

## Spotted Flycatcher

### Europese Vlieëvanger

#### *Muscicapa striata*

This Palearctic migrant has widespread nonbreeding grounds throughout most of the equatorial and southern tropics in Africa (Curry-Lindahl 1981; Pearson & Lack 1992). In southern Africa it is one of the commonest Palearctic passerines. The Spotted Flycatcher can be found anywhere in the region, but with a clear gradient of increasing abundance from south to north and from west to east. The taller savanna woodlands in the western part of the central Kalahari can be recognized in the distribution, which in general is very similar to that of the Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*. Spotted Flycatchers also cover most of the altitudinal range in the region, but are marginal in the alpine zone in Lesotho and the grasslands in the highveld of the southeastern Transvaal.

In northern and eastern Botswana, it was common in transect-counts during summer: it was present in 14 out of 16 woody vegetations with an overall average density of *c.* 4 birds/10 ha, and peak densities of *c.* 1 bird/ha were found in three types of mixed woodlands on granitic substrate in the eastern hardveld (Herremans 1993c).

It is solitary and territorial on the nonbreeding grounds, but has no clear song to proclaim its territory. However, it is confident and perches prominently in the open, and despite being a drab brown bird, the species is fairly conspicuous and characteristic. It may have been confused locally with the Dusky Flycatcher *M. adusta*. The atlas data are likely to be reliable and comprehensive.

**Habitat:** It occurs in any open woodland or habitat where trees with bare branches alternate with open space where it can hawk for insects. It was recorded in most vegetation types in the region, but despite it being a more specialized feeder than the Willow Warbler and preferring more open habitat with less well-structured middle and lower stratum, there is a correlation between the reporting rates of these two species in the different biomes. In the arid southwestern parts, the Spotted Flycatcher is confined to riverine strips (Sauer & Sauer 1960; Becker 1974; Loske 1984–85), gardens and the few other habitats with trees and bushes, but it does not need to drink (Irwin 1956a; Skead 1975a).

**Movements:** It is among the early-arriving Palearctic passerines: the earliest birds are present in the north of the region (Zones 1 and 5) from early October (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Herremans 1994d), but most arrive during late October and November. Arrival is progressively later further south in the subcontinent, with dates of peak arrival shifting from October in the north to late November

and early December in the south (Zones 4 and 8). In the more humid north and northeast of the subcontinent, arrival is quick and massive, while a few birds seem to trickle gradually through to the south. Numbers in the dry western parts of the region are variable, with more birds entering the Kalahari in wet years (pers. obs).

Departure is quick and fairly simultaneous over the whole region in the second half of March and April. The latest records in southern Africa are in late April (Irwin 1981), occasionally early May (Herremans 1994d). Highest reporting rates occurred just before departure and this could be related to increased activity during pre-migratory hyperphagy and fat deposition.

In the relatively mesic parts of southern Africa, birds have been demonstrated to return to the same locality in successive years (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Hanmer 1989b). Four birds from Finland, one from Sweden and one from Britain were recovered (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Underhill & Oatley 1994). Five subspecies have been identified in southern Africa, originating from widely separated areas in its Palearctic range (Clancey 1980b; Clancey *et al.* 1987).

