

Crimsonbreasted Shrike

Rooiborslaksman

Laniarius atrococcineus

The Crimsonbreasted Shrike is one of the near-endemic *Acacia* specialists of the Kalahari Basin and adjacent hardveld areas. It is common in the northern Cape Province, the western Transvaal, southwestern Zimbabwe, over most of Botswana (except broadleaved woodlands in the far northeast) and Namibia (except the arid south and west). It is common on the Namibian escarpment but avoids the Namib and the Karoo. The range extends marginally into southern Angola (Harris & Arnott 1988; Maclean 1993b). The scattered distribution in eastern Namibia and central Botswana is mainly an artefact of inadequate coverage.

A striking feature of its distribution is the sharp eastern boundary in South Africa. In the south this reflects the limit of *Acacia* woodland, but in the north the reasons for absence further east are not clear. It is virtually absent from ostensibly suitable thornveld in the Transvaal lowveld; apparently the escarpment and lowveld provide barriers to this species.

It is common in its stronghold in the Kalahari, most particularly in areas with well-developed *Acacia* woodland and bushveld (e.g. the Northern Kalahari) and the north-western part of the Central Kalahari. Densities of 1 pair/9–12.5 ha, and 1 pair/4–5 ha in optimal habitat, have been recorded from the Transvaal (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Ginn *et al.* 1989). Average densities of 2 birds/10 ha were found at five localities in the taller bushveld of the Kalahari and the arid woodland biome in eastern Botswana (unpubl. data). It is abundant in the tall *Acacia* woodlands southwest of the Okavango in northern Botswana (2022B) where a peak density of *c.* 1 bird/ha was recorded (unpubl. data).

It lives in pairs or small family parties and tends to skulk in dense bush during summer, but it behaves more conspicuously during winter when it feeds more frequently in the open on the ground (pers. obs). Vocalizations and plumage are very striking and it is a favourite with birders, hence the atlas data are likely to be comprehensive and reliable.

Habitat: It occurs in *Acacia* bushveld and woodland, with strongholds in the densely wooded Northern and Central Kalahari biomes, but less so in the more open Southern Kalahari. The high reporting rates in several other woodland types, including predominantly broadleaved woodlands (Okavango, Moist Woodland, Mopane) are the result of the extensive occurrence of *Acacia* mosaics within these biomes.

Movements: The atlas data give no evidence for regular seasonal movements, but on a local scale, some birds seem to move into more lush riverine woodland in the dry season and during prolonged droughts. Records from the Transvaal lowveld are attributed to wanderings in winter (Harris & Arnott 1988).

Breeding: The atlas breeding records are all September–April and confirm that it breeds in the summer (Ginn *et al.* 1989; Maclean 1993b). There is a distinct peak October–November in the east of the range (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Ginn *et al.* 1989; Skinner 1995a), while breeding tends to peak later in the west (Ginn *et al.* 1989).

Interspecific relationships: It is largely parapatric with the Swamp *L. bicolor*, Tropical *L. aethiopicus* and Southern *L. ferrugineus* Boubous, because of clear differences in habitat preference. They can occasionally be recorded alongside each other, particularly in the dry season and during droughts, when some Crimsonbreasted Shrikes frequent more lush riverine habitat.

It is a host of the Black Cuckoo *Cuculus clamosus* (Harris & Arnott 1988).

Historical distribution and conservation: This near-endemic species is widespread and common in its extensive range, and does not seem to be threatened in any way. Bush encroachment, particularly by *Dichrostachys* and *Acacia* spp., in response to overgrazing which is the most widespread habitat modification in the Kalahari, probably creates additional habitat for the Crimsonbreasted Shrike.

