

Marico Flycatcher

Maricovlieëvanger

Melaenornis mariquensis

The Marico Flycatcher is a specialist of the *Acacia* thornbelt in the Kalahari basin and adjacent hardveld. It occurs in the northern Cape Province, the northwestern Transvaal, southwestern and central Zimbabwe (extending as far as the eastern highlands), over most of Botswana (except in the broadleaved woodlands in the far northeast), and northern and central Namibia (except the coastal deserts). North of the broadleaved woodlands in northern Botswana, there is a different subspecies, *M. m. territinctus* (Clancey 1980b), in the Caprivi and along the Chobe riverfront. It does not need to drink (Irwin 1956a; Winterbottom 1963b) and is abundant in the Kalahari basin, particularly the race *acaciae* in the southern and western Kalahari (extending into Namibia (Clancey 1980b)). The nominate subspecies is abundant in the arid woodland biome in the upper Limpopo catchment along the Botswana–Transvaal border.

Average densities of 1 bird/ha are regularly found on the periphery of the Kalahari in Botswana (pers. obs). In the Transvaal a breeding density of 1 pair/36 ha was recorded (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). It occurs only marginally in the thornveld area of the Transvaal lowveld. Beyond the atlas region, it extends into southern Angola and southwestern Zambia (Maclean 1993b), and marginally into the Limpopo valley in southern Mozambique (V. Parker *in litt.*).

It is inquisitive and confiding, living in family groups of 5–15 birds (Maclean 1993b) and frequently perching in the open. The atlas data are reliable and comprehensive.

Habitat: It is a specialist of *Acacia* bushveld and woodland with strongholds in the three Kalahari biomes. Associations with predominantly broadleaved Miombo, Okavango, Mopane and Moist Woodland biomes result from the extensive occurrence of an *Acacia* mosaic within these biomes. The northern subspecies *territinctus* occurs in broadleaved scrub. There is probably a partial shift from a preference for taller, more shady bushveld and woodland in summer to more open habitat in winter, when it also frequently occurs on fallow fields with low, coppicing bushes.

Movements: It is apparently resident throughout its range. The weak seasonality pattern in some Zones results from a change in conspicuousness from summer to winter; in the hot season it has a tendency to perch in the shade below the canopy, while it frequently perches in the open during autumn and winter. The switch to more open habitat in winter possibly

involves short-distance movements and an expansion of home range (pers. obs).

Breeding: The atlas breeding records confirm that it has a protracted breeding season through the hot, wet summer, mainly September–April in the eastern part of the range (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Skinner 1995a), while breeding in the more arid parts of Namibia is on average considerably later and can also be in winter (see also Maclean 1993b). Peak breeding in Zimbabwe (Zone 5) is a month earlier than further south, e.g. in the Transvaal (September–November compared to October–December) (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b).

Interspecific relationships: There are four *Melaenornis* species in southern Africa, of which the Marico Flycatcher is the most common. Although ranges overlap, it rarely occurs

alongside Mousecoloured *M. pallidus* (Tarboton 1980b; Irwin 1981; Brown 1990a) and Black *M. pammelaina* Flycatchers, which prefer taller and relatively humid, broadleaved woodlands. It overlaps with the larger Chat Flycatcher *M. infuscatus*, which has a preference for more arid and more open, lower, scrubby vegetation (Frost & Frost 1987). In Botswana the two species were found alongside each other in seven out of eight transect-counts in the Kalahari (pers. obs).

It belongs to a guild which forages by still-hunting and pouncing (Fraser 1983; Herremans 1992a). It may be in competition with the Redbacked Shrike *Lanius collurio* during summer, and it may be significant that the Marico Flycatcher starts to use more open habitat in April, just after the Redbacked Shrikes have left the region. The Marico Flycatcher is also sparse in the Transvaal lowveld, a stronghold of the Redbacked Shrike (Bruderer & Bruderer 1993), while its own strongholds are skewed to the southern Kalahari, an area with relatively few Redbacked Shrikes.

