

## Karoo Chat

### Karoospekvreter

#### *Cercomela schlegelii*

The Karoo Chat is endemic to southern Africa and is well named because it is virtually restricted to the Karoo biome in South Africa and Namibia, and to the similarly semi-arid escarpment areas of Namibia and southwestern Angola. Its population density is clearly highest in the western and southwestern Karoo of the Cape Province and it occurs only marginally in relatively dry grasslands at the eastern extremities of its range in the Free State and northeastern Cape Province. Four subspecies are currently recognized (Clancey 1980b); there are no obvious discontinuities in the range, or between centres of abundance, which coincide with subspecific boundaries.

It is one of the commonest Karoo birds; indeed it is probably the most frequently encountered bird of the Succulent Karoo and western Nama Karoo vegetation types (Winterbottom 1968a). It is solitary or in pairs. It is also conspicuous and easily identified. Some confusion with male grey-form Mountain Chats *Oenanthe monticola*, and with the Tractrac Chat *C. tractrac* is likely to have occurred, in the latter case particularly in Namibia where the

Karoo Chat is paler and has a white rump. However, these errors are not believed to have had a serious effect on the data.

**Habitat:** Although its range overlaps greatly with other chats of the Karoo, its preferred habitat differs subtly from theirs. In contrast to the Sicklewinged Chat *C. sinuata* and the Anteating Chat *Myrmecocichla formicivora*, it is most common in the westerly, succulent-dominated parts of the Karoo, including the Little Karoo in the south. It prefers somewhat denser, taller scrub than the Tractrac Chat, and in northern Namibia it is altitudinally separated from that species, with the Tractrac occupying lowlands nearer the coast and the Karoo Chat occupying high ground further inland (Keith *et al.* 1992). The Karoo Chat can be found both on the flats and on broken ground, but is replaced in mountainous habitats by the Mountain Chat. It does not seek out human habitation like the Familiar Chat *C. familiaris* and it does not use the very open, bare ground and overgrazed and cultivated habitats favoured by the Capped Wheatear *O. pileata*.

**Movements:** Although marked, the seasonal fluctuations in reporting rate are not thought to denote movements. It is more likely that a spring/summer drop in reporting rates is due to reduced activity in the summer heat and possibly a degree of secretiveness while breeding and during post-breeding moult.

**Breeding:** It has a spring/summer breeding season with a peak September–November. The few records reported by Winterbottom (1968a) were July–October. Maclean (1993b) gave the breeding season as August–March with variation linked to rainfall.

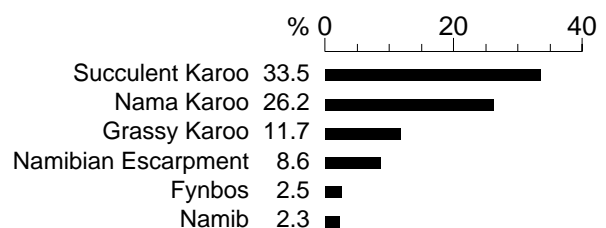
**Interspecific relationships:** See the section on habitat above.

