



Redbilled Helmetshrike

Swarthelmlaksman

Prionops retzii

The Redbilled Helmetshrike is typical of tropical Africa south of the equator, but its distribution in the atlas region extends south of the tropics in the eastern Transvaal, Swaziland and northern KwaZulu-Natal. It was also recorded throughout Zimbabwe, northern Botswana and the adjacent Caprivi, and infrequently further west in northern Namibia. There are strongholds in the Okavango, in the Zambezi Valley, the southeastern lowlands in Zimbabwe and the Transvaal lowveld. The two subspecies in the region (Clancey 1980b) appear to have continuous ranges.

It lives in communally breeding groups of 3–10 birds which maintain large territories. It is conspicuous when flying from tree to tree but may be overlooked at times owing to its dark coloration and preference for dense vegetation. It may be confused with the Chestnutfronted Helmetshrike *P. scopifrons* in the small area where the two species overlap.

Habitat: It lives in tall, moist deciduous and riparian woodlands, including Mopane, miombo and *Baikiaea*, but not *Terminalia* woodland. It tends to disperse into a wider range of woodland types in the winter (Harris & Arnott 1988). In some relatively arid areas the groups are confined to strips of woodland along watercourses. The vegetation types in which it was most frequently recorded are Okavango, Mopane and Miombo.

Movements: The Redbilled Helmetshrike is reported to be a resident which may have local movements during the winter (Irwin 1981). The atlas data show substantial seasonal variation in reporting rates, with peaks in winter (July) and troughs in summer (February) in Zone 5, but almost opposite peaks and troughs in the west (Zone 1). These seasonal differences may possibly be ascribed to increased local movement in winter and perhaps movement into and out of the region during this time.

Breeding: Egg-laying is in spring and summer, mainly August–November (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). The few atlas data are skewed to later dates, presumably by records of fledglings.

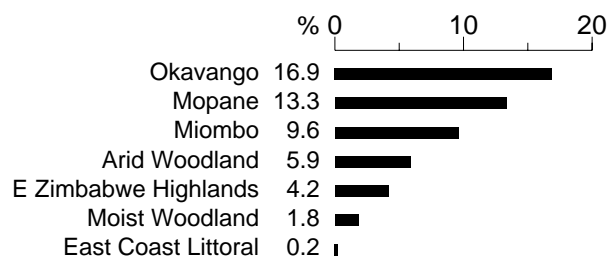
Interspecific relationships: It overlaps over a large area with the White Helmetshrike *P. plumatus* and over a small area with the Chestnutfronted Helmetshrike. It sometimes occurs alongside both of these species, although the White Helmetshrike tends to prefer more open habitats and the Chestnutfronted Helmetshrike more densely wooded habitats than the Redbilled Helmetshrike. Relative to the White Helmetshrike, the Redbilled Helmetshrike occurs at lower densities (Vernon 1977).

