

Olive Sunbird Olyfsuikerbekkie

Nectarinia olivacea

The Olive Sunbird occurs rather patchily in suitable evergreen forest from West and East Africa southwards to Angola, Zambia and Mozambique (Skead 1967c), and in the atlas region only in the eastern highlands of Zimbabwe and again in the southern parts of the eastern Transvaal extending southwards through Swaziland and along the KwaZulu-Natal and eastern Cape Province coastal and subcoastal belt as far as East London (3327BB). The two subspecies in the southern part of the region (Clancey 1980b) have continuous ranges on the present map; the race *N. o. sclateri* of the eastern highlands of Zimbabwe is probably isolated (cf. Skead 1967b).

This is one of two species of southern African sunbird in which the plumages are relatively dull and in which there is no sexual dimorphism, but as in the Grey Sunbird *N. veroxii* it makes up for this by being distinctly vociferous on occasion and is especially conspicuous around major nectar sources. Where it occurs it is often the commonest sunbird (pers. obs). There is a possibility of confusion with the Grey Sunbird in dark forest.

Habitat: The highest reporting rates came from the forests of the East Coast Littoral and the Eastern Zimbabwean Highlands, followed by adjacent Valley Bushveld and Afromontane Forest.

Movements: It is generally rather sedentary with most movement probably brought about by post-breeding dispersal of young. The southern Zones, especially Zone 7, show a higher incidence of winter records, but this may be the result of local, conspicuous concentrations occurring at seasonally flowering nectar-bearing plants such as *Schottia brachypetala*. Skead (1967c), however, did suggest that it may be a greater wanderer than assumed, as it is sometimes found well away from its normal habitat; this could also account for the greater number of records in winter. In the Zimbabwean population, there is no indication of seasonality and it is not found much away from its normal habitat at any time of year (Irwin 1981).

Breeding: The Zimbabwean atlas data (Zone 5) are few but this population breeds September–March with a distinct peak November–December (Irwin 1981). In KwaZulu-Natal and Swaziland (Zone 7), the atlas data suggest the season to be similar, August–April, but mainly October–February, a pattern largely confirmed by egg-laying information (Dean 1971). The atlas data for the eastern Cape Province are scant, with single records in August, November and December.

Interspecific relationships: Although occupying the same forest patches as the Grey Sunbird, the Olive Sunbird usually feeds at lower levels and along forest fringes, but these two species may compete at favoured nectar sources where the Olive Sunbird tends to be dominant (Ginn *et al.* 1989; pers. obs).

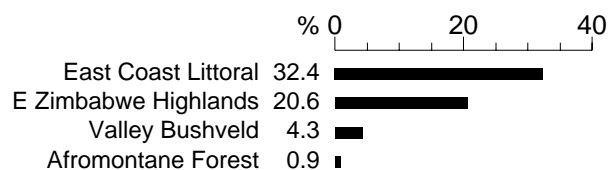
Historical distribution and conservation: The overall distribution is unlikely to have changed much, although the atlas data is more detailed than previous distribution maps (Skead 1967c; Cyrus & Robson 1980; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b), owing to more extensive coverage. Where extensive removal of forest for agriculture has taken place, local range contractions must have occurred. This would apply particularly to KwaZulu-Natal and possibly locally in Zimbabwe. Some earlier Zimbabwean records away from the eastern highlands (Skead 1967c) are questionable, with Irwin (1981) having ignored them and no records having been received from these areas during the atlas.

