

Kalahari Robin

Kalahariwipstert

Erythropygia paena

As can be seen in the distribution map, the Kalahari Robin is well named. Its stronghold is centred on the Kalahari basin in Botswana whence it extends to the west and north-west into Namibia and Angola, to the south into the northern Cape Province and the Free State, and to the east into the Transvaal and the dry southwestern parts of Zimbabwe. Four races (one outside of the atlas region) were recognized by Clancey (1976d, 1980b); the three races in the atlas region have entirely continuous distributions. Keith *et al.* (1992) admitted the same four subspecies and commented that there is a well-marked cline from pale birds in the northwest of the species' range to much darker birds in the higher-rainfall regions of the east.

It is a 'small brown bird' but has some distinctive features in tail coloration and postures. In flight, the fanned tail is orange with a broad, black subterminal band and prominent white tips to the feathers. On the ground, where it does most of its foraging, it gives the impression of a long-legged bird. When approached, it raises the closed tail to the vertical and often past it, almost touching the back of the head. Simultaneously, the wings may be drooped until the tips nearly touch the ground. The Karoo Robin *E. coryphoeus*, which is found together with the Kalahari Robin in parts of the northern Cape Province and central

Free State, does not exhibit similar tail movements and has no orange coloration in its tail. The two species are nevertheless confused, one for the other, by some observers.

Habitat: This is a characteristic species of open Kalahari sandveld with scattered bushes and trees. The vegetation analysis provides an accurate assessment of the range of plant community types frequented by this robin. Bare, or almost bare ground is an important habitat feature, as is the presence of at least one tree or substantial bush, the top of which serves as a songpost. Utility wires are freely used as songperches too, when available. It often frequents the vicinity of cattle dips and will forage on the lawns of homestead gardens, gaining access to hedge-enclosed areas by walking through the bottom of the hedge in preference to flying over it.

Movements: It is not known to undertake any regular seasonal movements; the models lend support to its sedentary status. As a generalist insectivore it does not require surface water for drinking and arthropod food is available throughout the year, so there would seem to be no obvious environmental pressures requiring it to migrate.

Breeding: Atlas data show breeding November–May in the west and September–February in the east. Breeding occurs opportunistically after rain in the Kalahari according to Maclean (1993b), and this would account for the wider spread of records in the western Zones. Egg-laying data span July–February in Botswana (Skinner 1995a) and October–March in Namibia (Brown & Clinning in press).

Interspecific relationships: In the southerly parts of its range, it overlaps with the Karoo Robin, while in its northern and eastern distribution it overlaps with the Whitebrowed Robin *E. leucophrys*. The Kalahari Robin appears to coexist amicably with both these species, but none of these robins has been well studied and inter-relationships in zones of overlap are not documented.

Historical distribution and conservation: There is no historical evidence to suggest that the range and status have changed, and the Kalahari Robin is not considered to be under threat.

