

Marico Sunbird

Maricosuikerbekkie

Nectarinia mariquensis

The Marico Sunbird occurs widely in southern and eastern Africa (Maclean 1993b). In southern Africa, the distribution is similar to that of thornveld endemics of the Kalahari basin, but also extends into the lowveld of the eastern Transvaal, Swaziland and KwaZulu-Natal. It is virtually absent from the escarpment in the eastern Transvaal which separates the eastern lowland race *N. m. lucens* from the nominate race to the west (Clancey 1980b). The range of the race *ovamboensis* in northern Namibia (Clancey 1980b) appears to be continuous with the nominate race to the south.

There are strongholds on the periphery of the Kalahari in southeastern Botswana and the adjacent parts of the Transvaal, and in the Okavango. In 15 transect-counts in eight woodland habitats in northern and eastern Botswana, average densities of 1 bird/2.4 ha were observed, but peak abundances reached 1 bird/0.5–1 ha in the northern Kalahari (Herremans 1992d). The apparent gaps in eastern Namibia and in central Botswana probably result from insufficient atlas coverage.

It is very active and defends temporary feeding territories throughout the year, making it conspicuous. It is difficult to distinguish from the Purplebanded Sunbird *N. bifasciata*, but their ranges overlap only marginally.

Habitat: It is an *Acacia*-thornveld specialist, feeding in summer mostly near flowering *Acacia* and in winter on *Loranthus*, *Aloe* and *Cadabe* species. It is concentrated in swamp-fringing forest in the Okavango (Brown 1990a; Brewster 1991) where large numbers feed in winter on flowers of *Loranthus* parasitizing tall *Acacia nigrescens*, and in the Mababe Depression (1824C) feeding in winter on *Cadabe termitaria* bushes. It is common in the Kalahari basin, particularly in all woodlands dominated by *Acacia*, but also in broadleaved woodlands with an *Acacia* component (e.g. Northern Kalahari, Arid and Moist Woodland and Mopane). In relatively arid areas it is particularly associated with riverine vegetation (Skead 1967c; Irwin 1981; Maclean 1993b) and this accounts for outlying records in the south and west.

Movements: Seasonal movements have been mentioned for Mozambique (Benson 1982), and there is evidence that many birds leave the arid Kalahari in the dry season and

during droughts (Herremans 1992d). In contrast, it increases at the northeastern edge of its range in Zimbabwe in the dry season, and particularly during droughts (Irwin 1981; Tree 1990d, 1992i).

The models show lower reporting rates in winter; these parallel breeding seasonality quite closely and might be related to changes in conspicuousness, but the males do not have an eclipse plumage (Skead 1967c). There is little seasonal trend in the more mesic northeast (Zone 5), but there is a dry-season decrease in the arid west (Zones 1–2), and a late dry-season increase is apparent in Zones 1 and 6. This may reflect movements from the arid Kalahari sandveld to the hardveld area in eastern Botswana, the western Transvaal and more mesic northern areas.

Breeding: The atlas records were all August–May, indicating breeding throughout spring and the wet summer, with a distinct peak in spring and early summer (September–January). This largely confirms earlier information on breeding (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Maclean 1993b; Skinner 1995a). Although there were no breeding records from Zone 7, breeding has previously been reported from KwaZulu-Natal (Dean 1971).

Interspecific relationships: Of the 18 *Nectarinia* sunbirds in the region, it is the only one specializing in the dry thornveld of the Kalahari basin. It overlaps most widely with the much smaller Whitebellied Sunbird *N. talatala* (Herremans 1992d), but is clearly dominant over that species. Overlap with the similarly sized Greater Double-collared Sunbird *N. afra*, which prefers *Protea* woodland, is limited (De Swardt 1991b). Similarly, overlap with the larger sunbirds (Black *N. amethystina* and Scarlet-chested *N. senegalensis*) is marginal because of different habitat preferences (Herremans 1992d). It is replaced by the similar Purplebanded Sunbird in the mesic woodlands in the far east and north of the region.

