



Orangebreasted Sunbird

Oranjeborssuikerbekkie

Nectarinia violacea

The Orangebreasted Sunbird is endemic to the fynbos biome (Clancey 1986a). It occurs on Cape fold mountains from sea-level to the high peaks, occupying the same area as the Cape Sugarbird *Promerops cafer*. Its distribution extends from Vanrhynsdorp (3118DA) to Port Elizabeth (3325DC), but it is absent or scarce away from mountains along the west coast.

While the sugarbird feeds predominantly from proteaceous inflorescences, the Orangebreasted Sunbird is strongly associated with tubular-flowered *Erica* spp., with which it appears to have co-evolved and which it pollinates (Rebello *et al.* 1984; Rebello 1987). Females may be mistaken for those of the Lesser Doublecollared Sunbird *N. chalybea*, but where their ranges overlap they occupy largely different habitats (the former in fynbos, the latter in forest). The atlas data are reliable.

Habitat: It is restricted to fynbos shrublands within which it is found wherever plants of the genera *Protea*, *Mimetes*, *Leucospermum* or tubular-flowered *Erica* spp. are in bloom and there are small shrubs in which to nest. Nevertheless, it does occasionally venture beyond its traditional habitat and has been recorded in the Karoo 'many kilometres' from the nearest fynbos (Martin *et al.* 1990b). This may represent movement between mountain ranges, a response to habitat loss (through burning), or natural vagrancy. Its occurrence in strandveld has been tentatively ascribed to widespread burning of fynbos (Fraser & McMahon 1992b).

Movements: In common with other nectarivores, it tracks the flowering of food plants. Wooller (1982) called it 'a mobile exploiter of scattered flowers'. Its movements are poorly known, however, not least because of the mountainous and remote nature of its habitat. The altitudinal migration suggested by Rebello *et al.* (1984) is given support by the sighting of a Kirstenbosch-ringed bird on the eastern plateau of Table Mountain (3318CD), only 4 km distant but 320 m higher up, in successive summers (Fraser *et al.* 1989). Reporting rates were lower in summer, which is presumably due to a partial migration out of lowlands into highlands where few observers ventured.

Breeding: It breeds virtually year-round, as shown by the atlas data and published egg-laying information (Winterbottom 1968a). The atlas data, however, shows a strong peak July–September, and June–August from egg-laying information. Differences in the timing of nesting across relatively short distances, e.g. between the Cape Peninsula (3418AB) and Hottentots Holland Mountains (3319C) (Skead 1967c), presumably reflect fine-scale variation in rainfall and/or flowering phenology of food plants. The breeding biology of the Orangebreasted Sunbird has been described in detail (Broekhuysen 1963; Skead 1967c; Williams 1993a).

Interspecific relationships: It is often ousted from flowering proteaceous shrubs by Cape Sugarbirds. At *Mimetes hirtus*, however, the sunbirds feed lower down the flowering spike than the sugarbird, a tactic which may reduce competition (Collins 1983). It has been recorded as a brood host of Klaas's Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx klaas* (Rowan 1983).

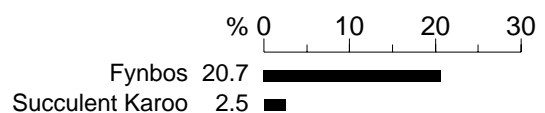
Historical distribution and conservation: The present distribution differs from Skead (1967c) only in the latter's records from almost 28°E. These are 'aberrant records' and there is thus no evidence of any recent large-scale changes in range.

