

Yellowthroated Sparrow

Geelvlekmossie

Petronia superciliaris

This is the only member of the genus *Petronia* found in southern Africa, where it occurs mainly in the more mesic eastern and northern parts. The range extends from the eastern Cape Province, through KwaZulu-Natal, and Swaziland where there is an estimated population of 4000 (Parker 1994), throughout the Transvaal and Zimbabwe, over much of eastern Botswana, through northern Botswana and the Caprivi, and into northern Namibia. There are widespread but scattered records from the northern Cape Province and southeastern Botswana; it marginally enters the northern Free State along the Vaal River. Extralimitally, it is widespread in the savannas and woodlands of Africa south of the equator (Hall & Moreau 1970). The four subspecies in the region (Clancey 1980b) have continuous ranges, except perhaps for the lower reporting rates along the Transvaal escarpment which separate the lowveld race *P. s. bororensis* from *flavigula* on the highveld.

This nondescript, inconspicuous bird is usually seen singly or in pairs, though regular gatherings of large numbers, sometimes 'hundreds', have been reported from Zimbabwe (Tree 1991c). Being to a large extent arboreal, it is probably best detected through its call which is not particularly distinctive. Overall it was probably under-recorded and can be expected to occur more widely than indicated; gaps in its range in the eastern part of the eastern Cape Province, northwestern Transvaal, and in Zimbabwe, lie in areas not well covered. High reporting rates at the periphery of its range should be viewed with discretion.

Habitat: Its preference for broadleaved woodland and savanna (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b) is obvious from the six vegetation types with the highest reporting rates. Although it apparently avoids areas of *Acacia* wood-

land adjacent to broadleaved woodland, e.g. in the northern Transvaal (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b), it does use thornveld in other areas, particularly in the southern part of its range in Arid Woodland in KwaZulu-Natal (Clancey 1964b; Cyrus & Robson 1980), and southwards into the Valley Bushveld. The relatively high reporting rate for the Eastern Zimbabwe Highlands is because the latter overlaps Miombo in a vegetation mosaic. Associations with grassland and Karoo vegetation types are due to the species occurring in these areas in riparian woodland; plantations of exotics, especially wattle, are also used (Maclean 1993b).

Movements: In all Zones there is a slight increase in reporting rates through the dry season, reaching a peak in spring. Although these probably reflect increased visibility of birds following leaf-fall, seasonal movements are suspected for Zimbabwe (Irwin 1981; Tree 1993d), but these appear to be too localized to be evident in the models.

Breeding: Breeding was reported from all parts of its range, mainly in the first half of summer, September–January, which accords with published data (Dean 1971; Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). Comparison of the last two sources also confirms the models, which show breeding is considerably earlier in Zimbabwe than in the Transvaal.

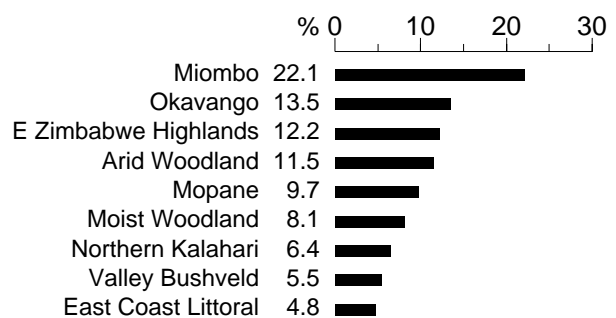
Interspecific relationships: Competition in drier savannas with the Southern Greyheaded Sparrow *Passer diffusus* has been suggested (Irwin 1981) but, with their different foraging behaviour, this would probably only involve competition for nest cavities. In broadleaved woodlands there is likely to be much rivalry with several species for this scarce resource.

