

Southern Tchagra

Grysborstjagra

Tchagra tchagra

This southern African endemic ranges from the southwestern Cape Province to Swaziland and the eastern Transvaal escarpment. Beyond the atlas region, the Southern Tchagra probably extends marginally into southern Mozambique (Harris & Arnott 1988), but its presence in that country is unconfirmed (Dowsett & Dowsett-Lemaire 1993). It occupies a broad coastal strip, most records being within 100 km of the coast, with only a few being more than 200 km inland. It is more common in the western half of its range (where two subspecies have continuous ranges) than in the Transkei and further north, including the range of the race *T. t. natalensis* (Clancey 1980b). This is a secretive species of dense cover, infrequently seen, even where reputed to be locally common. The call is distinctive but could be confused with that of the Threestreaked Tchagra *T. australis*, a species which it closely resembles; the range overlap in KwaZulu-Natal is only marginal, however.

Habitat: Typically a species of dense, drier vegetation, most atlas records came from the Valley Bushveld, East Coast Littoral, Nama Karoo and Fynbos biomes. It does not occur inside true evergreen forest (Skead 1967b) but favours the densest thickets in other woody vegetation types. In dry country it occurs in riverine acacias (Collett 1982; Winterbottom & Winterbottom 1984) or bushy clumps (Skead 1967b) but is equally at home in thickets in fynbos, including alien Rooikrans *Acacia cyclops* (Skead 1964c; Uys & Macleod 1967; Uys 1989). Clancey (1964b) considered it typical of alien thickets and scrub in KwaZulu-Natal. Whatever the vegetation, some near-impenetrable cover close to the ground is essential for this species which spends much of its time on the ground.

Movements: Atlas data provide no evidence of seasonal movement. Slight fluctuations in reporting rates are probably linked to the frequency of vocalizations.

Breeding: Atlas data show breeding beginning in September, peaking in November, and tailing off in January, being similar in Zones 4 and 8. Winterbottom (1968a) recorded egg-laying September–October in the southwestern Cape Province. Maclean (1993b) reported seasons of August–December in the Cape Province and October–December in KwaZulu-Natal.

Interspecific relationships: It has two close relations, the Blackcrowned *T. senegala* and Threestreaked Tchagras. Ecologically it is closest to the Threestreaked which utilizes the same general habitat structure. The ranges of the two overlap slightly in KwaZulu-Natal. Range overlap is much greater with the Blackcrowned Tchagra (the whole of KwaZulu-Natal and the far eastern Cape Province) but the latter is typical of more open habitats and also occurs at higher altitudes.

Historical distribution and conservation: The historical range is not well known, but probably differed little from the atlas data. For example, the KwaZulu-Natal distribution and abundance in the 1970s was much as it is now (Cyrus & Robson 1980). In the Cape Province it may have penetrated a little further inland in

the past; Winterbottom (1962a) recorded it in Colesberg (3025CA). Uys (1989), however, considered it to have increased in abundance in the southwestern Cape Province over the past 30 years. In the Transvaal, Lawson & Edmonds (1983) claimed the first records in the eastern escarpment. However, older records exist: McLachlan & Liversidge (1957) noted two records just north of Pretoria (2528CA), and Van der Merwe & Pienaar (1959) recorded the bird at Percy Fyfe Nature Reserve (2429AA). Although their list has other demonstrable weaknesses it was accepted by Winterbottom (1962a) in an avifaunal analysis. Also included in this analysis was a record by Calder (1948), on a Kruger Park list which, however, omitted the Threestreaked Tchagra. It is certain that all the pre-1983 Transvaal records were misidentifications of the Threestreaked Tchagra.

The Southern Tchagra is fairly common in its restricted range, has benefited from the spread of alien trees and thickets in some areas, and is not of particular conservation concern.

