



Whitebellied Sunbird

Witpensuikerbekkie

Nectarinia talatala

The Whitebellied Sunbird occurs widely in southern Africa from northern Namibia eastwards through northern and eastern Botswana to Zimbabwe and Mozambique, and southwards through the Transvaal, Swaziland and the Free State as far south as southern KwaZulu-Natal. Beyond southern Africa, it occurs in southern Angola, Zambia and southern Tanzania (Skead 1967c). Particularly high reporting rates were obtained from the Transvaal, eastern Botswana, eastern Swaziland and northern KwaZulu-Natal. It is almost completely absent from the alpine, sour and mixed grasslands of the southeastern Transvaal and north-eastern Free State, although it was recorded both to the east and west of these regions. The three subspecies recognized by Clancey (1980b) have continuous ranges in the atlas map.

It is quite variable and the more yellow-bellied forms, not to mention newly fledged, short-billed juveniles, have given rise to identification problems with not only the Yellowbellied *N. venusta* but also the Bluethroated *Antheptes reichenowi* Sunbird (Hustler 1985c).

Habitat: It frequents a wide range of woodland and bush types with the highest reporting rates from the moist woodlands of the Transvaal, but nearly all woodlands within its range are inhabited at some time of the year. Open savanna is preferred to unbroken stands of woodland such as Mopane or miombo. During the winter months when nectar-bearing blossoms are at their most prolific, large numbers of Whitebellied Sunbirds may be attracted to these sources, regardless of woodland type. In Botswana in September, maximal densities of 3 birds/ha in stands of blooming *Combretum mossambicense* were found, while densities ranged widely in a variety of other woodlands, up to 1.5–2 birds/ha (Herremans 1992d).

Movements: Throughout its southern range, it is either migratory to a varying degree or subject to considerable nomadic wandering. At a local scale, seasonal changes in numbers can be dramatic (Herremans 1992d). There appear to be movements along a west–east or south–north axis, from the more arid western regions where it breeds in summer, into the more mesic eastern and northern parts of the range where it spends the dry winter months (Skead

1967c; Tree 1990d; Herremans 1992d). Active passage of migrants has been observed in northern Botswana (Borello 1992a). More westerly wintering may occur following good summer rains, while birds vacate areas affected by drought (Herremans 1992d). This pattern of seasonality is reflected in the models with a summer peak in reporting rates in the west and an increase during the dry season in the east. There also appears to be a movement of eastern populations into southeastern Zimbabwe during the dry season (Irwin 1981). The pattern of seasonality is not as well defined in KwaZulu-Natal (Zone 7), but is indicative of similar seasonal movements. In Swaziland there was no evidence of seasonality (Parker 1994). It does not have an eclipse plumage (Tree 1990d) and this factor therefore did not contribute to the seasonal variation in reporting.

Breeding: The models show a strong peak September–January in the eastern Zones. Occasional breeding takes place in these areas at any other time of year. Egg-laying records for Namibia come from February–March (Winterbottom 1971d; Brown & Clinning in press).

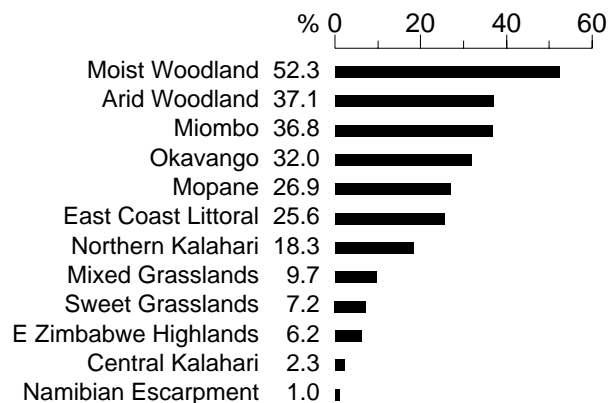
Interspecific relationships: It forms a breeding mosaic with the Miombo Doublecollared Sunbird *N. manoensis*, the latter inhabiting patches of more heavily wooded country when breeding (Irwin 1981) and there does not appear to be direct competition between the two. It overlaps with Marico Sunbird *N. mariquensis* which generally displaces it at nectar sources.