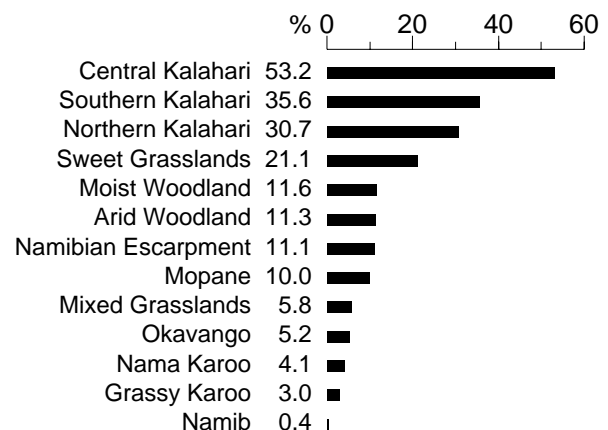
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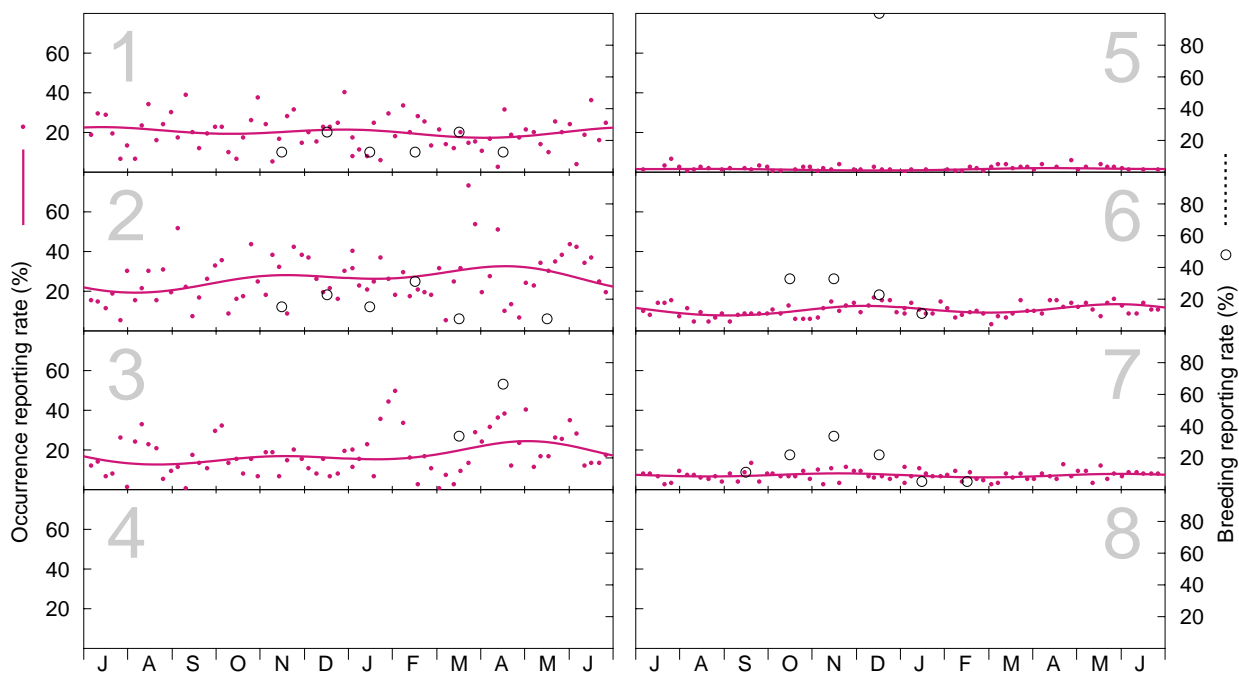
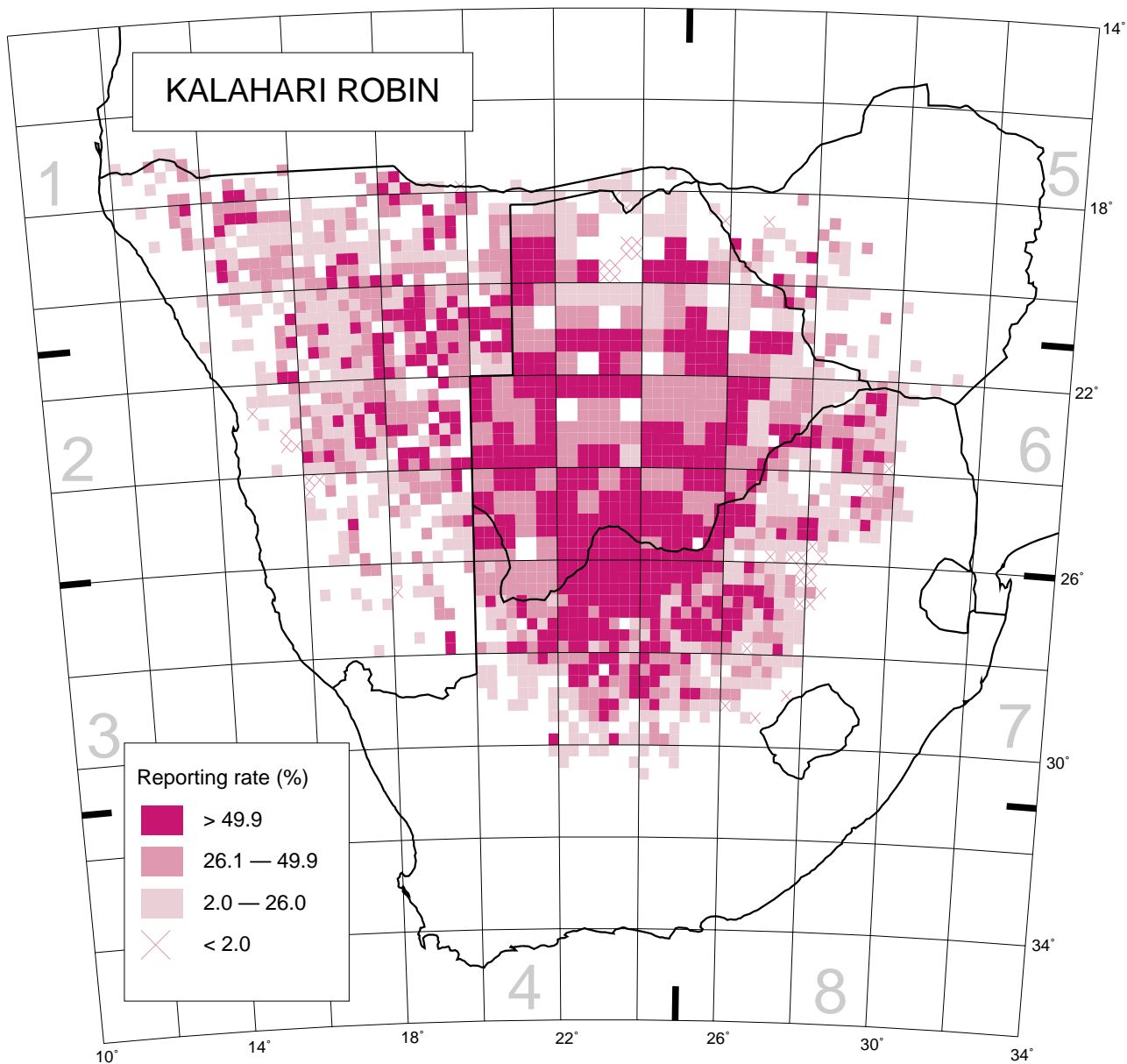
Recorded in 1934 grid cells, 42.6%

Total number of records: 10 780

Mean reporting rate for range: 23.8%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 662, 957, 975, 0, 130, 1218, 1415, 0; Breeding: 8, 13, 3, 0, 1, 9, 18, 0.