



## Dusky Flycatcher

### Donkervlieëvanger

#### *Muscicapa adusta*

The Dusky Flycatcher is common in a broad strip along the south and east coast of southern Africa. It ranges from the southwestern Cape Province to KwaZulu-Natal, where the range broadens, taking in the Drakensberg fringes up to 1800 m (Clancey 1964b), and continuing north through Swaziland and the eastern Transvaal. In Zimbabwe, the distribution becomes patchy, and it is locally common only in parts of the east and north. Beyond the limits of southern Africa, it extends to Cameroon in the west and to 15°N in Ethiopia; north of 10°S it is largely a montane species (Hall & Moreau 1970).

Four subspecies are recognized in the region (Clancey 1980b), of which *M. a. mesica* in the miombo of the central plateau in Zimbabwe, and *subadusta* in the eastern highlands of Zimbabwe, have disjunct ranges. The range of *fuscula* in the lowlands, from the Transkei to KwaZulu-Natal, is less well separated from *adusta* which occupies the area to the southwest and north, and in the highlands.

Its close relative and look-alike is the Spotted Flycatcher *M. striata*, and confusion could arise, although their preferred habitats are different. The atlas data are considered to be reliable.

**Habitat:** It prefers fairly dense, usually evergreen vegetation, but not the darkest interior of evergreen forest. Where forest is not man-modified, it uses the edge or natural clearings along rivers (Irwin 1955; Skead 1967a), and in general it can be considered a bird of forest ecotones. It is confined to riverine strips in many places where this is the only available evergreen forest (Collett 1982). Much use is also made of plantations of alien trees. In fynbos a typical station for the Dusky Flycatcher would be the interface between a gum plantation and fynbos (Skead, D.M. 1966b), and nests have been found on the edges of pine plantations (Hall 1983). In the Free State, nearly all records are from gardens and orchards (Earlé & Grobler 1987). The distribution suggests that it may depend upon free water, and it certainly drinks (Hamling 1953).

**Movements:** The models and seasonal maps show that it is a regular, partial migrant in the southern part of the range,

but a resident in the north. There is a decline in abundance in the western and southern Cape Province (Zone 4) during the winter, this coinciding with a marked increase in the eastern Cape Province and KwaZulu-Natal (Zones 7 and 8). The winter peak in the Transvaal (Zone 6) is less marked and there is no seasonal change in Zimbabwe (Zone 5). Not only is there movement to spend the winter in the warmer east and north, there is also altitudinal movement to the coast in winter, this being especially apparent in KwaZulu-Natal (Clancey 1964b; Skead 1967a; Cyrus & Robson 1980; Berruti *et al.* 1994a; Harrison & Navarro 1994). In the Transvaal there is some winter movement down the escarpment (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b), and in Swaziland it is a winter visitor to the lowveld and Lebombo (Parker 1994); the eastward movement extends into Mozambique (Clancey 1971c).

**Breeding:** The season is clearly defined and, except for a tendency towards an earlier peak in the north, almost synchronous throughout the range. First records occur in September, last in March, with a November–December peak. The similarity of seasons in the southwestern Cape Province and the eastern Cape Province is remarkable in view of the difference in seasonality of rainfall. The atlas breeding data peak one month later than egg-laying data, which also indicate synchronous breeding throughout the region (Winterbottom 1968a; Dean 1971; Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b).

**Interspecific relationships:** It has two close relatives of similar ecology (Fraser 1983). The Bluegrey Flycatcher *M. caerulescens* has a widely overlapping range and foraging style but avoids alien trees and makes more use of deciduous vegetation. The Spotted Flycatcher uses almost any woody vegetation and is more widespread, particularly in seasonally dry woodland. The latter is predominantly a hawkler (the other two forage in a variety of ways) and moreover, as a Palearctic migrant, it is absent in winter when resources might be limiting.

It is a host of Klaas's Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx klaas* (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Maclean 1993b).

**Historical distribution and conservation:** The range is not known to have changed. There may have been a change in status in the southwestern Cape Province; Winterbottom (1971b) recorded it in the Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve (3418AD) as a summer breeder only, yet it also winters there now. Reporting rates for the subspecies *mesica* in the miombo woodland of Zimbabwe were low and this form may have suffered from extensive clearing of its habitat. Generally speaking, the Dusky Flycatcher is common and not threatened.

