

# Paradise Flycatcher

## Paradysvlieëvanger

### *Terpsiphone viridis*

The Paradise Flycatcher is common over the south and east of southern Africa, and also occurs more sparsely in parts of the western interior. It ranges continuously from the western Cape Province to KwaZulu-Natal, Swaziland, most of the Transvaal and the adjacent hardveld in eastern Botswana, Zimbabwe, the Okavango and Caprivi. Elsewhere in Namibia it is thinly scattered, mainly in the northern half. It also occurs sparsely in the Free State and the lower-lying west of Lesotho. It avoids the Karoo and the Kalahari. There are strongholds in tropical areas: KwaZulu-Natal, Swaziland and the Transvaal lowveld, further north in the Okavango and Caprivi, and on the plateau in northern Zimbabwe. In Swaziland the population is estimated at 20 000 birds (Parker 1994).

Beyond southern Africa it occurs over most of sub-Saharan Africa and is also found in southwestern Arabia (Maclean 1993b).

Two subspecies are recognized in the region: *T. v. granti* occurs in the broad coastal region from the southwestern Cape Province to northern KwaZulu-Natal, while *plumbeiceps* occupies the interior from the Free State and Swaziland northwards (Clancey 1980b; Clancey *et al.* 1991).

It is distinctive, noisy and easily approached. The atlas records are reliable and comprehensive.

**Habitat:** Atlas records coincide almost entirely with the distribution of woodlands, with the exception of most of the Kalahari. Evergreen forests and broadleaved woodlands had relatively high reporting rates. Treeless biomes are used where alien trees have been planted. This is particularly evident in the southern Transvaal where it is regular in well-wooded towns and suburbs, and largely absent in rural areas. Alien trees are also used in Karoo gardens (Skead 1967b), and in the midst of natural woodlands (Winterbottom 1971c). The species does not occur uniformly within natural evergreen forest. It prefers riverine strips, and in the absence of these uses 'tunnels' of overhanging branches over small forest streams (Skead 1964a). Clancey (1964b) indicated it only on the edges of climax forest. Particularly in the drier areas it becomes mostly associated with riparian vegetation (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Penry 1994).

**Movements:** The race *plumbeiceps* winters in the equatorial region, almost to 5°N in Cameroon and Zaire (Benson 1982b). Occasionally some remain in winter as far south as the low-lying areas of Zimbabwe and Botswana (Irwin 1981; Herremans 1994d). The coastal race, *granti*, migrates along the coast and winters in northern KwaZulu-Natal, Swaziland, Mozambique, and peripherally into the lowveld of Zimbabwe and the northeastern Transvaal (Clancey 1971c; Cyrus & Robson 1980; Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Berruti *et al.* 1994a; Parker 1994). A Pietermaritzburg (2930CB) breeder was recovered in northern Mozambique (Elliott & Hunter 1974). In KwaZulu-Natal there is also a marked altitudinal component to the movements with a marked winter decrease in reporting rates above 300 m (Berruti *et al.* 1994).

The coastal race starts to arrive on the breeding grounds from early September onwards, while the inland form arrives from late September. Occupation of most of the range appears to be quite rapid, although in arid areas arrival is delayed: on average only by late November in southeastern Botswana, seven weeks later



than in the Okavango (Herremans 1994d). The population remains static until February, the northward migration beginning in March. Departure is more protracted than arrival.

**Breeding:** The season is clearly defined, and similar in the southern and southeastern parts of the range (Zones 4 and 6–8). Most nesting spans September–March, with a peak November–December. The peak tends to be slightly earlier (November) in the far north of the range (Zones 1 and 5). Breeding data from Zone 2, where birds arrive later, are also later. The models confirm existing egg-laying dates (Winterbottom 1968a; Dean 1971; Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Skinner 1995a).

**Interspecific relationships:** The Bluemantled Flycatcher *Trochocercus cyanomelas* is closest to the Paradise Flycatcher, both taxonomically and ecologically. The latter is a little larger, but both forage in much the same way and even have similar vocalizations. Ecological separation is based on habitat, the Bluemantled being a true forest

bird, and also a resident, while the migrant Paradise Flycatcher occupies more seasonal, deciduous woodland.

