

## Dusky Sunbird

### Namakwasuikerbekkie

*Nectarinia fusca*

The Dusky Sunbird is a southern African endemic species with a distribution confined to the arid and semi-arid west. In South Africa it occupies the Karoo and Kalahari and it is also widespread in western and southern Namibia. It extends into southwestern Angola and occurs marginally in southwestern Botswana, but avoids the centre of the Kalahari in that country.

Reporting rates indicate greatest densities along the western Orange River and the Namibian escarpment. Areas of apparent absence in the Karoo have probably resulted from less than comprehensive coverage and/or temporarily unfavourable conditions, and are therefore unlikely to be true 'holes' in the distribution. The patchy distribution of watercourses and broken ground, and hence of trees in arid areas, would also have contributed to the discontinuous pattern of distribution. It avoids the 'sand sea' of the southern Namib.

Some degree of confusion with female Lesser Double-collared Sunbirds *N. chalybea* in the Karoo, and with female Marico Sunbirds *N. mariquensis* and male and female Whitebellied Sunbirds *N. talatala* in northern Namibia, may have occurred. It occurs singly or in pairs, except when aggregated at abundant sources of nectar.

**Habitat:** The vegetation analysis clearly shows its choice of arid habitats. The Namibian Escarpment had a reporting rate nearly double that of the next two most favoured vegetation types, Namib and Nama Karoo. It is found in scrubby habitats, including *Acacia* scrub along watercourses. It appears to prefer broken ground and rocky habitats, as reflected in the high reporting rate from the Namibian Escarpment, possibly because flowering succulents such as aloes and crassulas are more common in such areas. It is also attracted to homesteads with their irrigated orchards and gardens.

**Movements:** The models do not show any regular seasonal pattern of movements. As with most birds of arid country, the Dusky Sunbird is nomadic (Maclean 1993b) in response to the availability of food which, in turn, is dependent on erratic rainfall. During severe droughts it may irrupt in neighbouring regions, for example the southwestern Cape Province (Hockey *et al.* 1989; Maclean 1993b).

**Breeding:** The atlas records show a long season which probably indicates opportunistic breeding linked to rainfall. The trend towards earlier breeding in Zones 3 and 4 is presumably the effect of winter rainfall in the far west. In Namibia, egg-laying has been recorded in all months with a February–April peak coinciding with the late rains; breeding in suburban environments has probably extended the season beyond the norm (C.J. Brown pers. comm.).

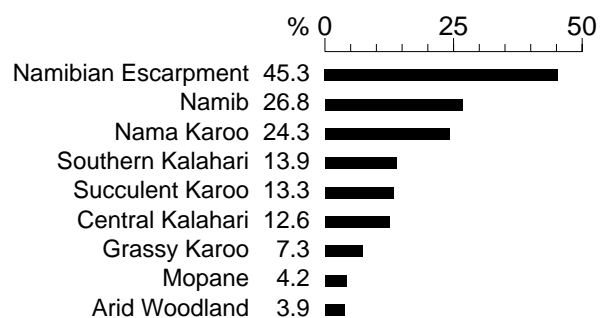
**Interspecific relationships:** Its range overlaps significantly with those of the Lesser Doublecollared and Malachite Sunbirds *N. famosa* in the south and southwest, and with those of the Whitebellied, Marico and Scarlet-chested *N. senegalensis* Sunbirds in central and northeastern Namibia. The ranges of Dusky and Marico Sunbirds are remarkably complementary in arid scrublands, and arid woodlands and Kalahari, respectively.

