



Chat Flycatcher

Grootvlieëvanger

Melaenornis infuscatus

The Chat Flycatcher is near-endemic to southern Africa and occurs in the arid parts of the region. It is common in the northern and eastern Cape Province, over most of Namibia, except in the Namib Desert in the west and the taller woodlands in the north, and in the Kalahari in Botswana. Beyond the atlas region it extends marginally into southwestern Angola (Maclean 1993b). It is virtually absent from the winter-rainfall region, except for the nominate subspecies which is restricted to an isolated strip of strandveld in the western Cape Province. It does not need to drink (Irwin 1956a; Winterbottom 1963b) and has strongholds in the Nama Karoo (race *M. i. seimundi*; Clancey 1980b) and the southern Kalahari (race *placidus* in the southeast; Clancey 1980b). The area of lower reporting rates in the Kalahari in western Botswana might coincide with the transition between *placidus* in the east and *namaquensis* to the west (following Clancey 1980b). The distribution has a remarkably sharp cut-off east of 26°E.

It lives in small family parties of 2–4 birds (Maclean 1993b). It is less confiding than the Marico Flycatcher *M. mariquensis*, but perches conspicuously throughout the year on top of small bushes in open habitat. The data for these species are most likely similarly comprehensive and reliable.

Habitat: It prefers arid open country with low bushes and few trees. It has a much lower affinity for *Acacia* than the Marico Flycatcher, and is absent from the Valley Bushveld biome adjacent to its range in the Karoo. It is essentially a bird of the Kalahari and Karoo.

Movements: The models do not suggest any reliable patterns: there are no clear movements and it has uniform conspicuousness throughout the year.

Breeding: Published breeding information is scant (Winterbottom 1968a; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Skinner 1995a) and the atlas provides a good amount of new data, confirming that breeding is protracted from spring throughout the wet summer (August–April), but with a peak in October–January (Ginn *et al.* 1989; Maclean 1993b; Skinner 1995a). The nominate subspecies in the winter-rainfall region of the western Cape Province is said to breed earlier, July–November (Hockey *et al.* 1989), but this is not convincingly confirmed by the atlas data.

Interspecific relationships: (See also Marico Flycatcher.) At least in areas of overlap, the Chat Flycatcher is usually less abundant than the Marico Flycatcher; average densities of 7 birds/10 ha were found for the latter, and only 1 bird/10 ha for the former in transect-counts in the central and northern Kalahari of Botswana (unpubl. data).

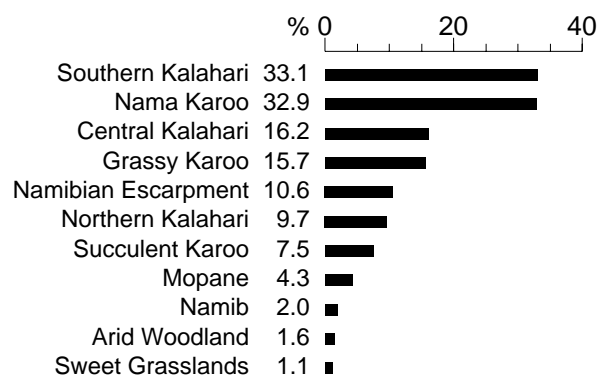
With its preference for open scrubby habitat, the Chat Flycatcher occurs less with the Redbacked Shrike *Lanius collurio* than with the Lesser Grey Shrike *L. minor*, a larger, migratory member of the same foraging guild. Details of its feeding ecology and possible interactions remain to be documented, but its strongholds are mostly outside the nonbreeding range of the Lesser Grey Shrike.