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

**Historical distribution and conservation:** The range appears to have expanded slightly in recent years. For example, Clancey (1964b) gave it to be uncommon, even absent throughout the year, in northern KwaZulu-Natal. The range is expanding in Lesotho, where the first record was in 1972 (Bonde 1993). The Paradise Flycatcher's acceptance of plantations of alien trees and gardens must have allowed it to expand its range. Its conservation status appears to be secure.

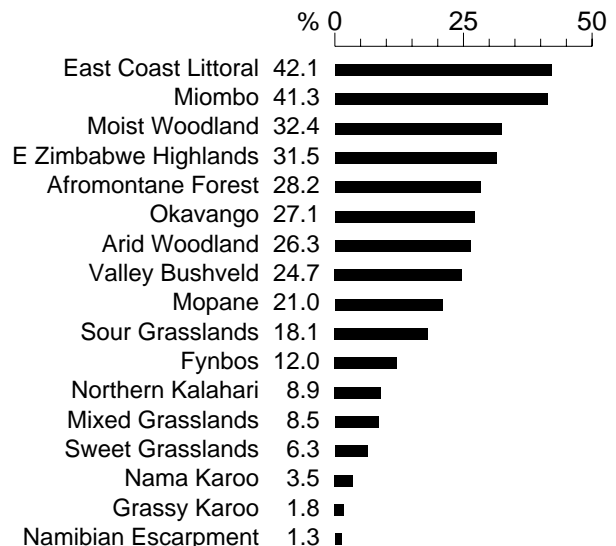
D.N. Johnson and M. Herremans

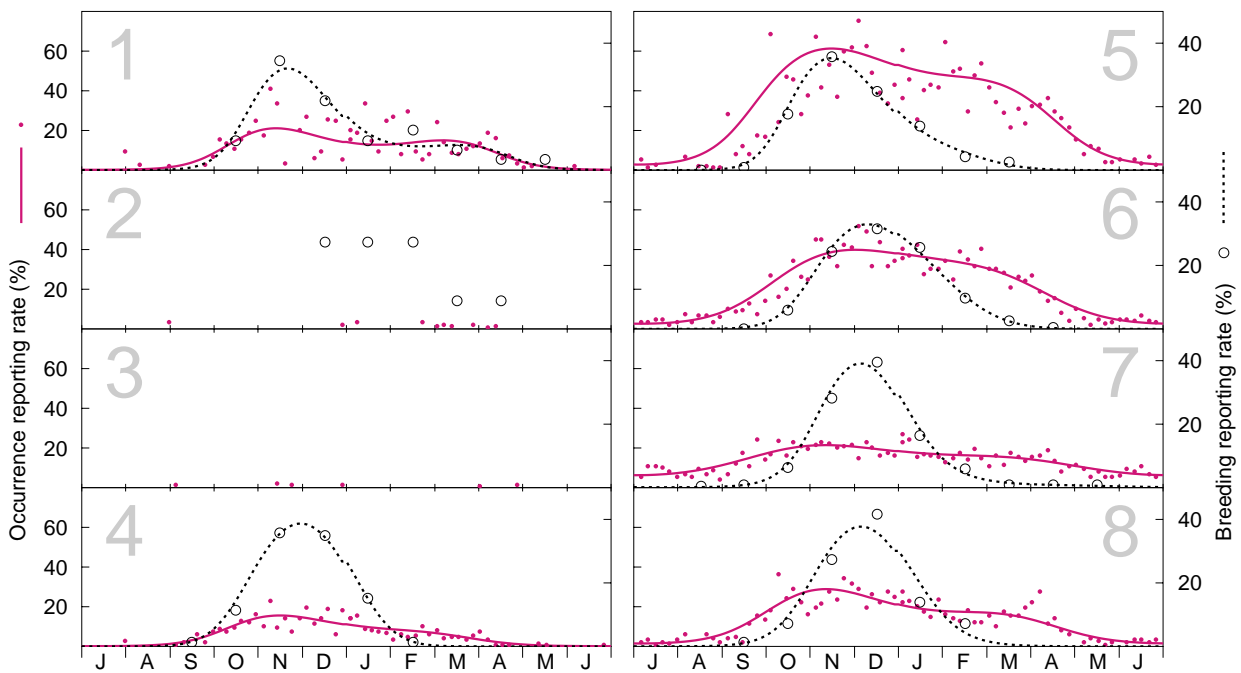
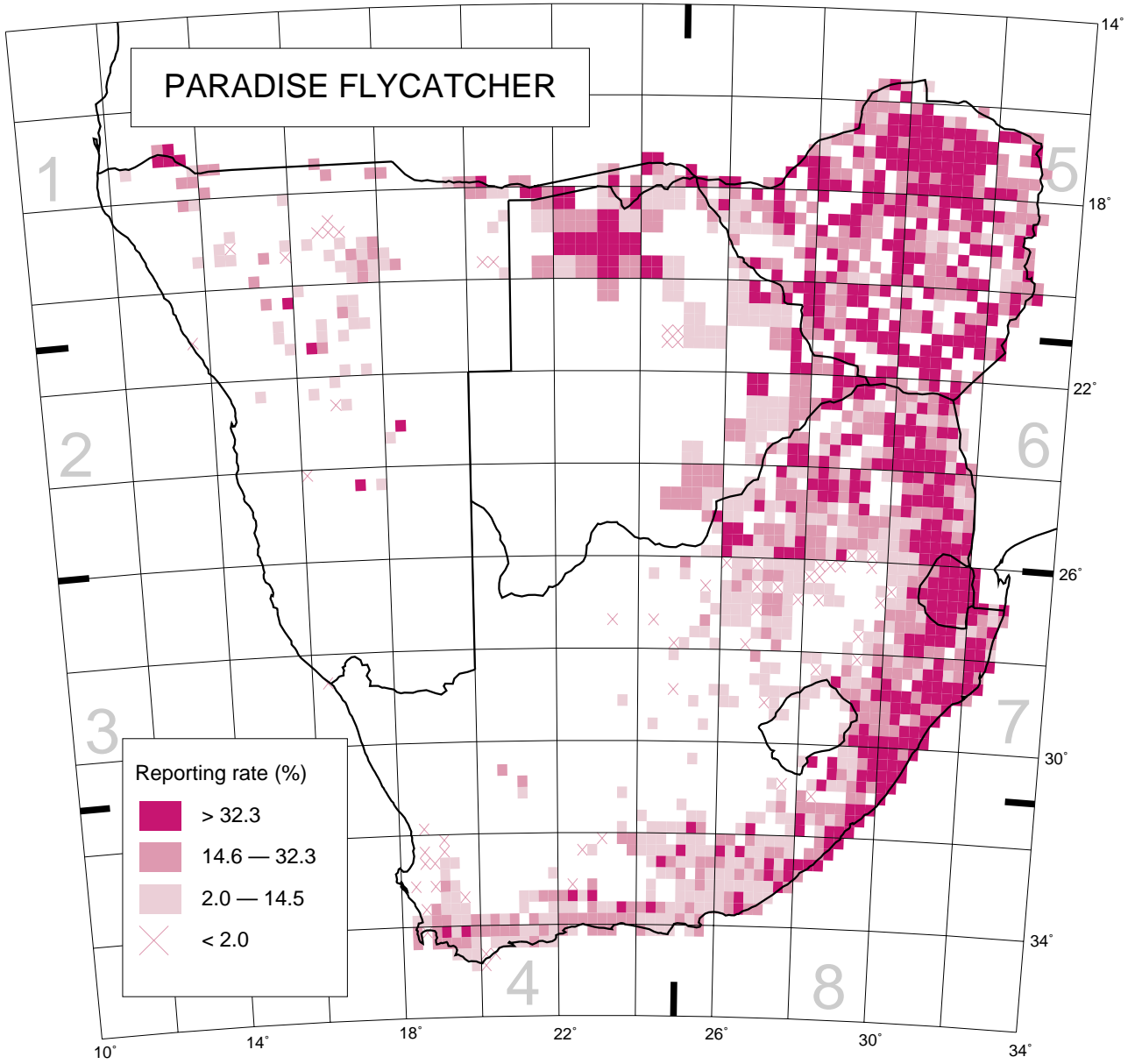
Recorded in 1610 grid cells, 35.5%

