Grasslands because its range does not significantly penetrate those vegetation types.

**Movements:** After the breeding season it undertakes local movements (Keith *et al.* 1992). The models show quite marked seasonal fluctuations in reporting rates which are consistent with altitudinal movement; higher reporting rates in winter result from birds appearing at lower altitudes where they are seen more frequently. In Swaziland, however, no seasonal movements were recorded (Parker 1994). It is possible that migratory birds at relatively high altitudes may winter at relatively low altitudes by 'leapfrogging' over resident birds at medium altitudes; this idea needs to be tested.

**Breeding:** Egg-laying has been recorded September–December in KwaZulu-Natal and September–February in the Transvaal (Dean 1971; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). Atlas data show a similar pattern of summer breeding.

**Interspecific relationships:** It is territorial and also competes with other species; it is displaced by Fiscal Shrikes *Lanius collaris*, but chases away smaller insectivorous species including Familiar Chat *Cercomela familiaris*, Stonechat and Longbilled Pipit *Anthus similis* (Tye 1988).

**Historical distribution and conservation:** It is vulnerable to the current aggressive commercial afforestation of moist grasslands; it has no doubt already suffered several local extinctions as a result. Its disappearance from the Magaliesberg range in the southern Transvaal (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b) suggests that it may be sensitive to even quite subtle habitat alteration and its virtual absence from Lesotho may be linked to sensitivity to disturbance. The pattern

of its distribution suggests that it may originally have occurred on the Witwatersrand in the southern Transvaal. The conservation status of the Buffstreaked Chat should be closely monitored.