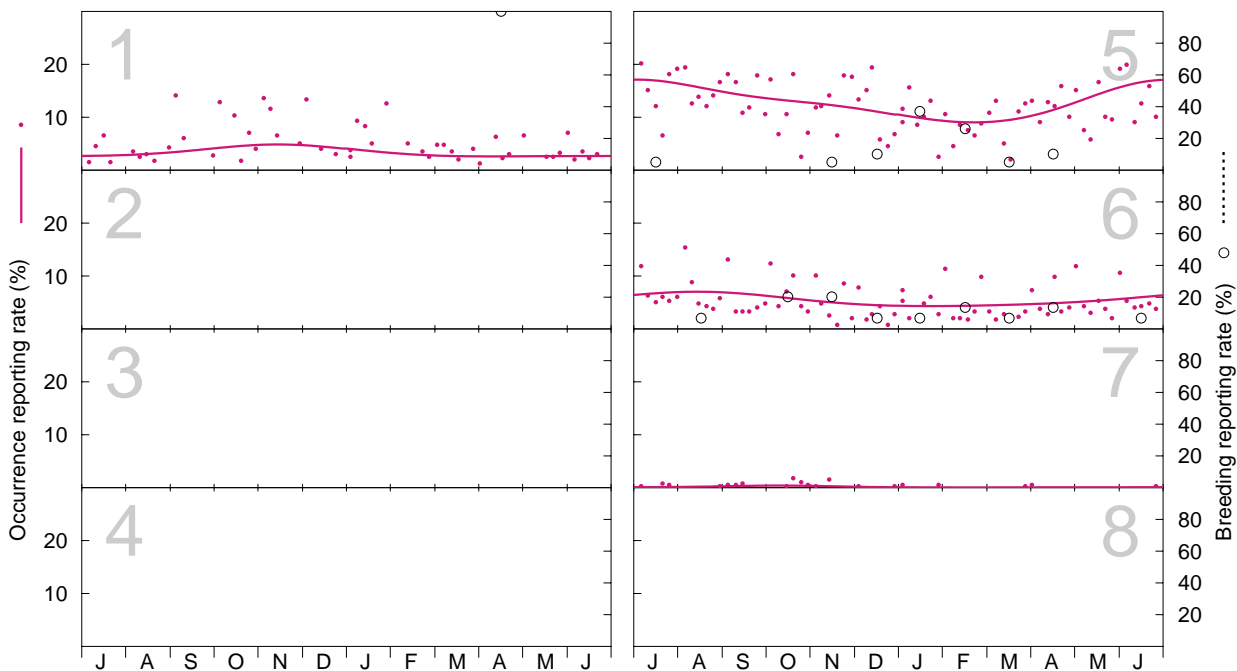
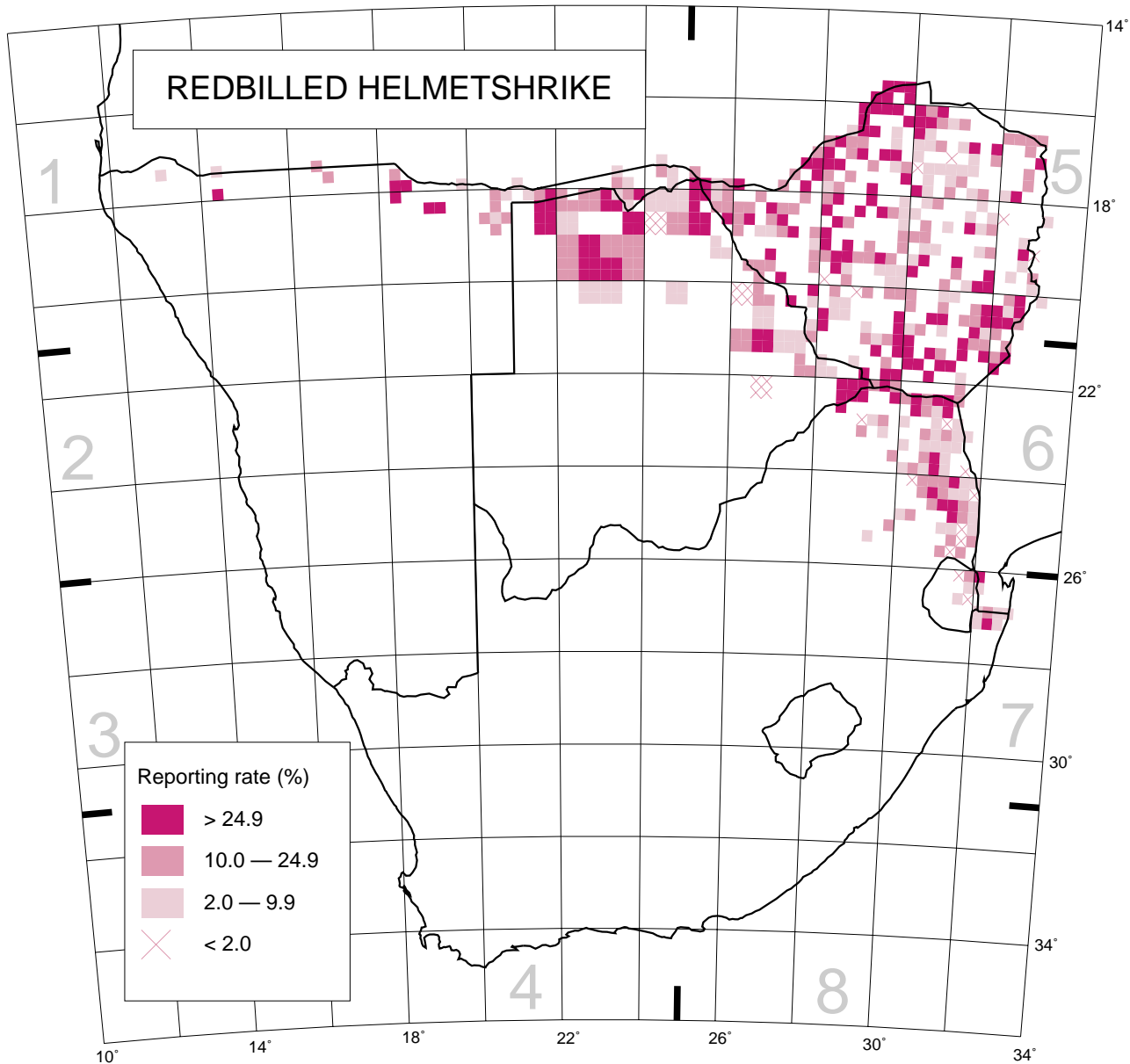
Historical distribution and conservation: The atlas data accord with the previously known range (Hall & Moreau 1970). The present range is probably not much different from that of the past, but abundance may have been affected by the removal of natural woodland. The continued depletion of natural woodlands for firewood and agricultural lands could cause the Redbilled Helmetshrike to become threatened within southern Africa in the future.

C.J. Vernon and V. Parker

Recorded in 535 grid cells, 11.8%
Total number of records: 3134
Mean reporting rate for range: 15.9%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 107, 0, 0, 0, 1129, 618, 29, 0; Breeding: 2, 0, 0, 0, 19, 15, 0, 0.