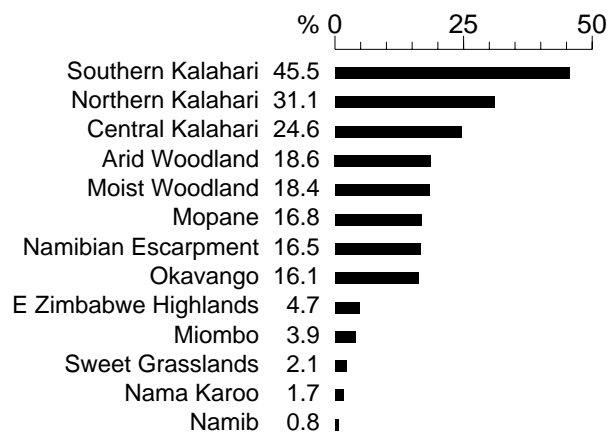
It is an occasional host of the Diederik Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx caprius* (Maclean 1993b).

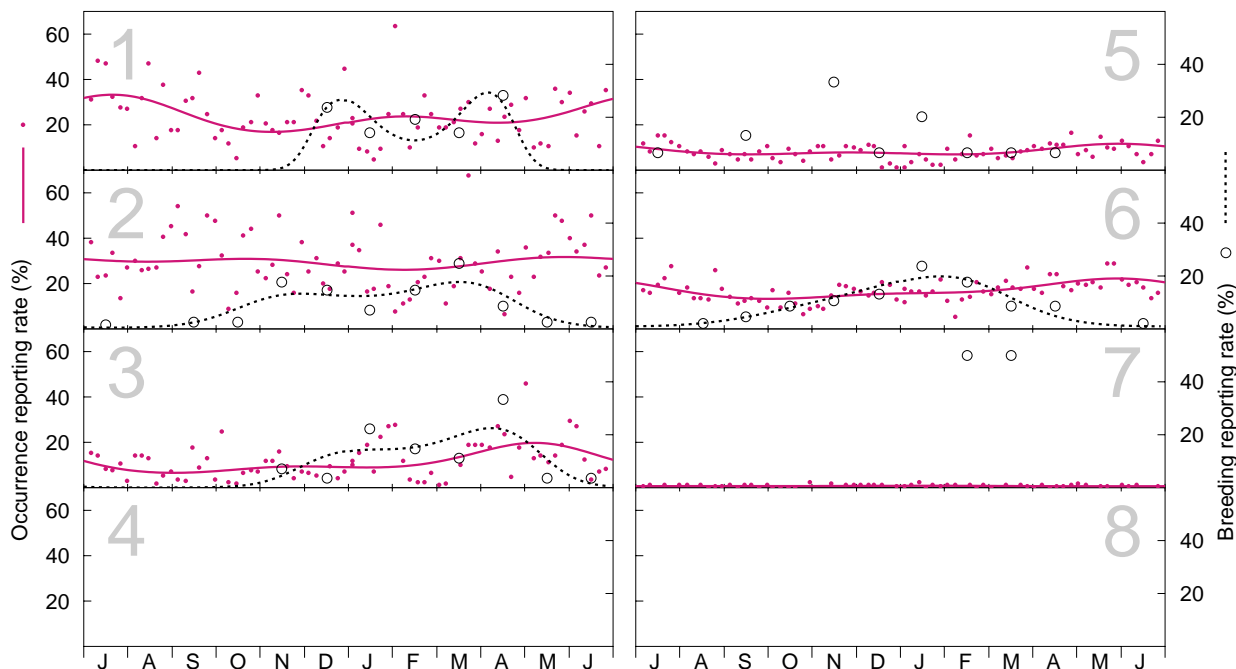
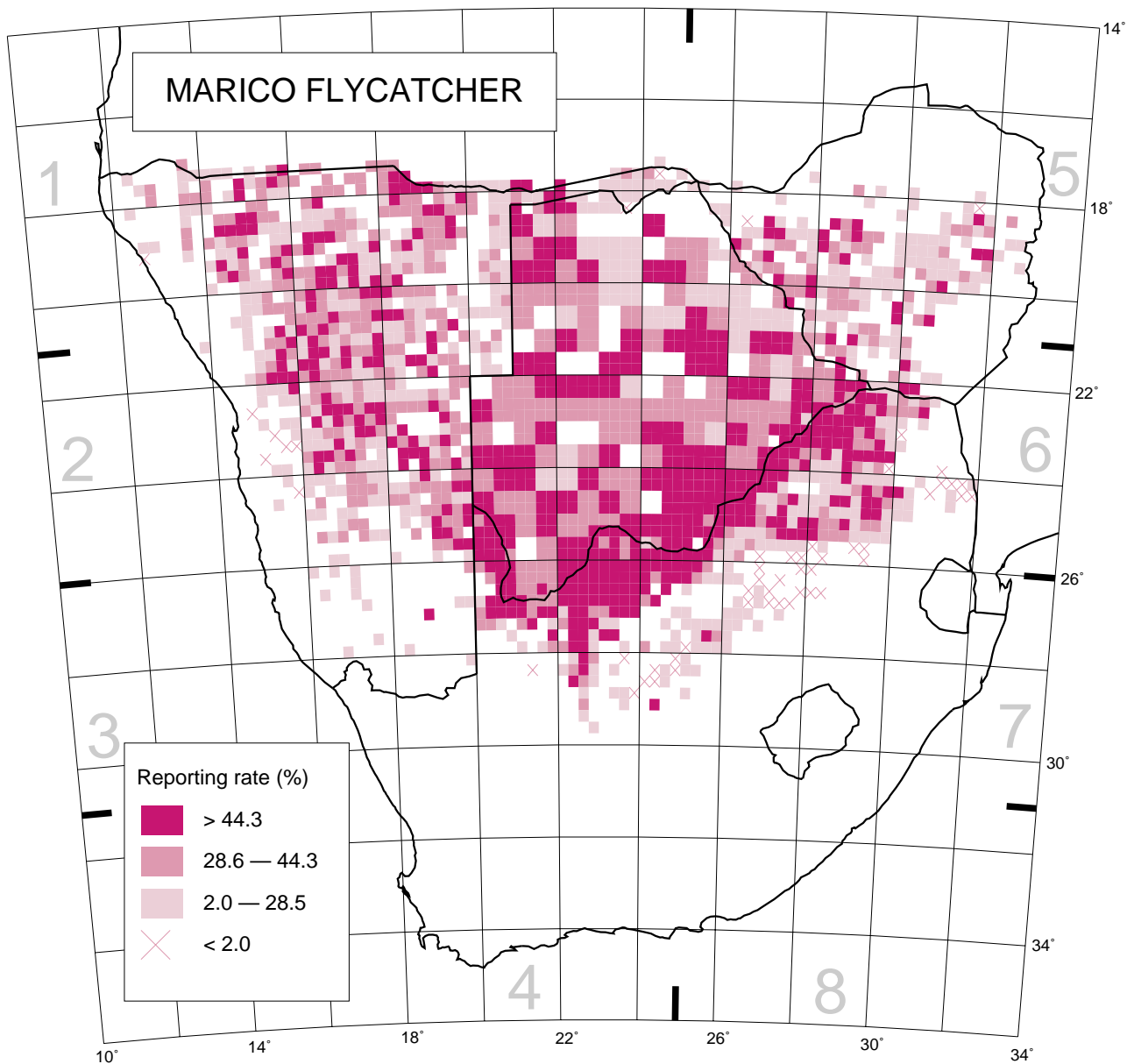
Historical distribution and conservation: It is abundant in the *Acacia* belt and is of no particular conservation concern. Thornbush encroachment in response to overgrazing, which is one of the major habitat transformations within its range, is beneficial to the Marico Flycatcher.

M. Herremans

Recorded in 1910 grid cells, 42.1
Total number of records: 10 540
Mean reporting rate for range: 23.5%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 797, 1065, 641, 0, 732, 1945, 139, 0; Breeding: 21, 69, 27, 0, 15, 46, 2, 0.