Gurney's Sugarbird

Rooiborssuikervoël

Promerops gurneyi

Endemic to southern Africa, the nominate race has a restricted range along the Drakensberg escarpment from the eastern Cape Province to the eastern Transvaal and Swaziland; the subspecies *P. g. ardens* occurs in eastern Zimbabwe and adjacent Mozambique (Irwin 1981). There are isolated populations in the Waterberg (2427B, 2428A) and Soutpansberg (23°S) mountain ranges in the Transvaal (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). Although it occurs in neighbouring parts of KwaZulu-Natal (Cyrus & Robson 1980) and Transkei (Quickelberge 1989), there do not appear to be any records from within Lesotho (Jacot-Guillarmod 1963; Osborne & Tigar 1990; Bonde 1993). It is a conspicuous species in its specialized habitat, but was probably under-reported as it inhabits mountainous terrain.

Habitat: Its distribution coincides with the mountain grassland veld types associated with *Protea* spp. (Acocks 1988; De Swardt 1992). High reporting rates came from the Alpine and Sour Grassland vegetation types. The sugarbirds were also reported in grassland areas bordering Afromontane forests. Here they visit flowering plant species such as *Protea caffra*, *Greyia radlkoferi* and *Hallerida lucida* along forest margins, but always return to patches of *Protea roupelliae* (De Swardt & Louw 1994). High reporting rates were obtained in the *Protea–Brachystegia*-dominated areas of the eastern highlands of Zimbabwe (Friedman 1952).

Movements: It disperses from *Protea* areas during winter (Maclean 1993b) and seasonal movements have been recorded between the low-lying Lydenburg (2530AB) area and the high-lying Long Tom Pass (2530BA) (De Swardt 1989, 1991a). These movements occur mainly after the peak October–February flowering period of *P. roupelliae* (De Swardt 1991a). It was observed to visit suburban Lydenburg during winter when *P. roupelliae* nectar in the mountain grasslands becomes depleted. Individuals tend to return to the same mountain localities in summer. The mean distances moved were 7.0 km (n = 21; range 5.7–10.5 km) between the suburban and mountainous habitats (De Swardt 1991a, unpubl. data). Dispersal from natal territories of young individuals also occurs, and birds leave burnt *Protea* veld after veldfires (De Swardt 1993). The models tend to show higher reporting rates during winter probably because the birds are more conspicuous at lower altitudes. The two records from Lammerkop (2529CB; Transvaal highveld) and Kaalrug (2531DA; Transvaal lowveld), which were for June and October respectively, also suggest seasonal movements (see also Gouws 1994; Lawson 1994).

Breeding: The atlas breeding data span September–March. There was a November–January peak at Lydenburg where the preferred nest sites were mainly *Protea* bushes (De Swardt & Bothma 1992). In the eastern Transvaal, the breeding season coincided with the peak flowering period of *P. roupelliae* (De Swardt 1991a). Unusual breeding was noted during winter in KwaZulu-Natal (Nevill 1987; Martin *et al.* 1988) and late autumn at Lydenburg (pers. obs).

Interspecific relationships: Malachite Sunbirds *Nectarinia famosa* are common in *Protea* veld, but occur at lower densities than sugarbirds (De Swardt 1993). In the past, both Gurney's and Cape *P. cafer* Sugarbirds have been found breeding in the Amatole Mountains (3227CA) where they were common (Skead 1964d), but the present atlas data show no overlap in their ranges, although they occur in close proximity in the eastern Cape Province.

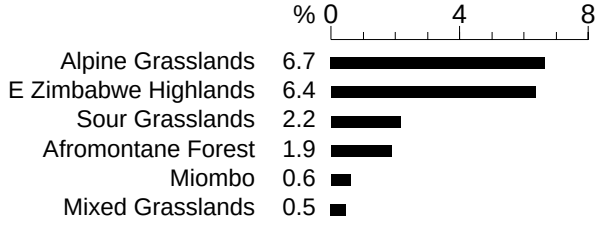
Historical distribution and conservation: The distribution is similar to that presented by Skead (1967c). The range of the two sugarbird species overlapped historically in thickets of *Protea roupelliae* in the eastern Cape Province, where both species were found breeding (Skead 1964d, 1967c). The range of Gurney's Sugarbird may have contracted in this area because of fires in the mountainous areas. *P. roupelliae* is not fire resistant which may have resulted in a decline in the populations of this *Protea* (Rourke 1980).