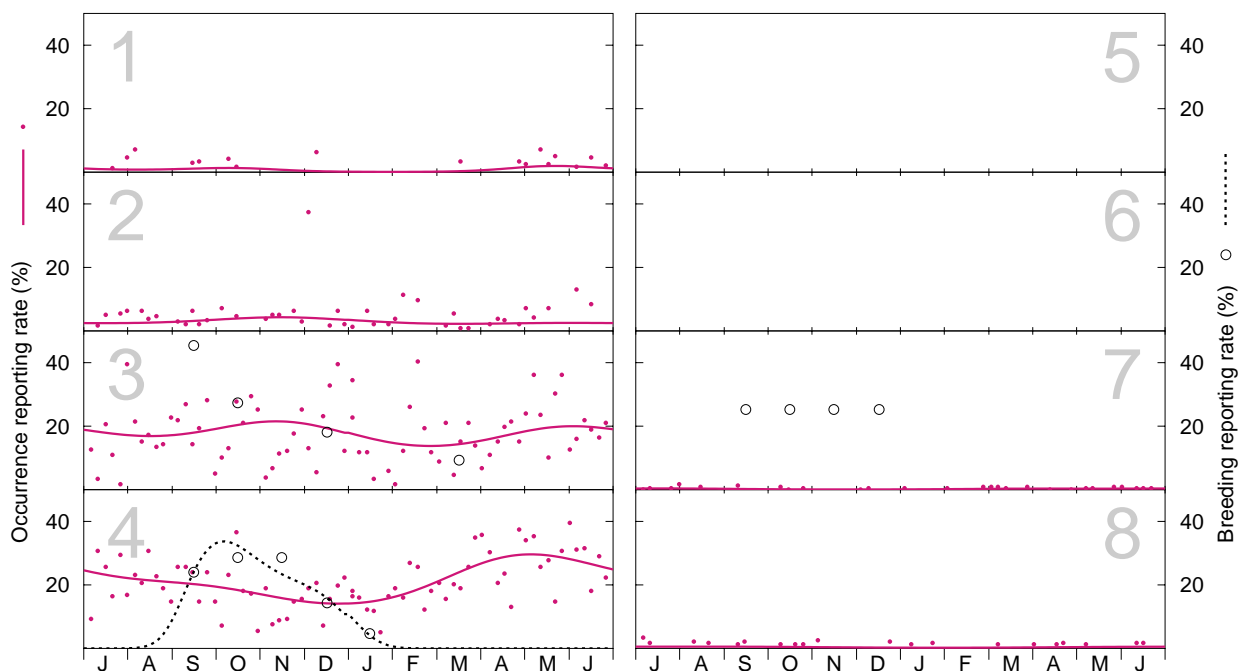
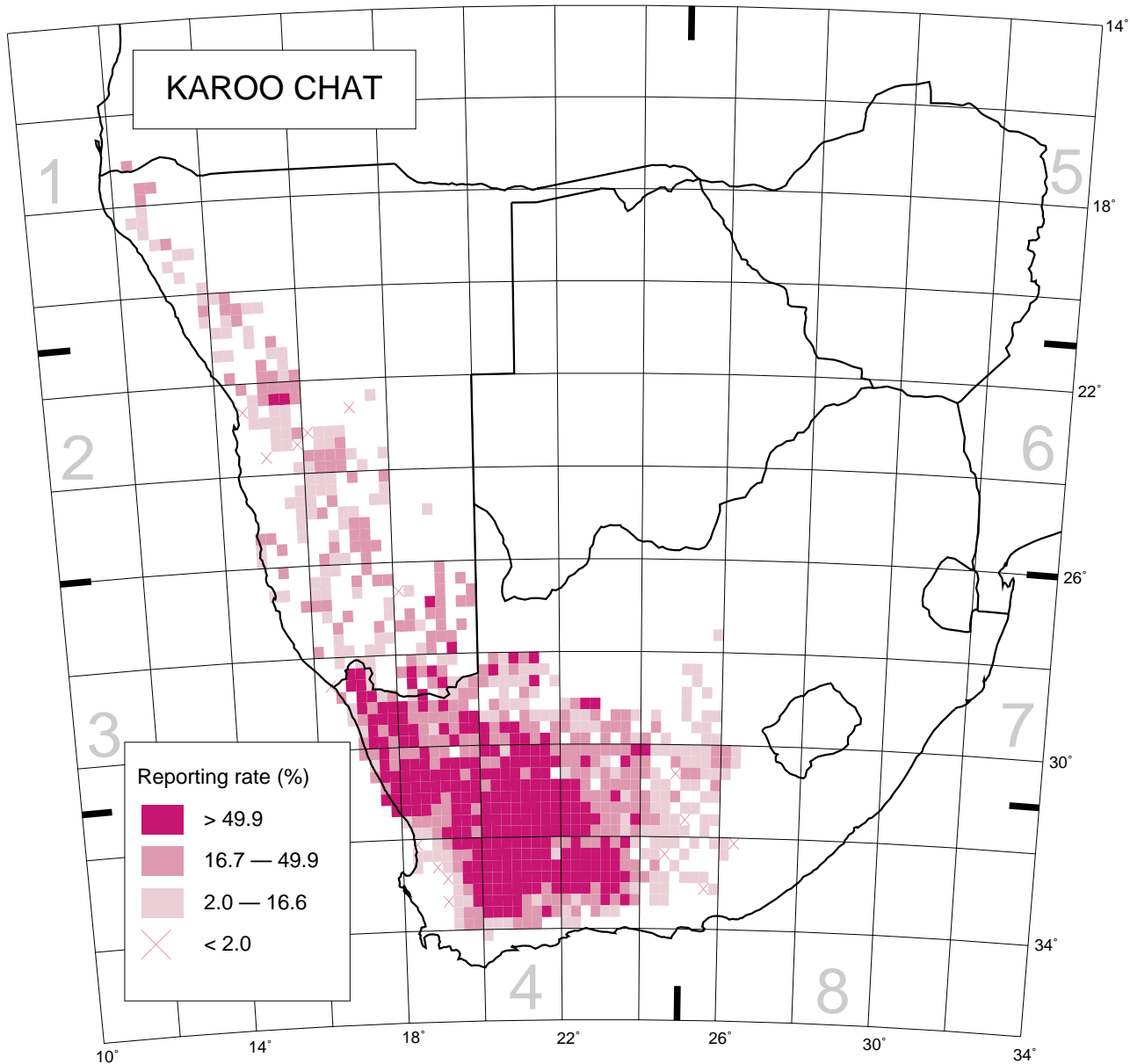
**Historical distribution and conservation:** The distribution of the Karoo Chat is not believed to have changed historically and this common species is not under any threat.

J.A. Harrison

Recorded in 795 grid cells, 17.5%  
Total number of records: 4634  
Mean reporting rate for range: 23.7%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 31, 101, 987, 1887, 0, 0, 45, 22; Breeding: 0, 0, 11, 21, 0, 0, 4, 0.