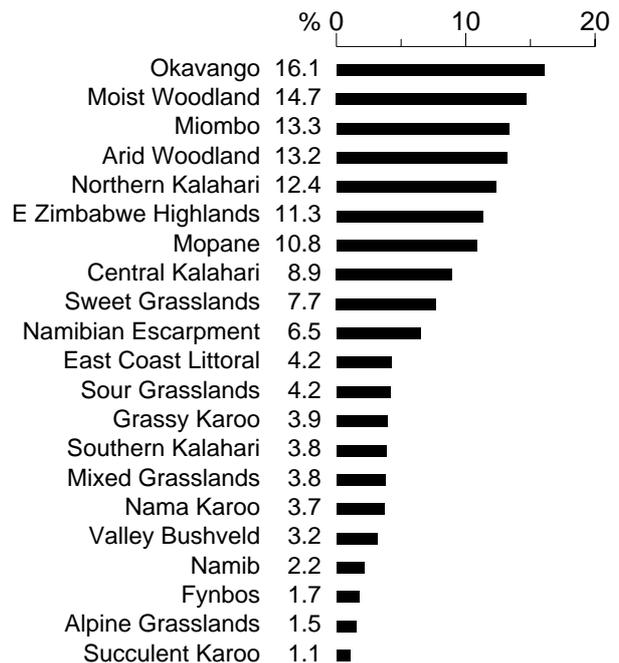
**Interspecific relationships:** Despite the wide variety of flycatchers in the region (22 species), the Spotted Flycatcher seems to be the only species which is specialized in long upward hawking (Fraser 1983). The Dusky and Bluegrey *M. caerulescens* Flycatchers are the only congeneric species in the region, but both generally prefer the lower stratum in denser woodland and forest.