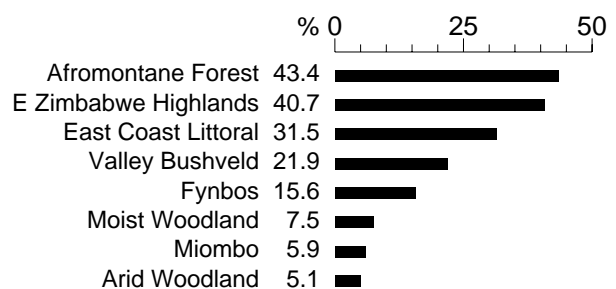
D.N. Johnson

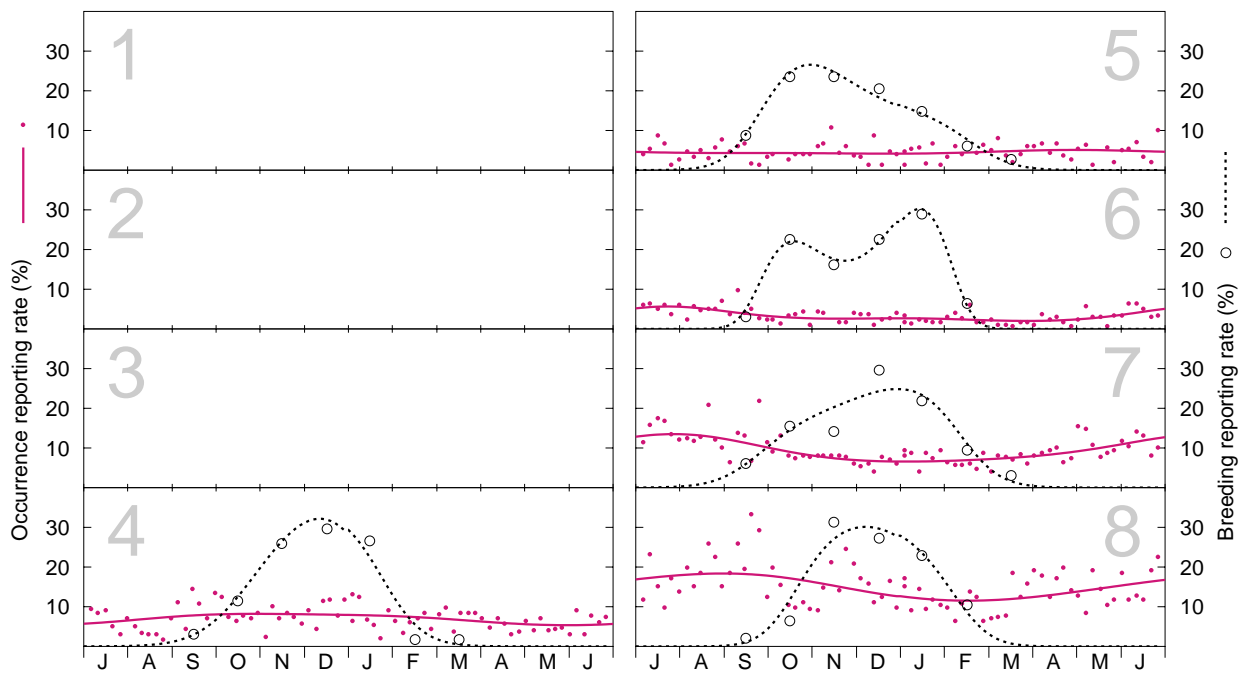