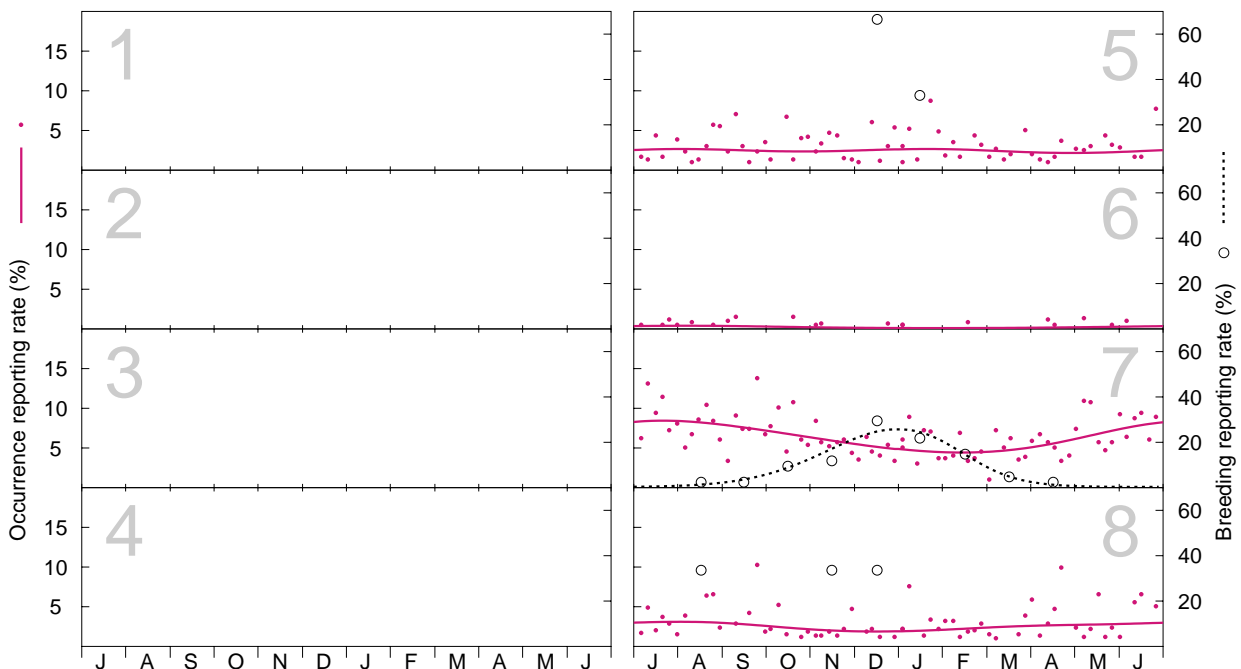
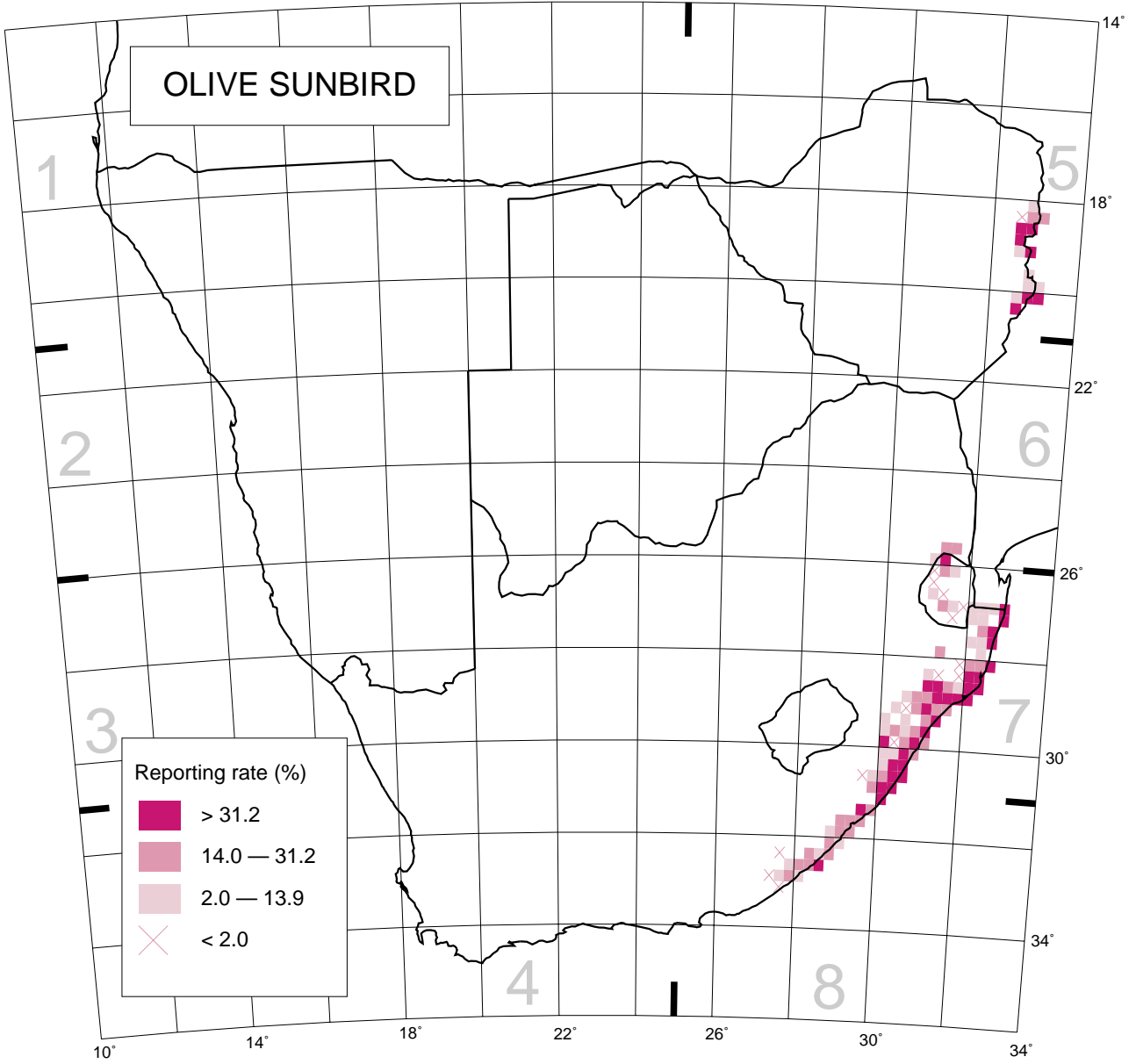
Although not at present threatened, continued degradation of coastal forest in South Africa could have serious consequences for this southernmost population of Olive Sunbirds.

A.J. Tree

Recorded in 125 grid cells, 2.8%
Total number of records: 4264
Mean reporting rate for range: 25.4%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 0, 0, 0, 0, 215, 26, 1236, 138; Breeding: 0, 0, 0, 0, 3, 0, 41, 3.