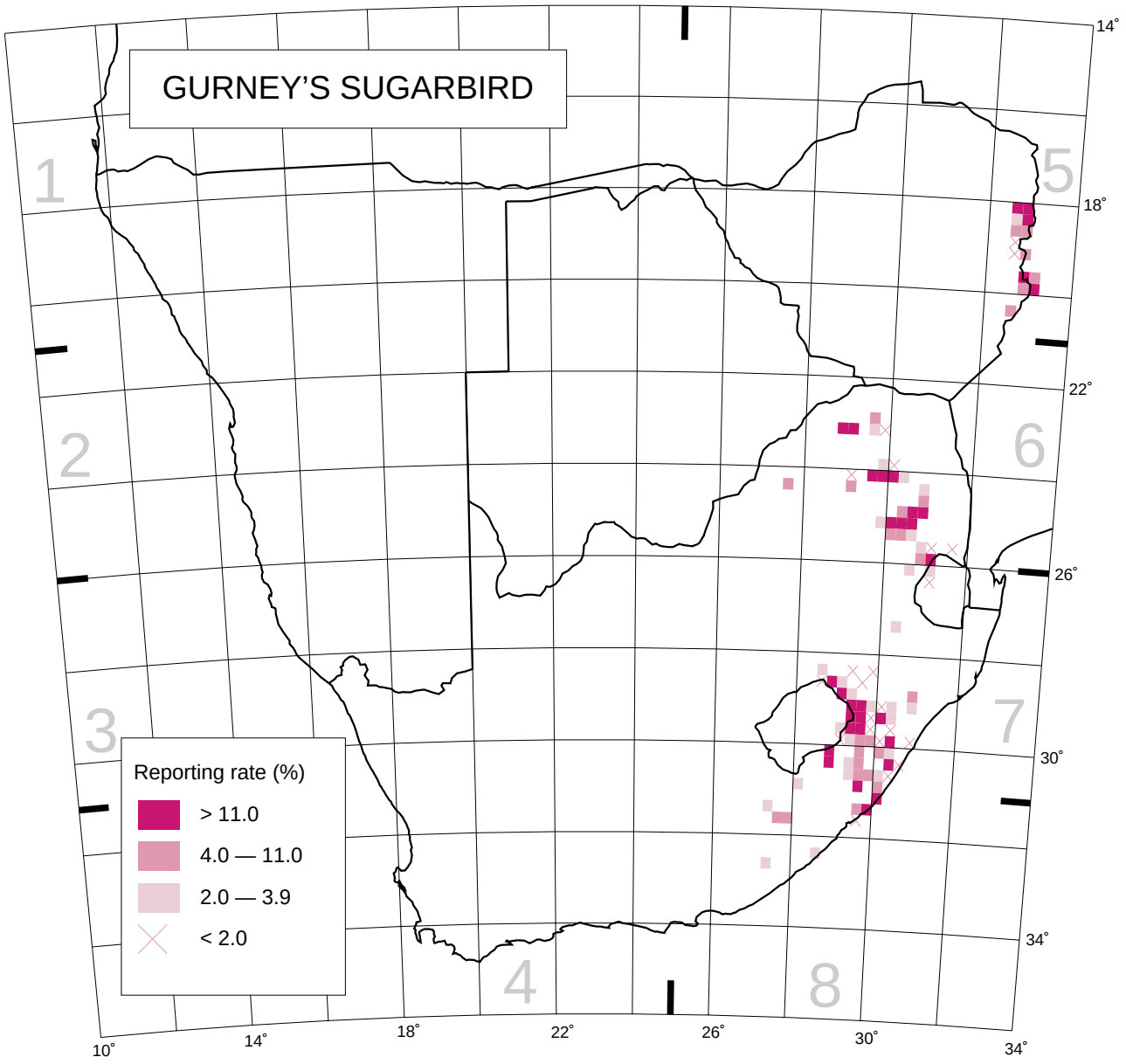
Gurney's Sugarbird is not considered to be threatened in South Africa (Brooke 1984b), but the conservation of its habitat is essential (Siegfried 1984). Veldfires in the higher mountainous areas are a regular occurrence, but habitat destruction by unnatural or too frequent fires as a result of human interference are considered a threat. *P. roupelliae* survives fires by recovering from undamaged leaf buds; hot late-summer fires are responsible for the total destruction of shrub crowns. Sugarbirds disperse away from such destroyed *Protea* clumps to adjacent undamaged clumps (De Swardt 1993). Because the sugarbirds are dependent on proteas, the management of *Protea* veld by conservation authorities and private landowners is a priority (De Swardt 1993).