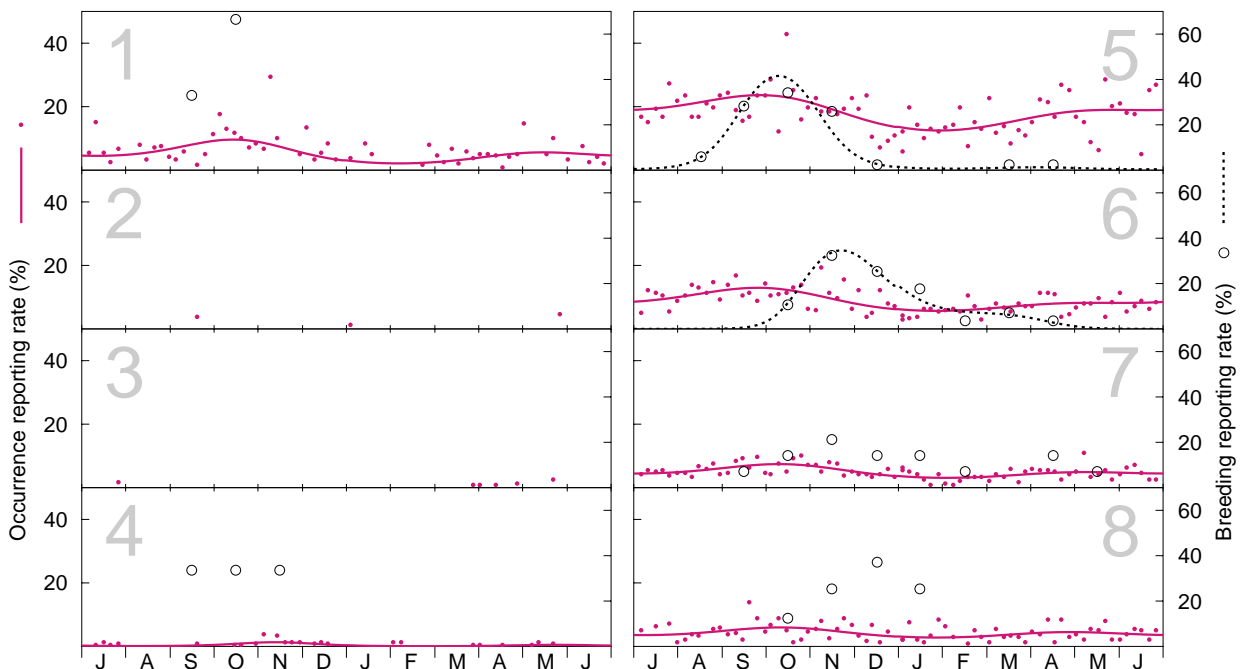
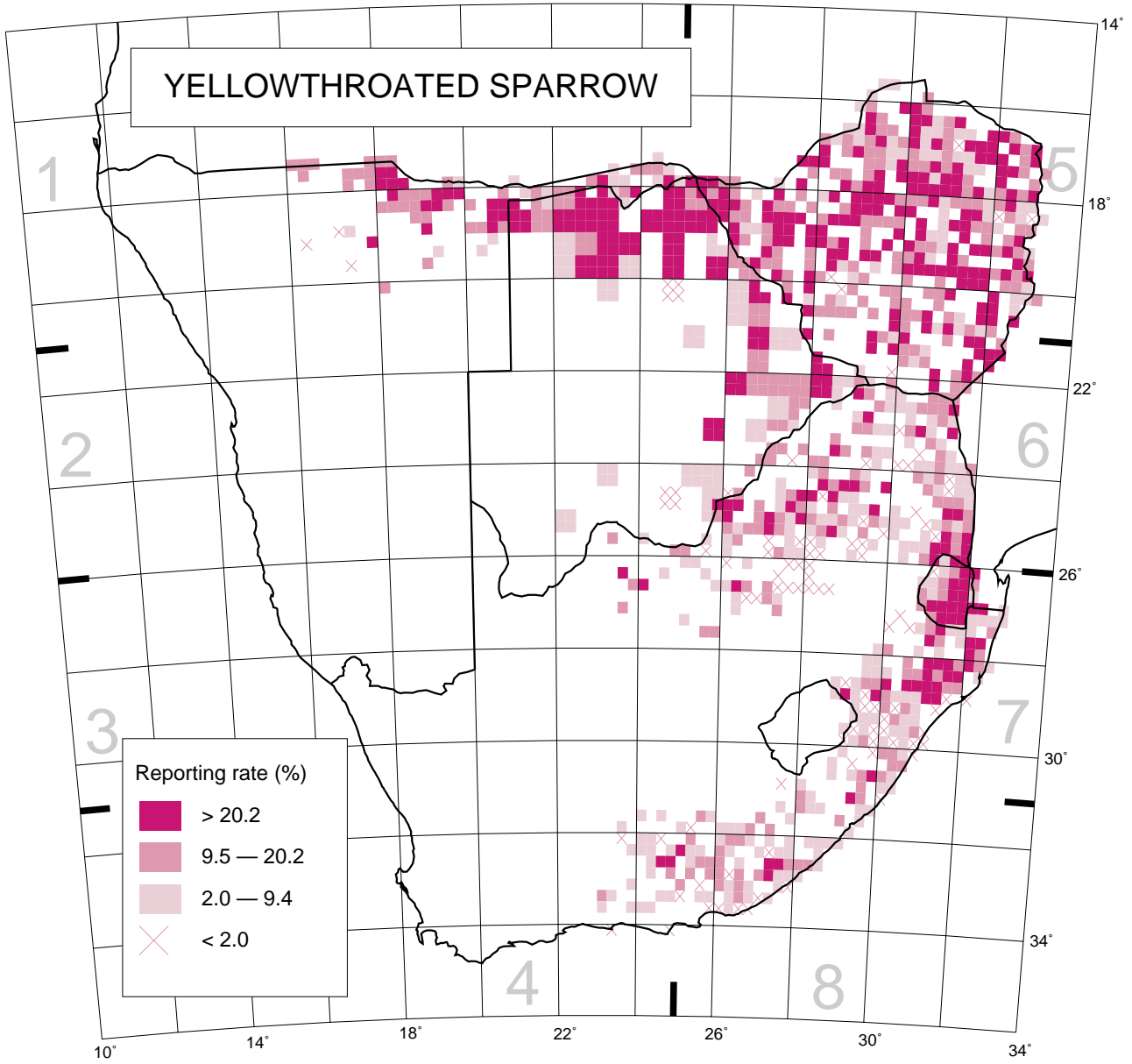
Historical distribution and conservation: The claim by Stark (1900) that it occurred 'from the neighbourhood of Cape Town to Damara Land, on the west coast' is certainly erroneous. While the clearing of woodland in many parts of its range must certainly have reduced the natural habitat available for the Yellowthroated Sparrow, its ability to occupy plantations has probably enabled it to expand its range elsewhere.

B.D. Colahan

Recorded in 1159 grid cells, 25.5%
Total number of records: 7176
Mean reporting rate for range: 10.2%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 175, 5, 7, 35, 1610, 994, 958, 231; Breeding: 3, 0, 0, 3, 50, 28, 14, 8.