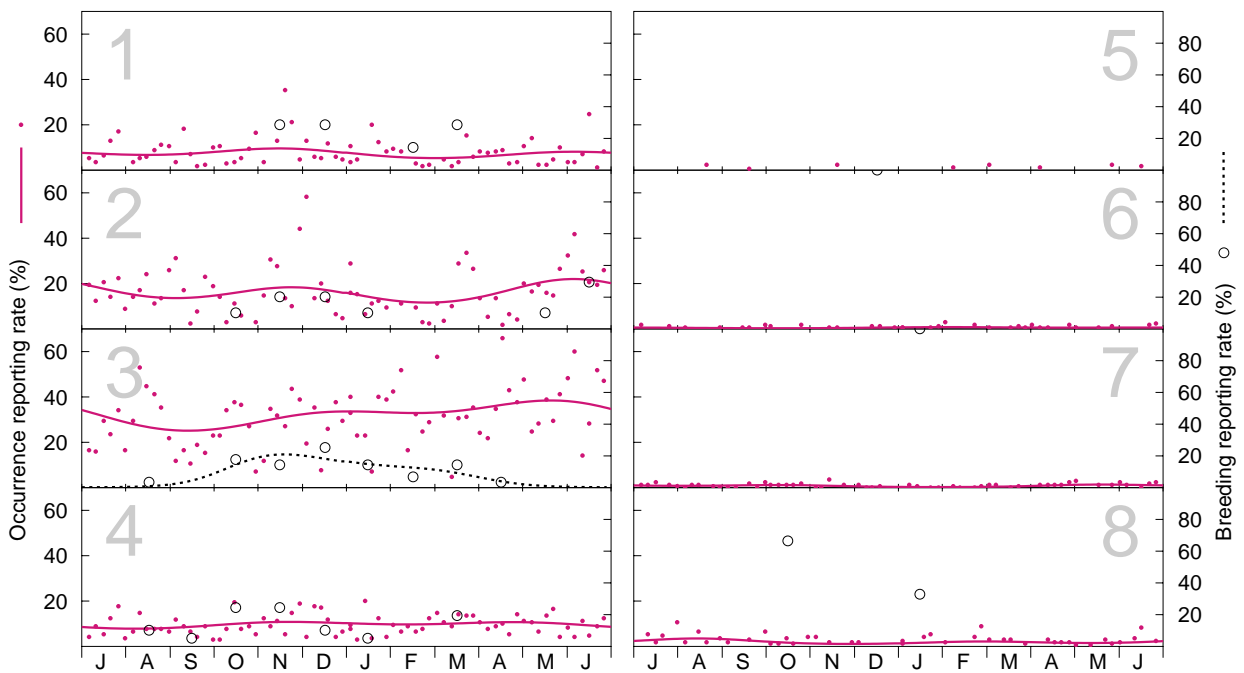
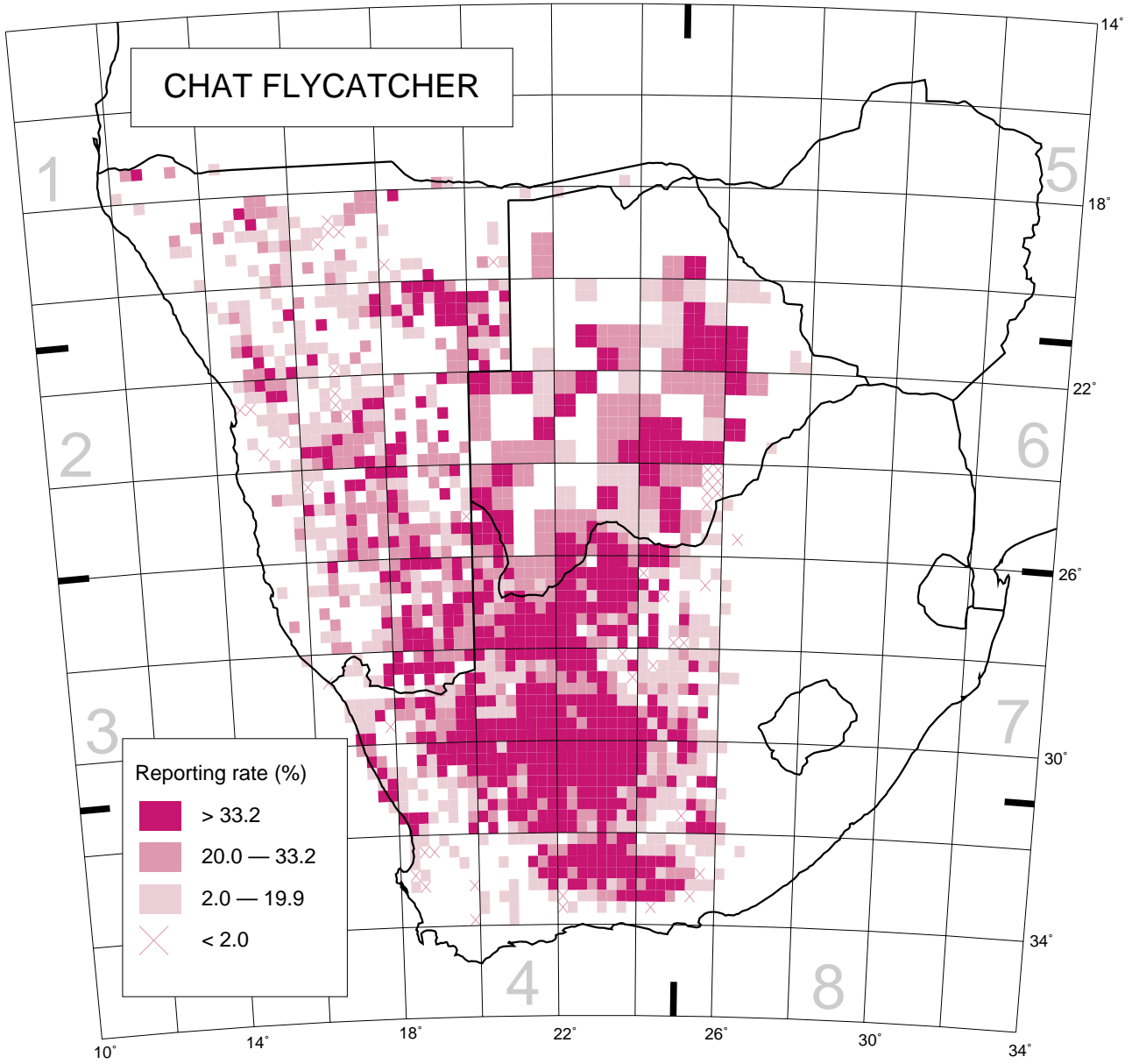
Historical distribution and conservation: The nominate subspecies in the western Cape Province has lost considerable parts of its restricted range through habitat destruction (Hockey *et al.* 1989). The species may well have benefited from long droughts in the Kalahari during the 1980s and '90s, as these killed many of the larger trees and bushes, thereby creating more suitable open habitat. The Chat Flycatcher has a large range and is common in many areas; there are no definite population trends known, but it is not threatened.

M. Herremans

Recorded in 1672 grid cells, 36.9%
Total number of records: 6243
Mean reporting rate for range: 20.2%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 241, 586, 1790, 844, 12, 62, 158, 108; Breeding: 7, 10, 28, 20, 0, 2, 1, 3.