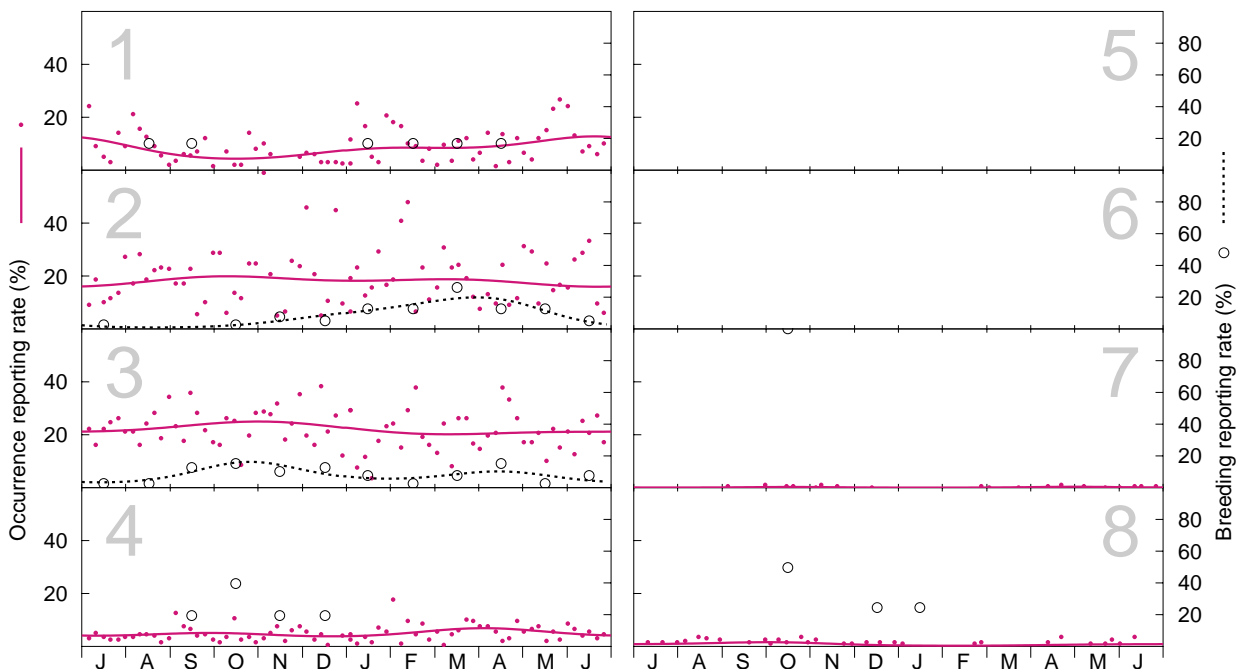
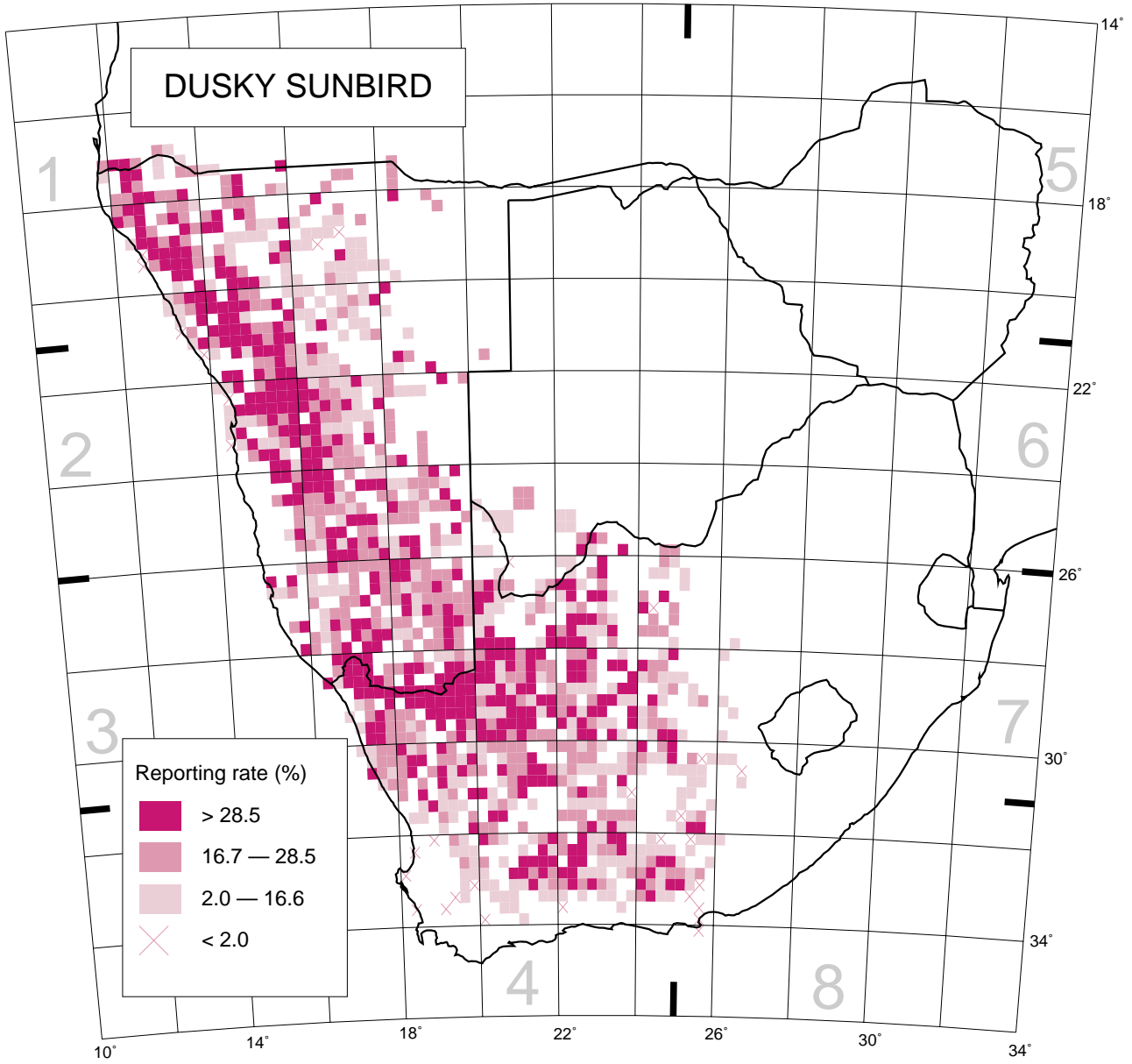
**Historical distribution and conservation:** Its range is unlikely to have changed significantly in historical times and the distribution map of Skead (1967c) is essentially similar, but the current map provides better detail. The Dusky Sunbird's choice of arid habitats makes it relatively safe from human interference.

J.A. Harrison

Recorded in 1208 grid cells, 26.6%  
Total number of records: 7045  
Mean reporting rate for range: 23.6%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 282, 650, 1216, 437, 0, 0, 27, 45; Breeding: 6, 39, 39, 5, 0, 0, 1, 4.