Total number of records: 26 283

Mean reporting rate for range: 23.8%

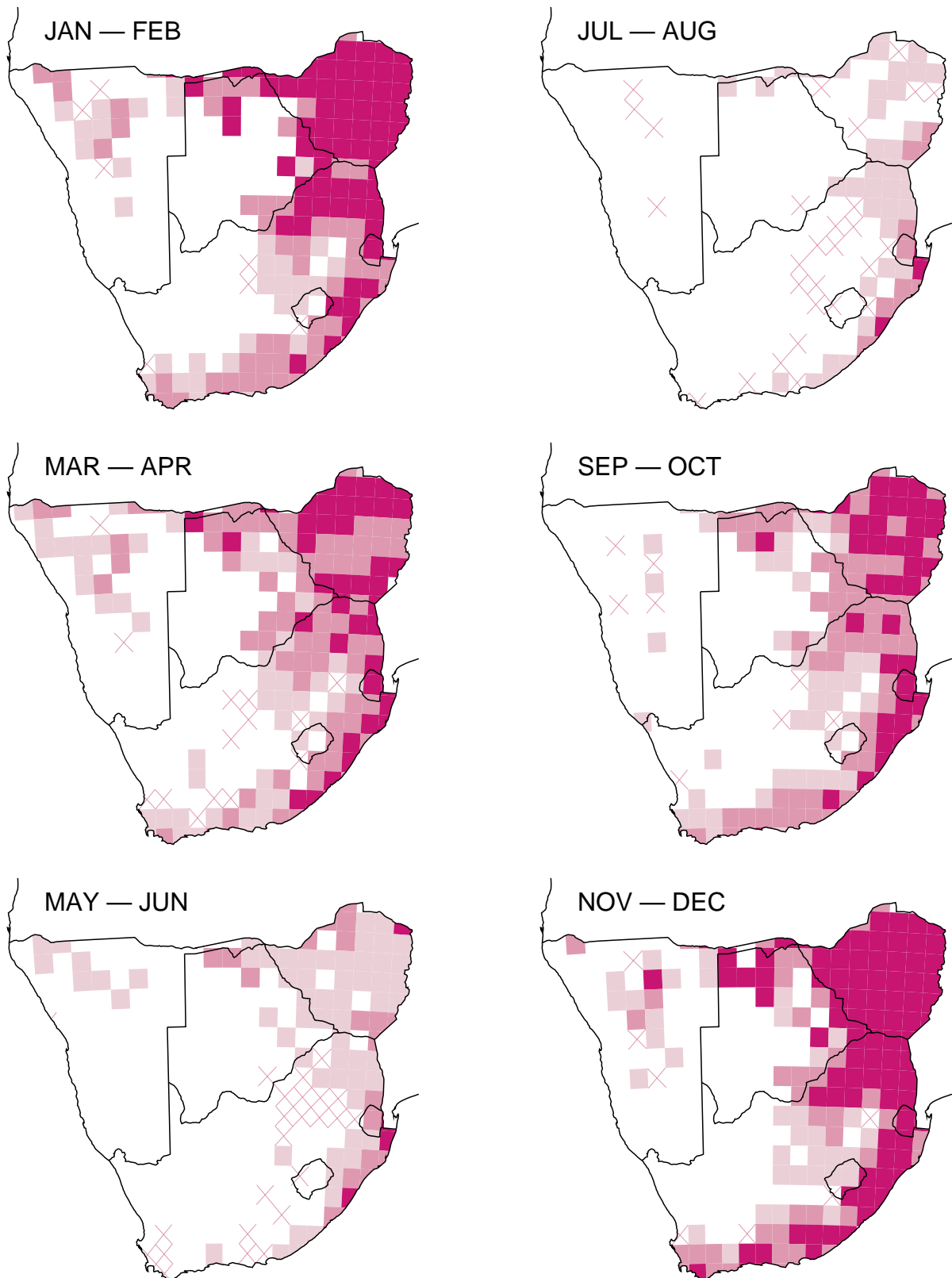
#### Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 262, 10, 6, 473, 2759, 2390, 2755, 755; Breeding: 32, 11, 0, 132, 336, 611, 281, 134.

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Seasonal distribution maps; one-degree grid.