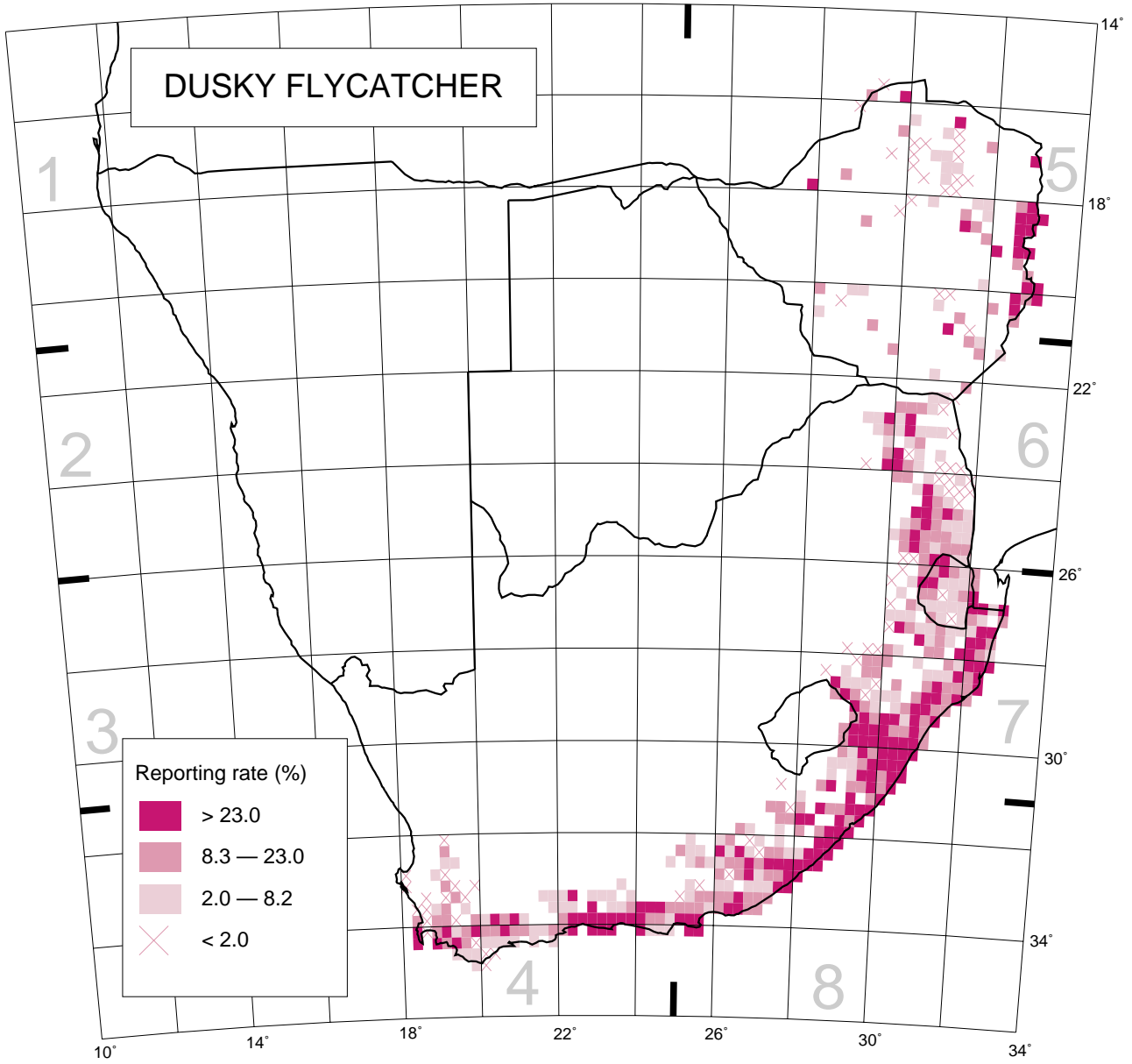
Recorded in 566 grid cells, 12.5%