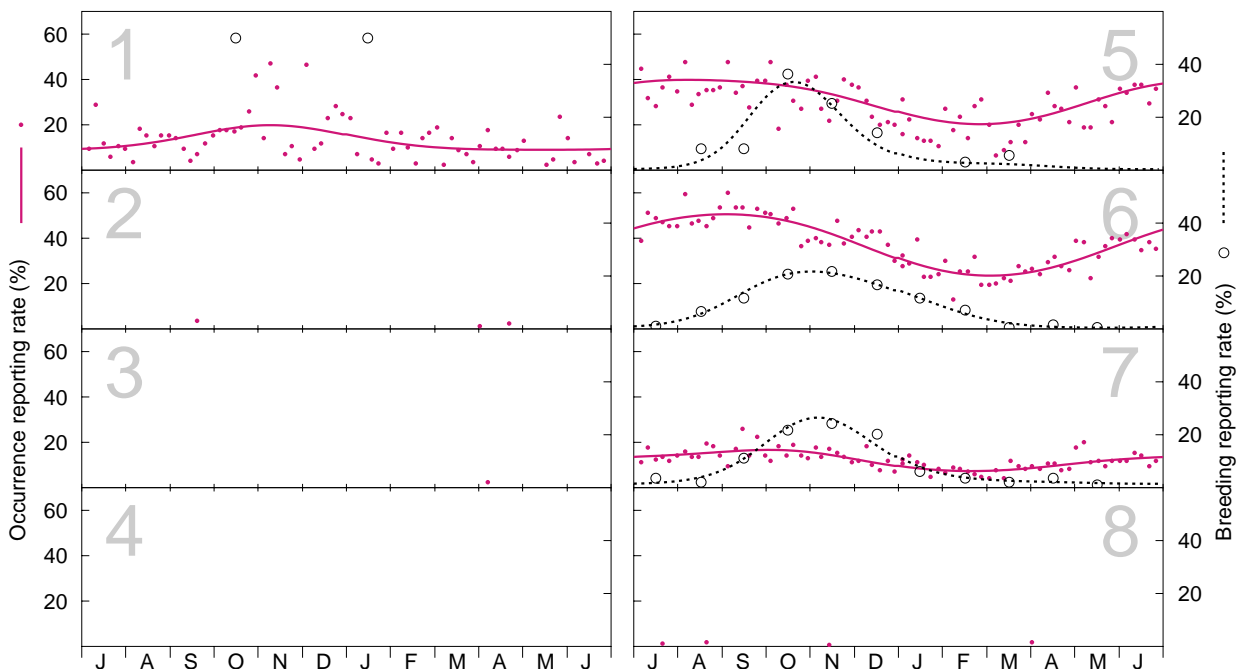
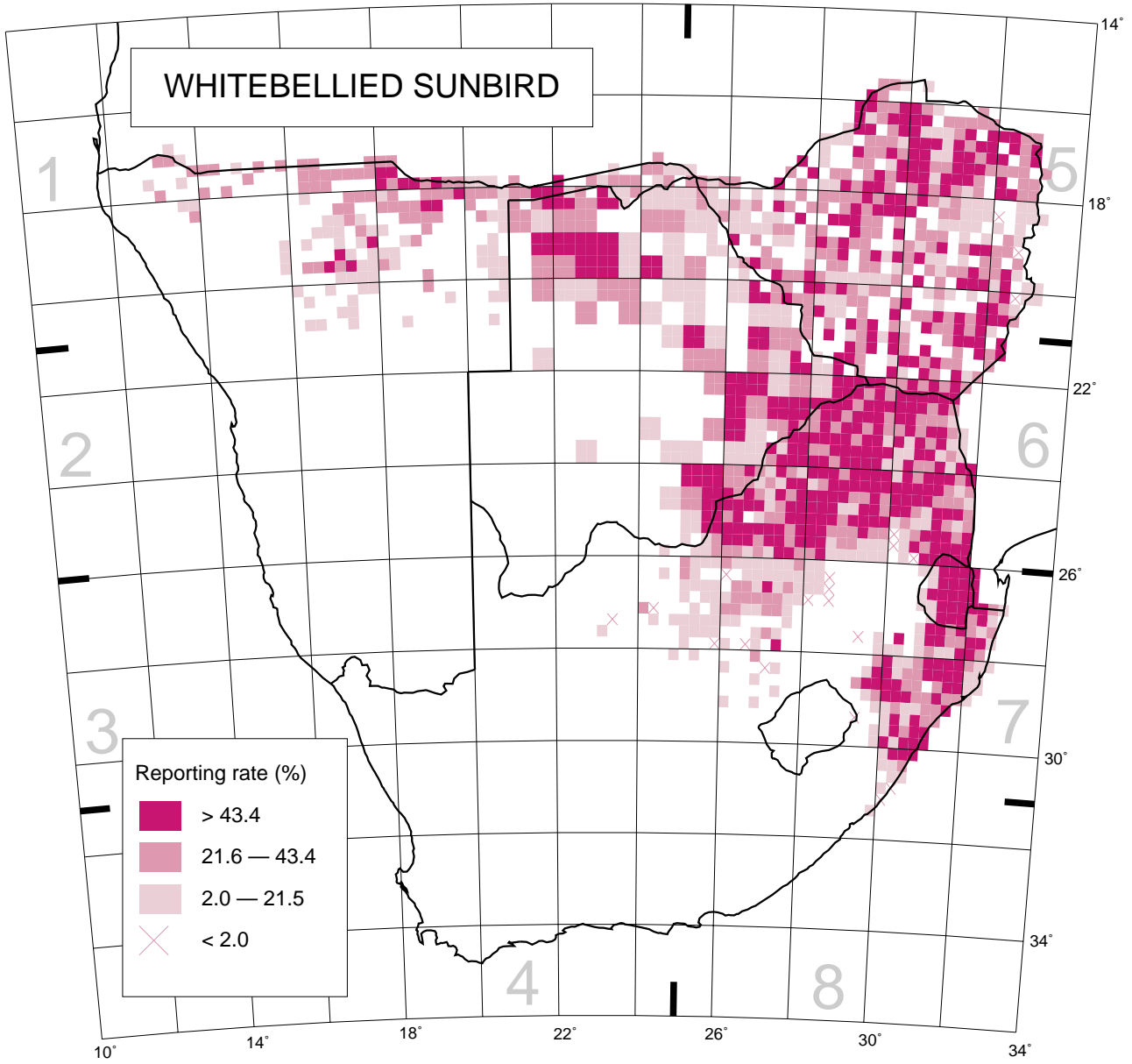
Historical distribution and conservation: The atlas map shows the Whitebellied Sunbird to occur in several regions for which an earlier map (Skead 1967c) did not: in the Limpopo drainage and southeastern Botswana, in the northern and central Free State and in central KwaZulu-Natal. The opening up of the miombo woodlands in Zimbabwe has probably allowed some local expansion of its range in that region.

A.J. Tree

Recorded in 1483 grid cells, 32.7%
Total number of records: 24 766
Mean reporting rate for range: 33.8%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 404, 4, 2, 0, 2761, 4241, 2359, 4; Breeding: 2, 0, 0, 0, 36, 168, 83, 0.