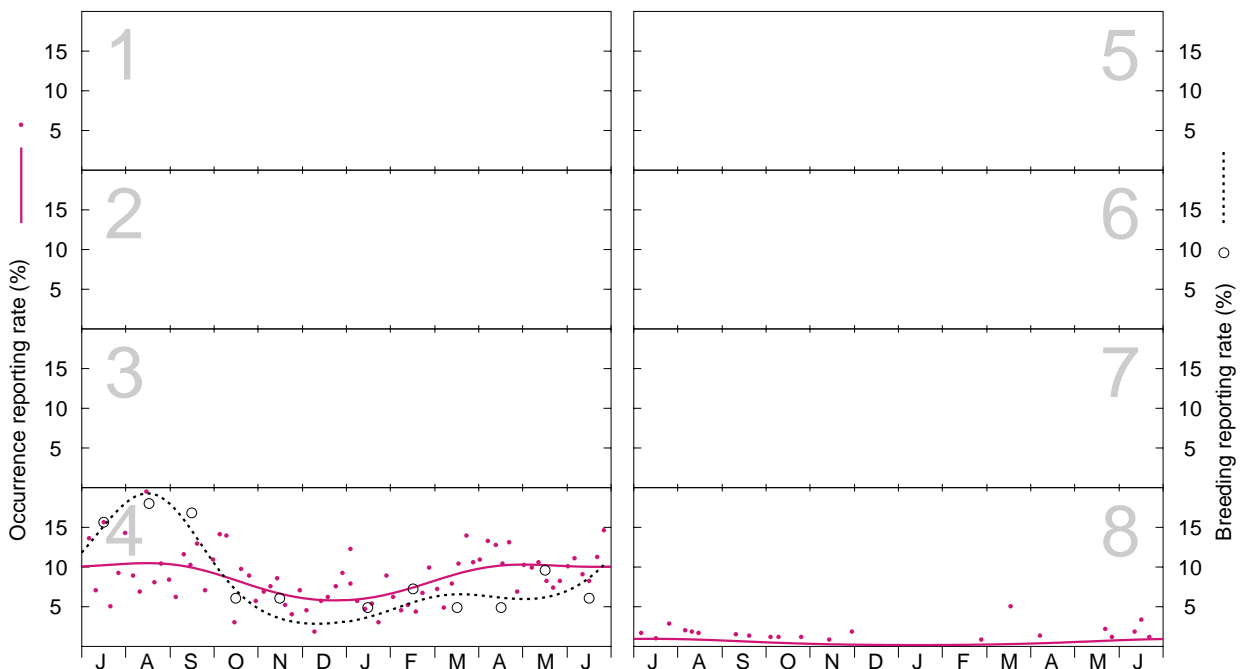
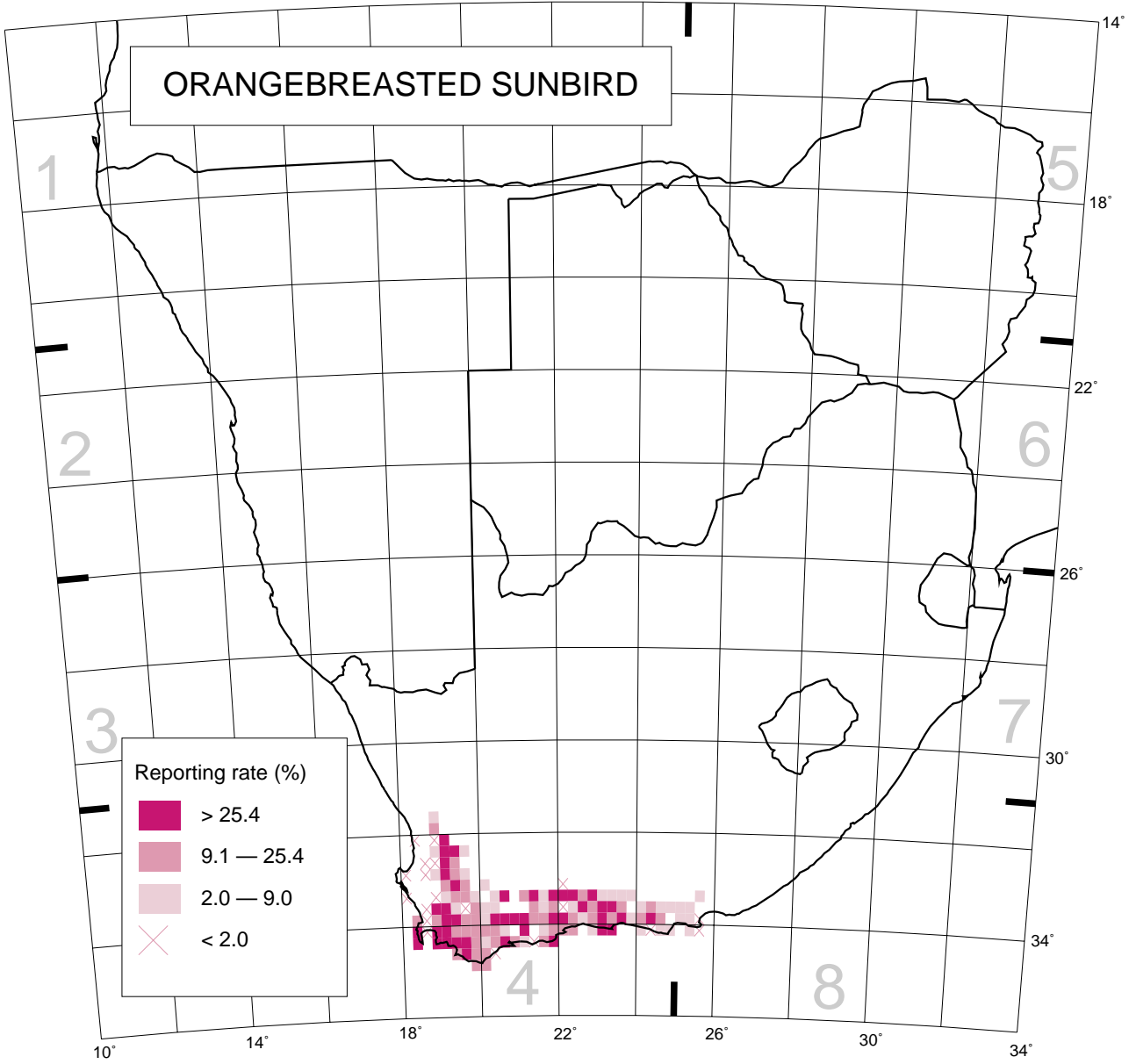
As a fynbos-biome endemic, the Orangebreasted Sunbird is exposed to those threats which impose upon this floristically diverse ecosystem as a whole. These include infestation by alien woody plants (notably *Pinus* spp. and Australian *Acacia* and *Hakea* spp.), too-frequent burning and, in the coastal lowlands, urban and agricultural development. Densities of Orangebreasted Sunbirds at the Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve (3418AD) dropped 77% with increasing infestation of fynbos by *Acacia cyclops*. This may result in disruption and breakdown of the bird–plant pollination relationship as elements of the indigenous year-round nectar source are eliminated by alien plants (Fraser & Crowe 1990).

M.W. Fraser

Recorded in 138 grid cells, 3.0%
Total number of records: 4393
Mean reporting rate for range: 21.7%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 0, 0, 0, 772, 0, 0, 0, 27; Breeding: 0, 0, 0, 83, 0, 0, 0, 0.