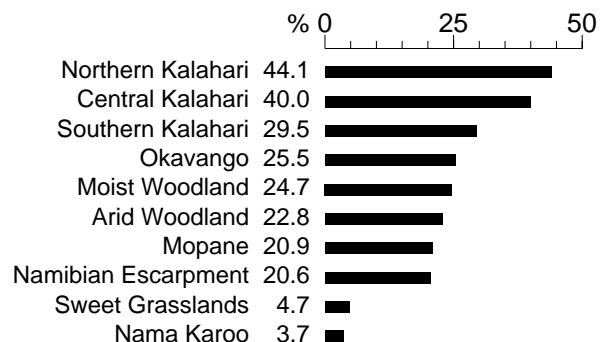
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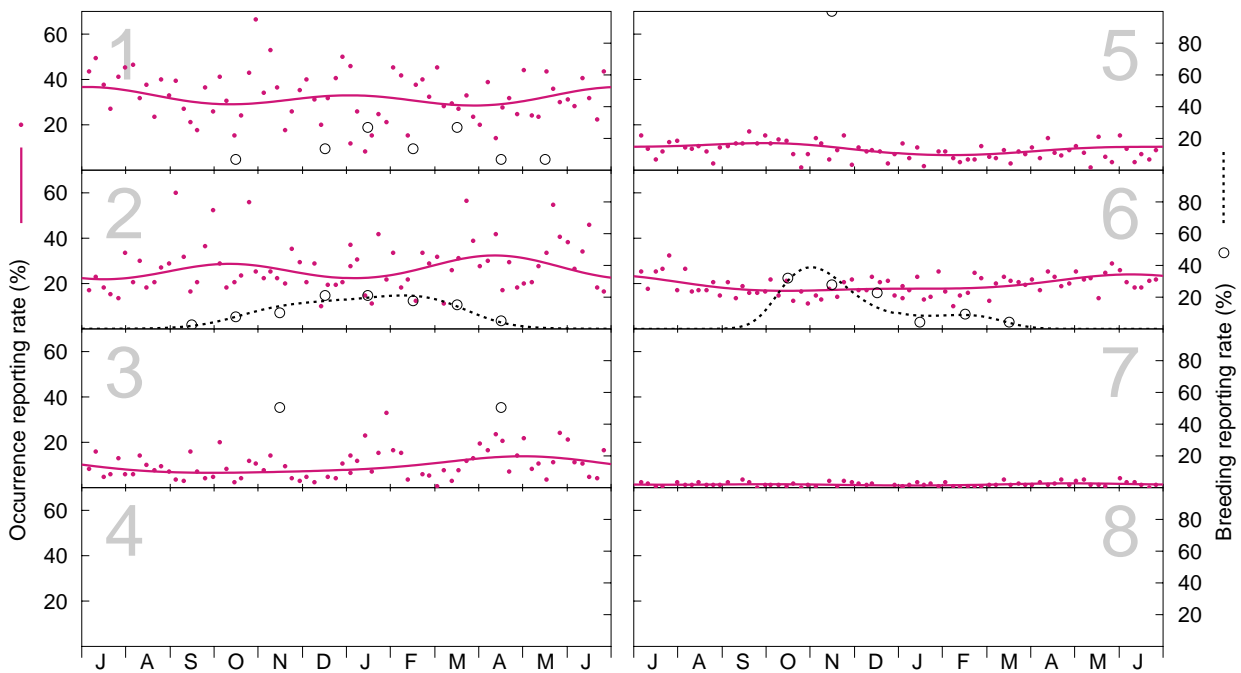
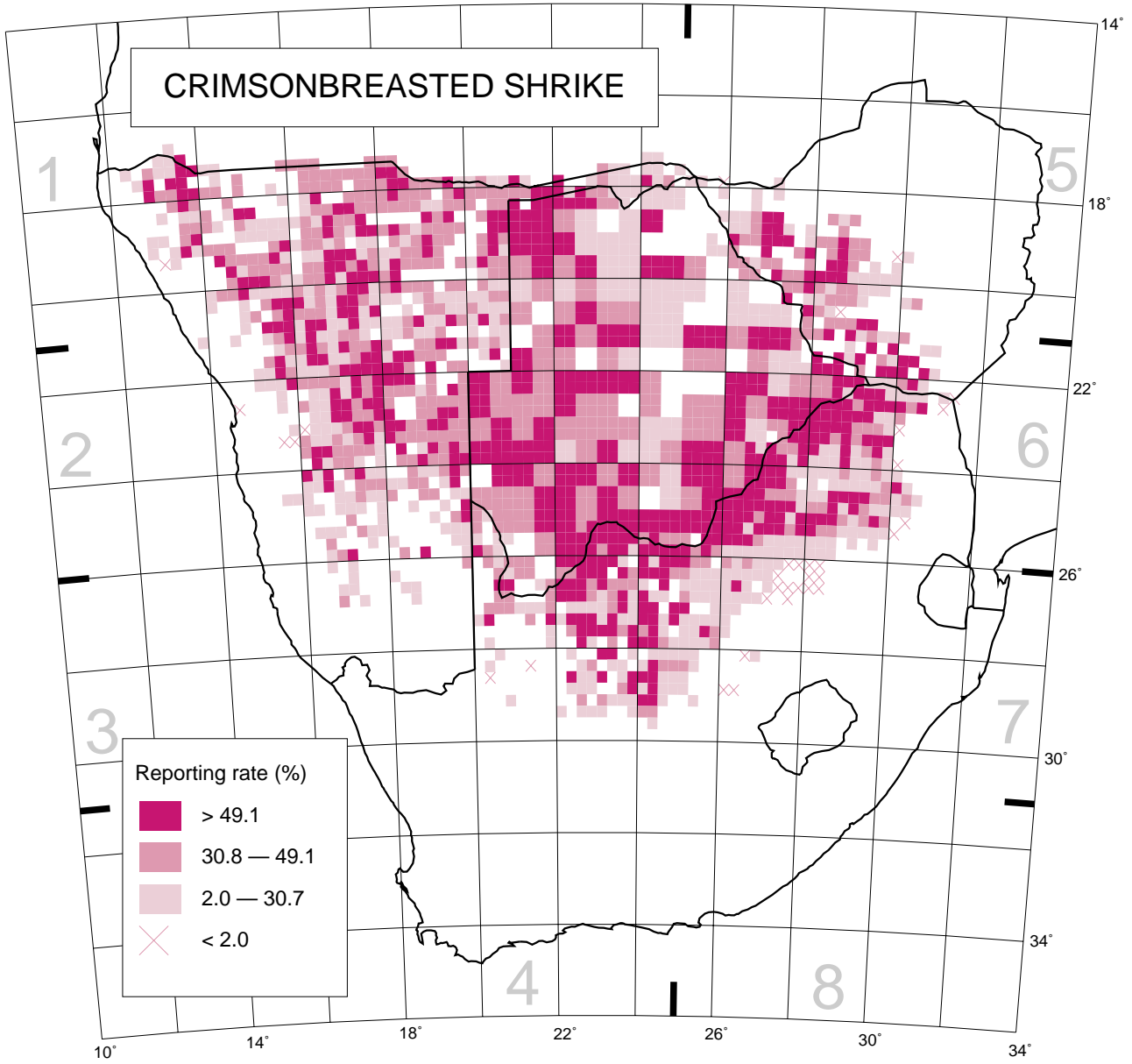
Recorded in 1931 grid cells, 42.6%

Total number of records: 13 517

Mean reporting rate for range: 27.8

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 1053, 960, 535, 0, 840, 2223, 273, 0; Breeding: 15, 39, 2, 0, 1, 22, 0, 0.