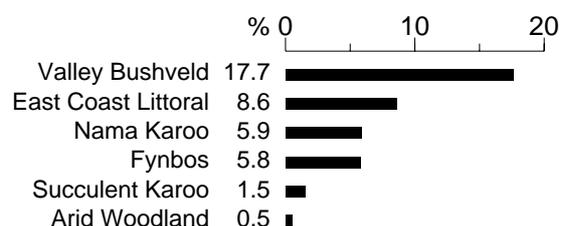
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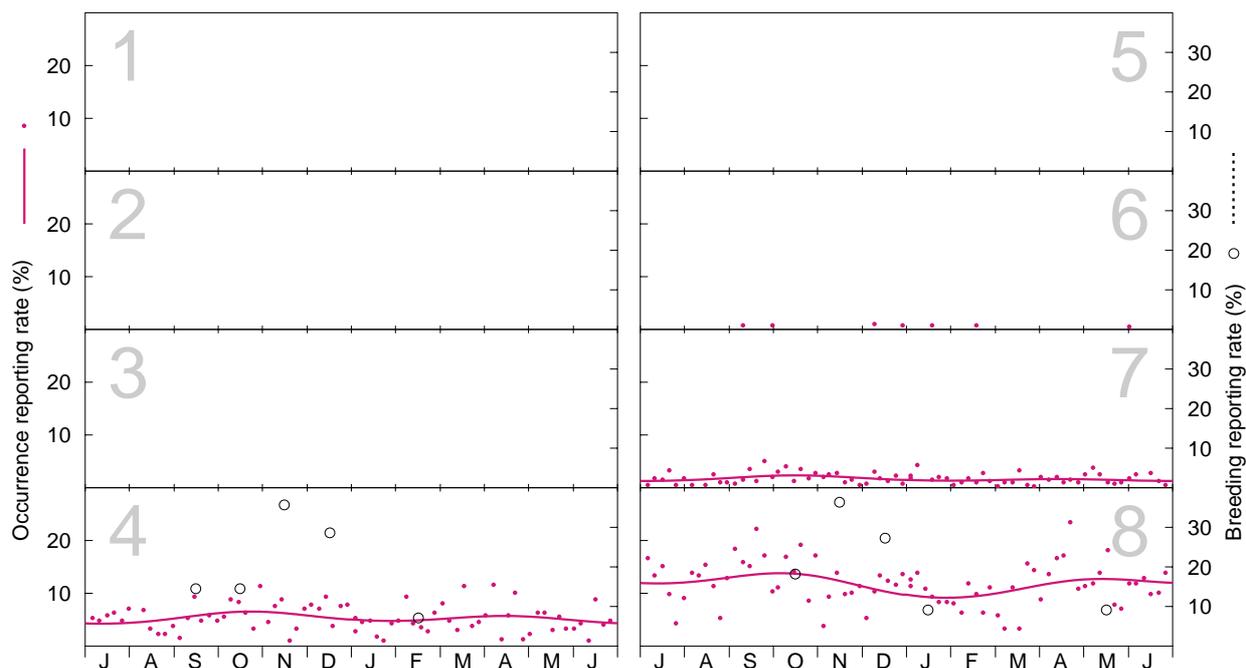
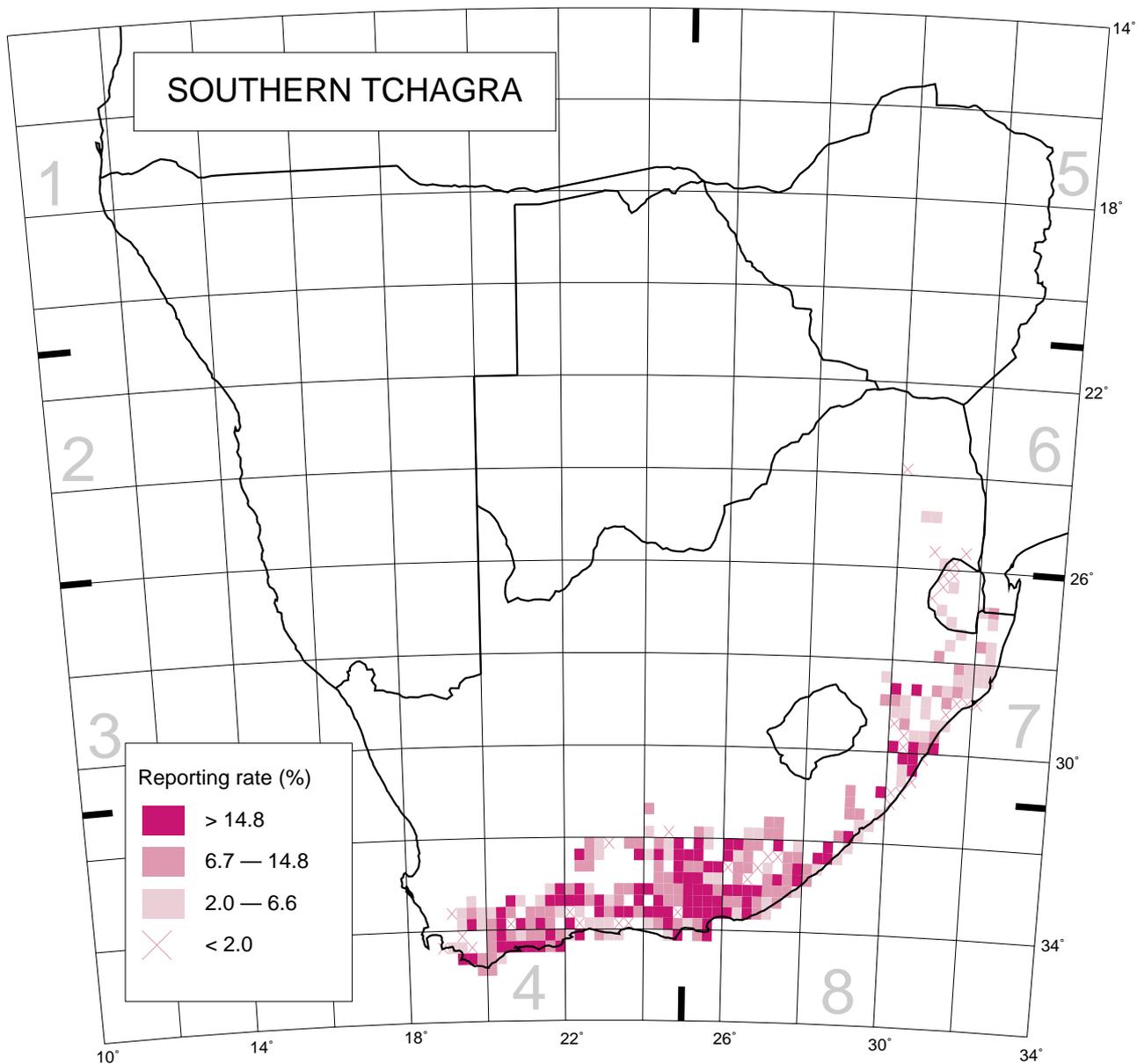
Recorded in 302 grid cells, 6.7%

Total number of records: 3931

Mean reporting rate for range: 11.6%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 0, 0, 0, 464, 0, 7, 324, 648; Breeding: 0, 0, 0, 14, 0, 0, 0, 11.