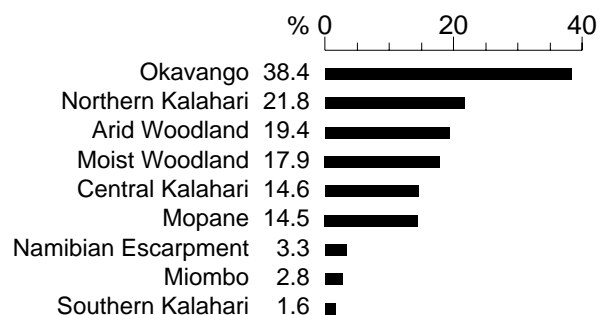
It is a host of Klaas's Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx klaas* (Maclean 1993b).

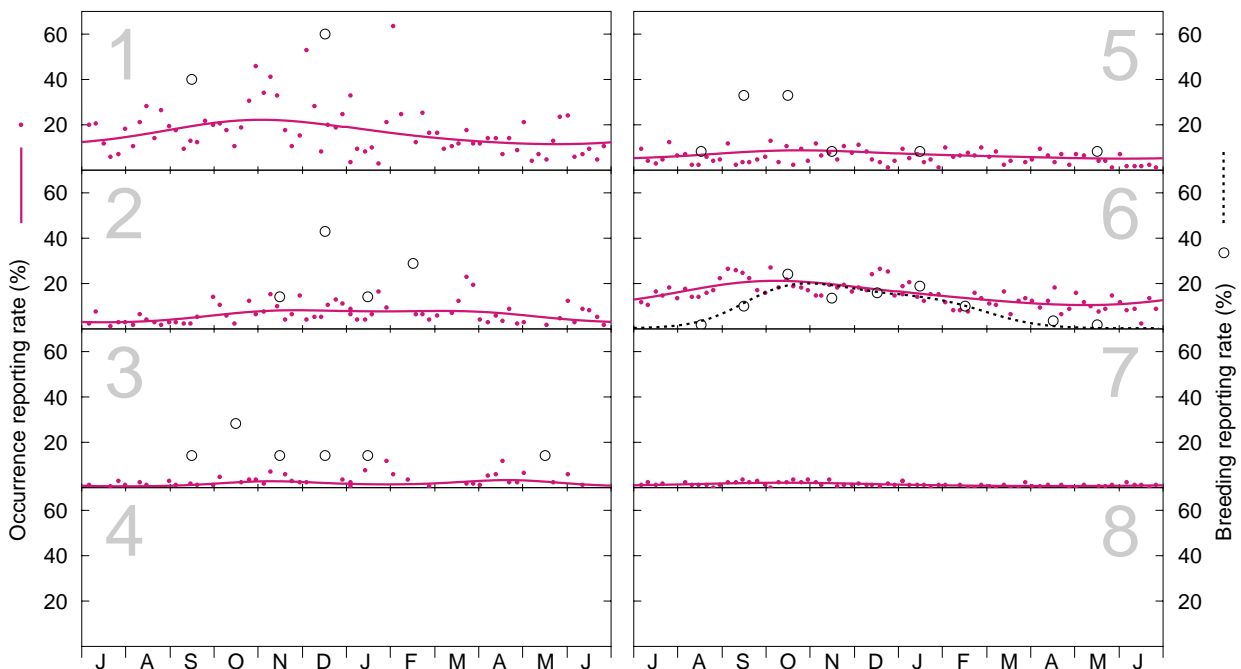
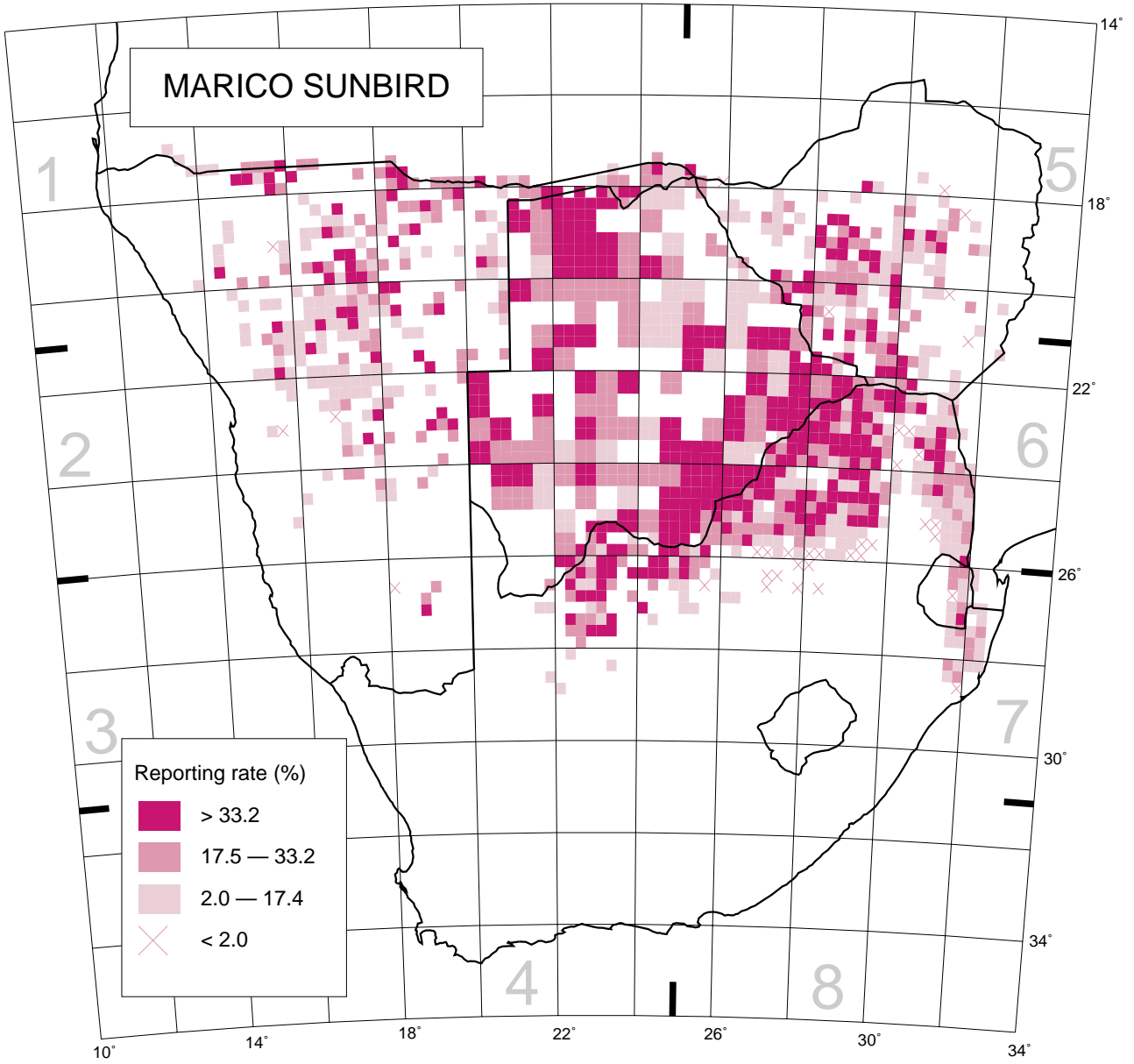
Historical distribution and conservation: The distribution map extends the previously known range as shown by Skead (1967c), especially to include large areas of southern Botswana and the northern Cape Province. The Marico Sunbird is common and widespread and of no immediate conservation concern.

M. Herremans

Recorded in 1328 grid cells, 29.3%
Total number of records: 8402
Mean reporting rate for range: 18.7%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 515, 215, 103, 0, 591, 1755, 259, 0; Breeding: 5, 7, 7, 0, 12, 58, 0, 0.