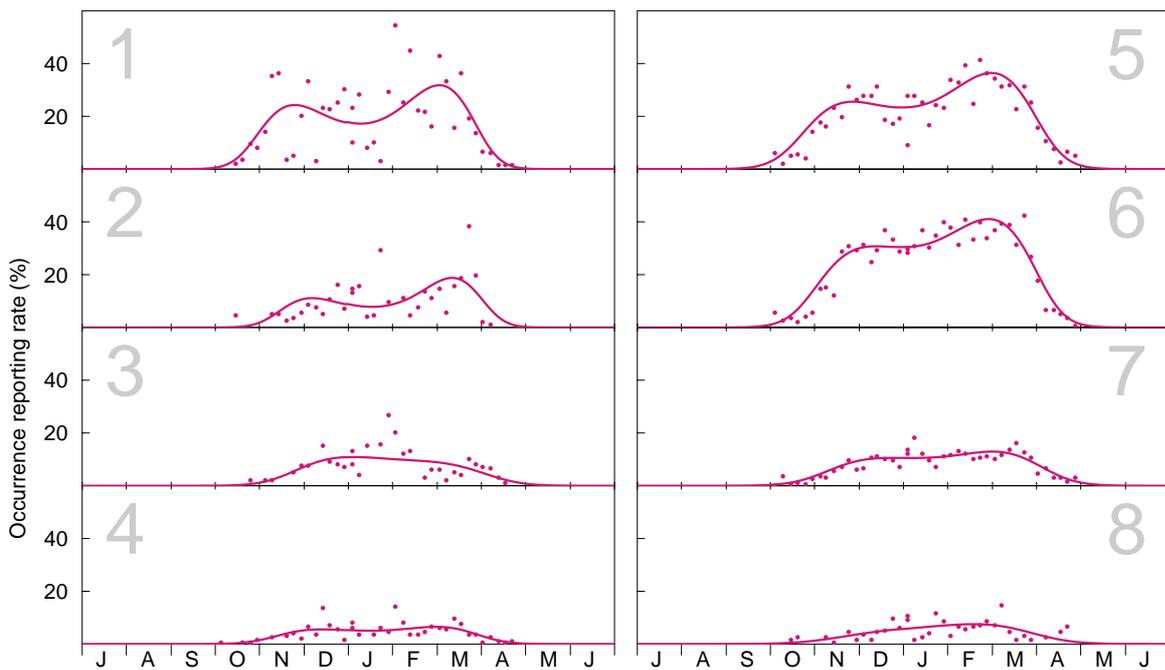
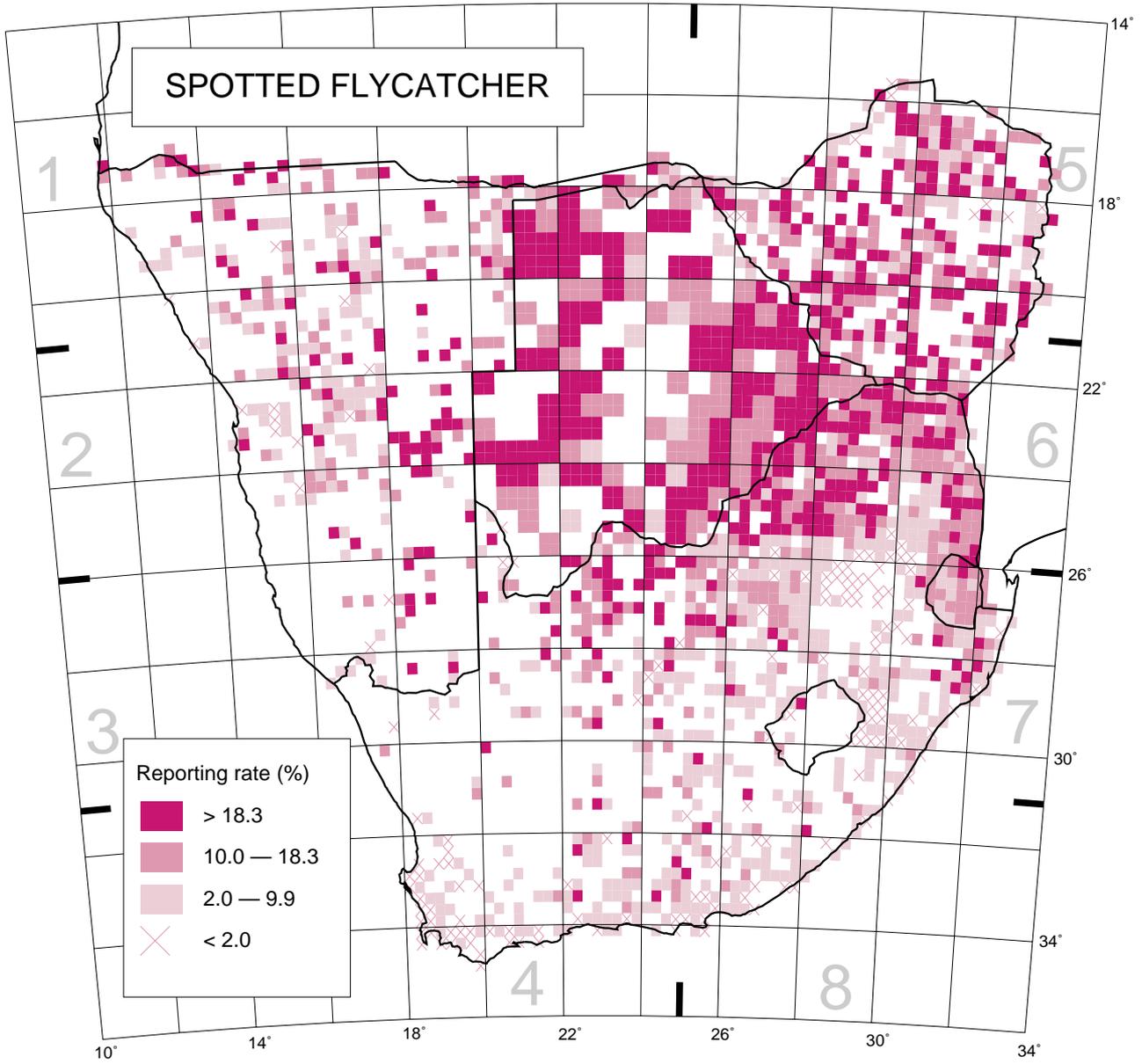
**Historical distribution and conservation:** It is declining in Europe (Tucker & Heath 1994), but no changes are documented in southern Africa. It probably benefits from increased habitat availability in arid areas, such as watered ornamental gardens and alien-tree plantations. It is widespread and common and not under any particular threat in the region.

*M. Herremans*

Recorded in 2114 grid cells, 46.6%  
Total number of records: 9810  
Mean reporting rate for range: 8.3%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 271, 184, 176, 182, 1073, 1642, 955, 134.