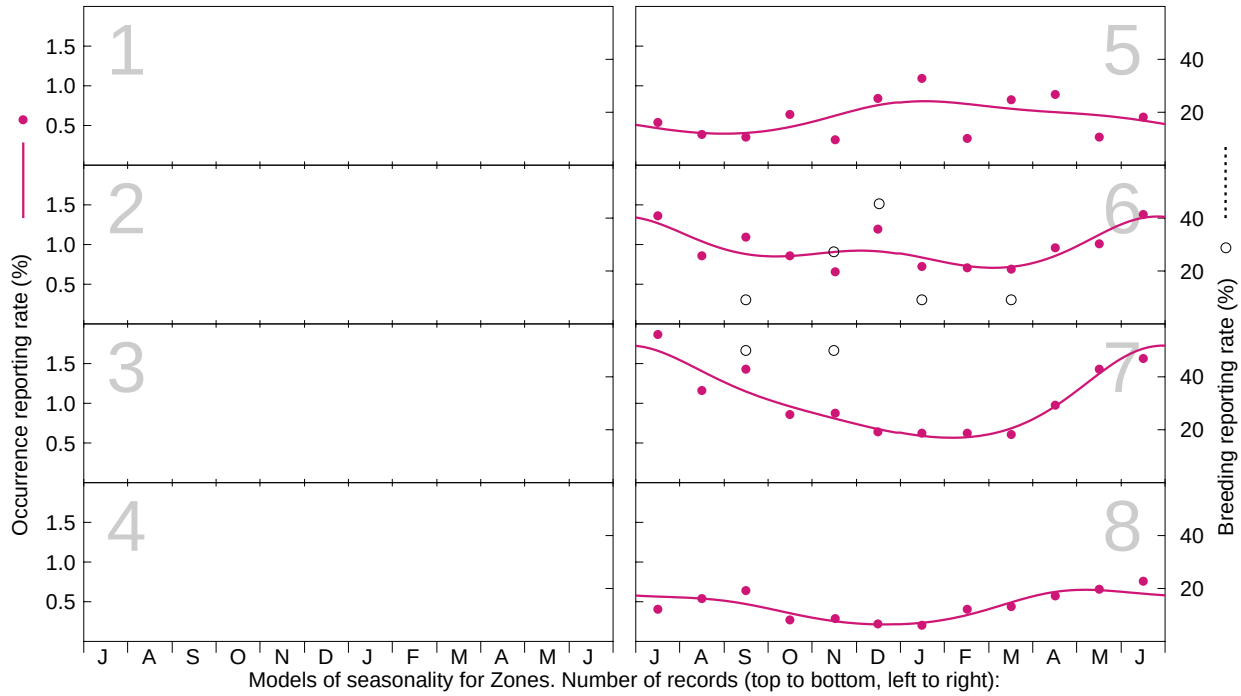
D.H. de Swardt

Recorded in 108 grid cells, 2.4%
Total number of records: 827
Mean reporting rate for range: 6.5%

Reporting rates for vegetation types







Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
Occurrence: 0, 0, 0, 0, 69, 234, 472, 52; Breeding: 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 11, 2, 0.