Total number of records: 12 189

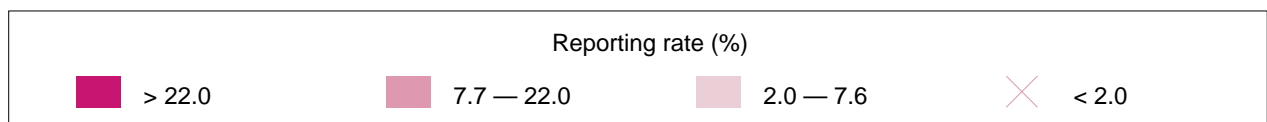
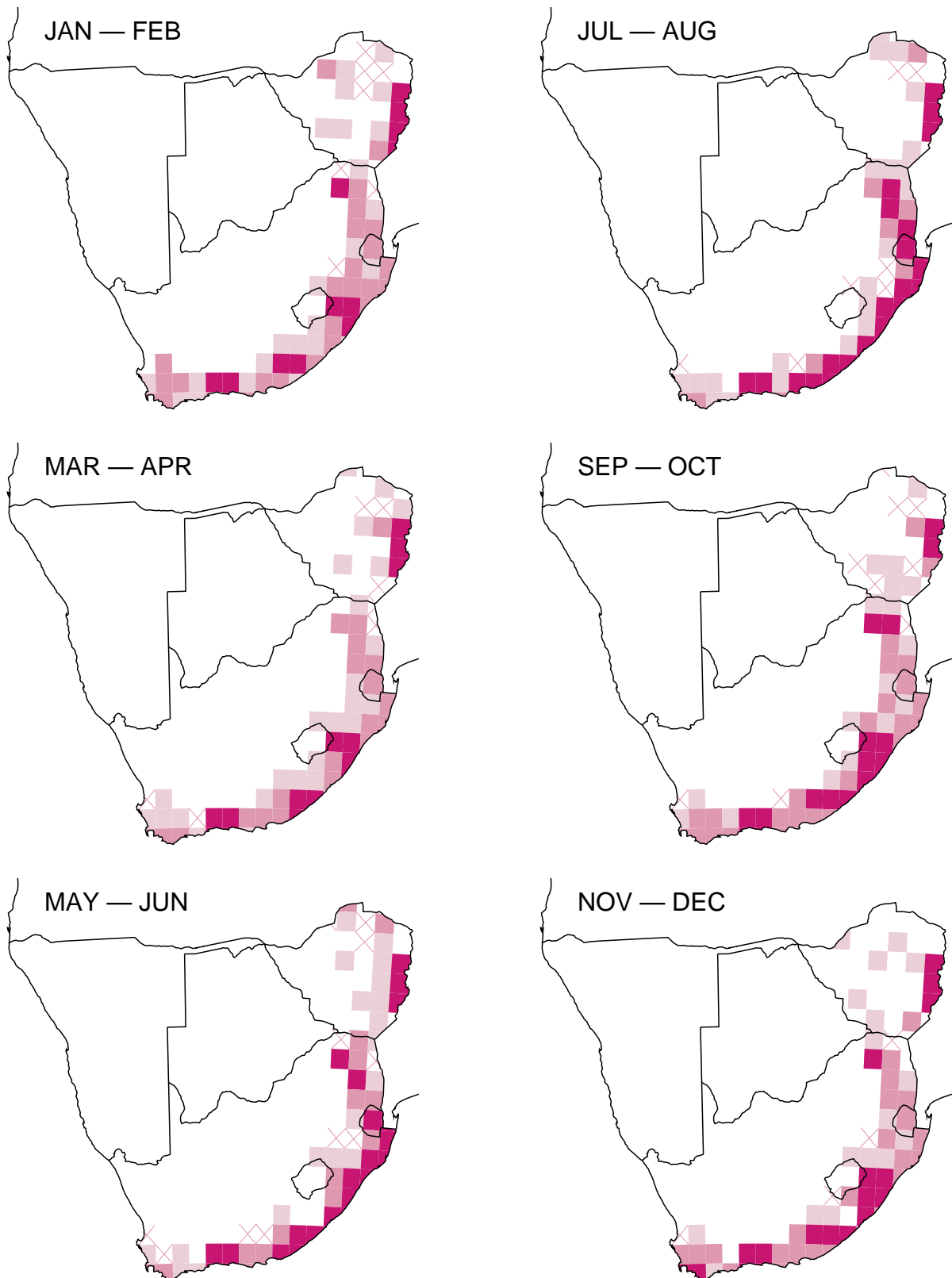
Mean reporting rate for range: 19.3%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types





## DUSKY FLYCATCHER



Seasonal distribution maps; one-degree grid.