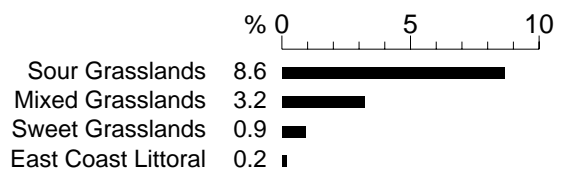
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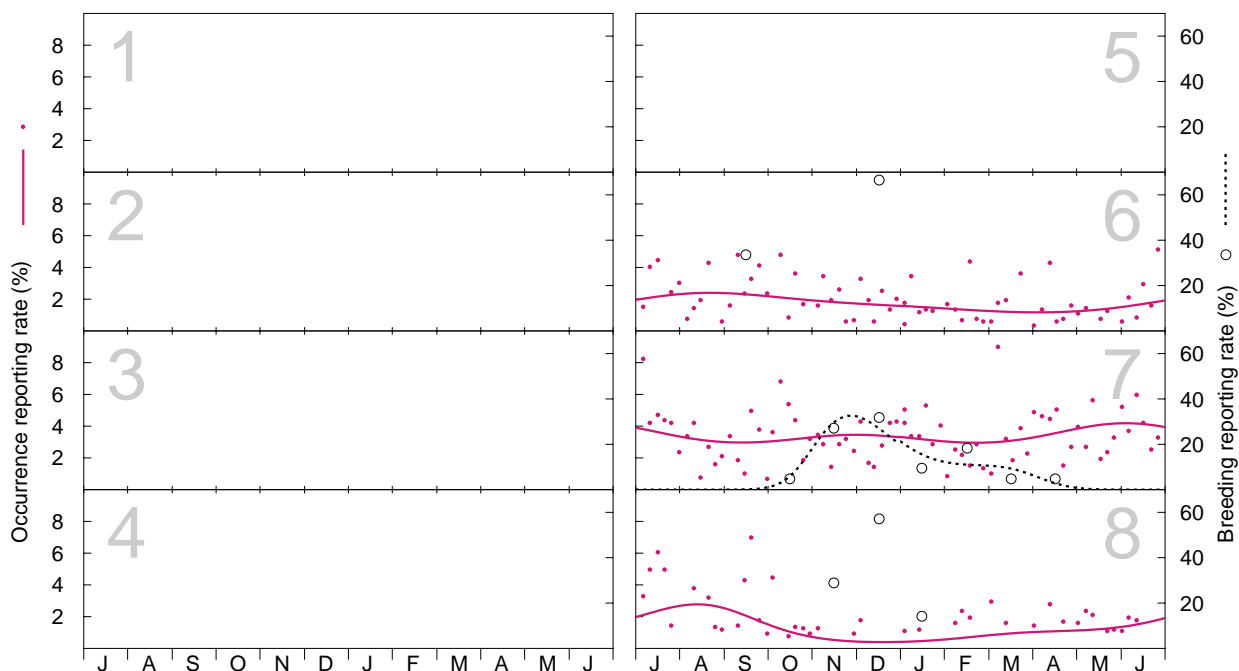
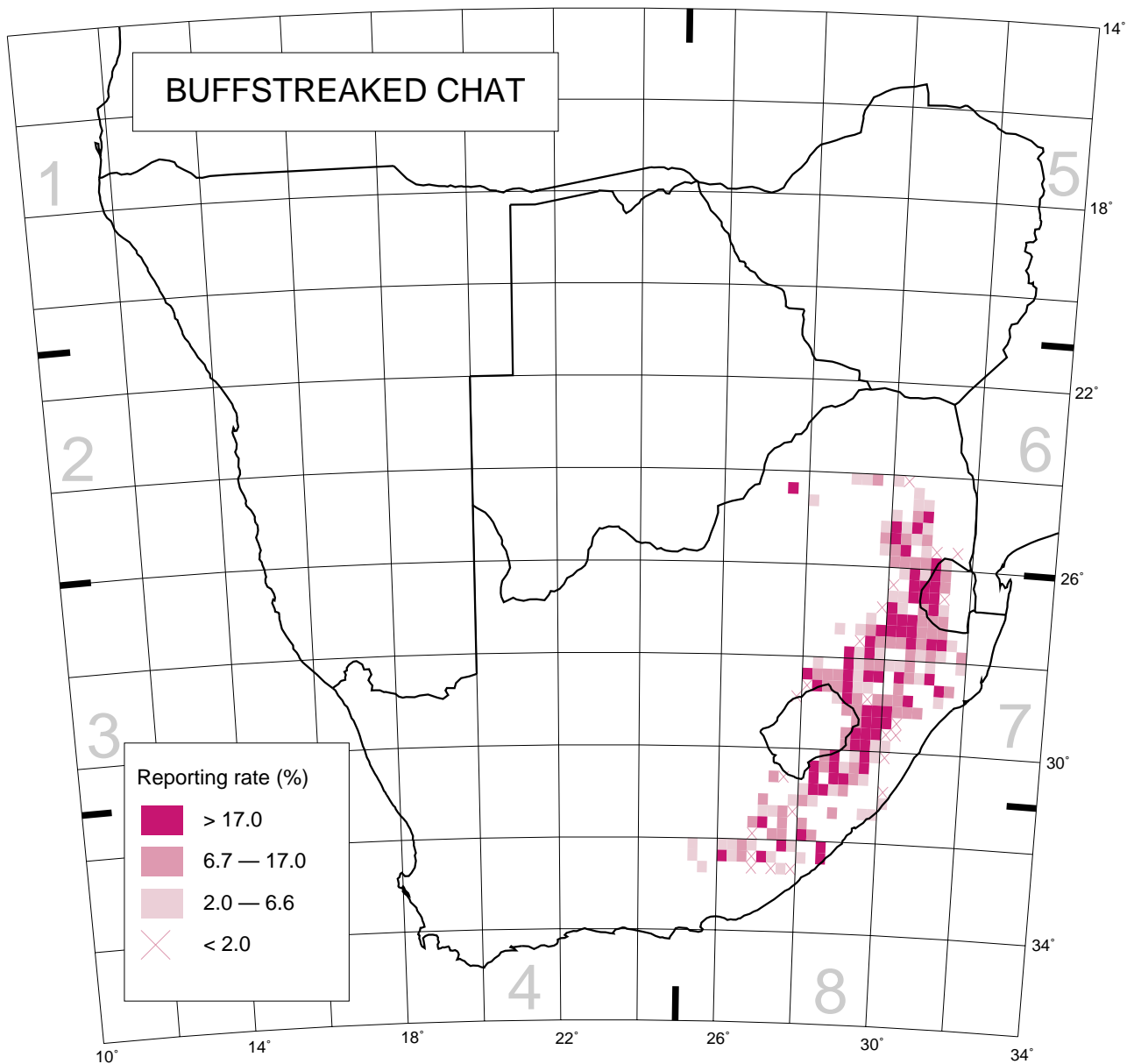
Recorded in 227 grid cells, 5.0%

Total number of records: 2837

Mean reporting rate for range: 16.1%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 195, 663, 68; Breeding: 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 3, 22, 7.