



Groundscraper Thrush

Gevlekte Lyster

Turdus litsitsirupa

The Groundscraper Thrush is widespread in the savannas of eastern and southern Africa (Maclean 1993b). In southern Africa it is uncommon in dry, and generally more common in humid broadleaved woodland. In many places it is localized and of sporadic occurrence (Maclean 1993b). The reporting rates vary greatly between adjacent grid cells, illustrating the localized pattern. Relative strongholds are nevertheless found in miombo woodlands in Zimbabwe, in miombo-like woodlands in far eastern Botswana, in woodlands of the northern Cape Province, and in moist woodlands in the western Transvaal. It is absent from the Zambezi River valley and from the coastal regions of northern KwaZulu-Natal. The gap in the distribution in the Kalahari along the Botswana–Namibian border could be an artefact of lower coverage, or might be a genuine separation of the subspecies *T. l. litsitsirupa* in the east and *pauciguttatus* in Namibia (Clancey 1980b). Surprisingly, the species does not have strongholds in the woodlands in the upper and middle Limpopo River valley; many other species of open woodland (see e.g. Grey Tockus *nasutus*, Redbilled *T. erythrorhynchus* and Yellow-billed *T. flavirostris* Hornbills) have strongholds in this region.

It is generally quite bold, particularly around human settlements (Maclean 1993b), and the atlas data can be considered reliable and comprehensive.

Habitat: It occupies a variety of open ‘parkland’ woodlands (both broadleaved and *Acacia*), particularly where the understorey is poorly developed, with patches of bare ground. It is most common in miombo, open overgrazed woodland, lush gardens in dry country, plantations of alien trees, and near small-scale clearings for cultivation. It was most frequently recorded in broadleaved and mixed wood-

land biomes, but it does also occur in arid *Acacia* woodlands in the Kalahari thornbelt and on the Namibian escarpment. It was reported in highland grasslands, but this mostly results from its occurrence in alien-tree plantations, e.g. *Eucalyptus*.

Movements: No regular movements are documented, but four models suggest seasonal changes (particularly Zone 6). In the northern Cape Province (Zone 3), reporting rates were higher late in the wet season and lower in the late dry and early wet season, while in the more mesic northwest and Limpopo drainage reporting rates were higher in the dry winter. Some birds may move from the arid areas in the southwest to more mesic parts in the north and east during the dry season, and probably also during drought periods when few birds remain in the arid areas (pers. obs). Aspinwall (1981) cautiously suggested the possibility of southwards movement immediately after the rains, which would result in an influx in the present atlas region November–February; the models do not support this, however.

Breeding: Atlas breeding records were mostly in the wet season, September–March, with a clear peak in spring and early summer, October–December. Peak egg laying is September–November in Zimbabwe (Irwin 1981), and October–November in the Transvaal (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b), and the somewhat earlier peak in Zimbabwe (Zone 5) is confirmed by the atlas data. Breeding is later and spans a broader period in the arid west (Zone 2), while there are also records May–June from the arid southwest (Zone 3).

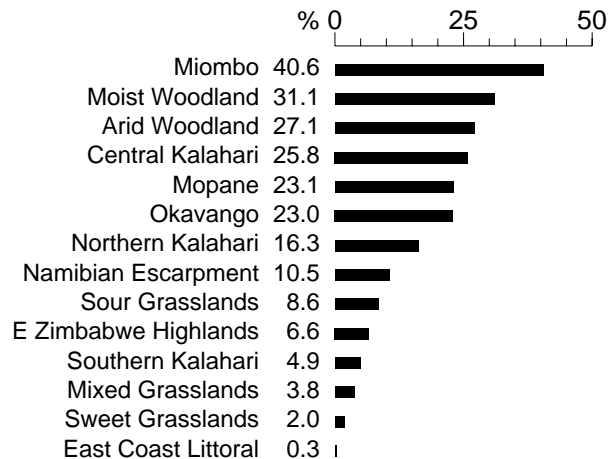
Interspecific relationships: It overlaps widely with the two other *Turdus* thrushes in the region, and is regularly found alongside these in parks and gardens, but it is the only one to occur in the Kalahari and the arid west.

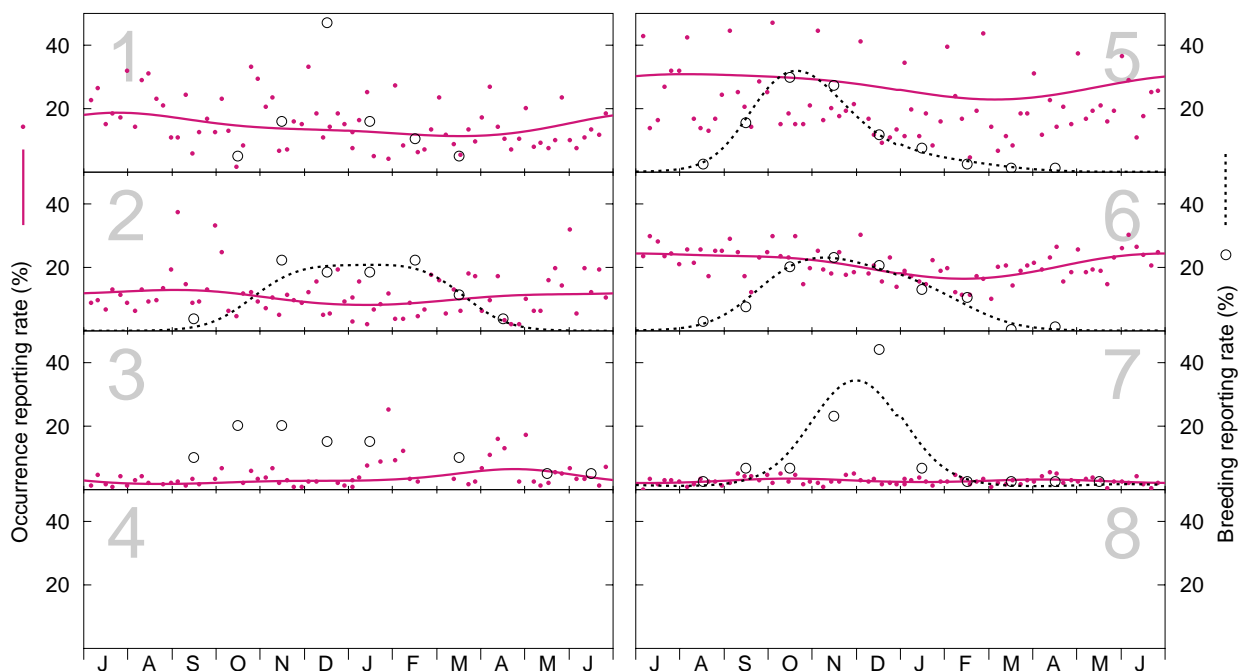
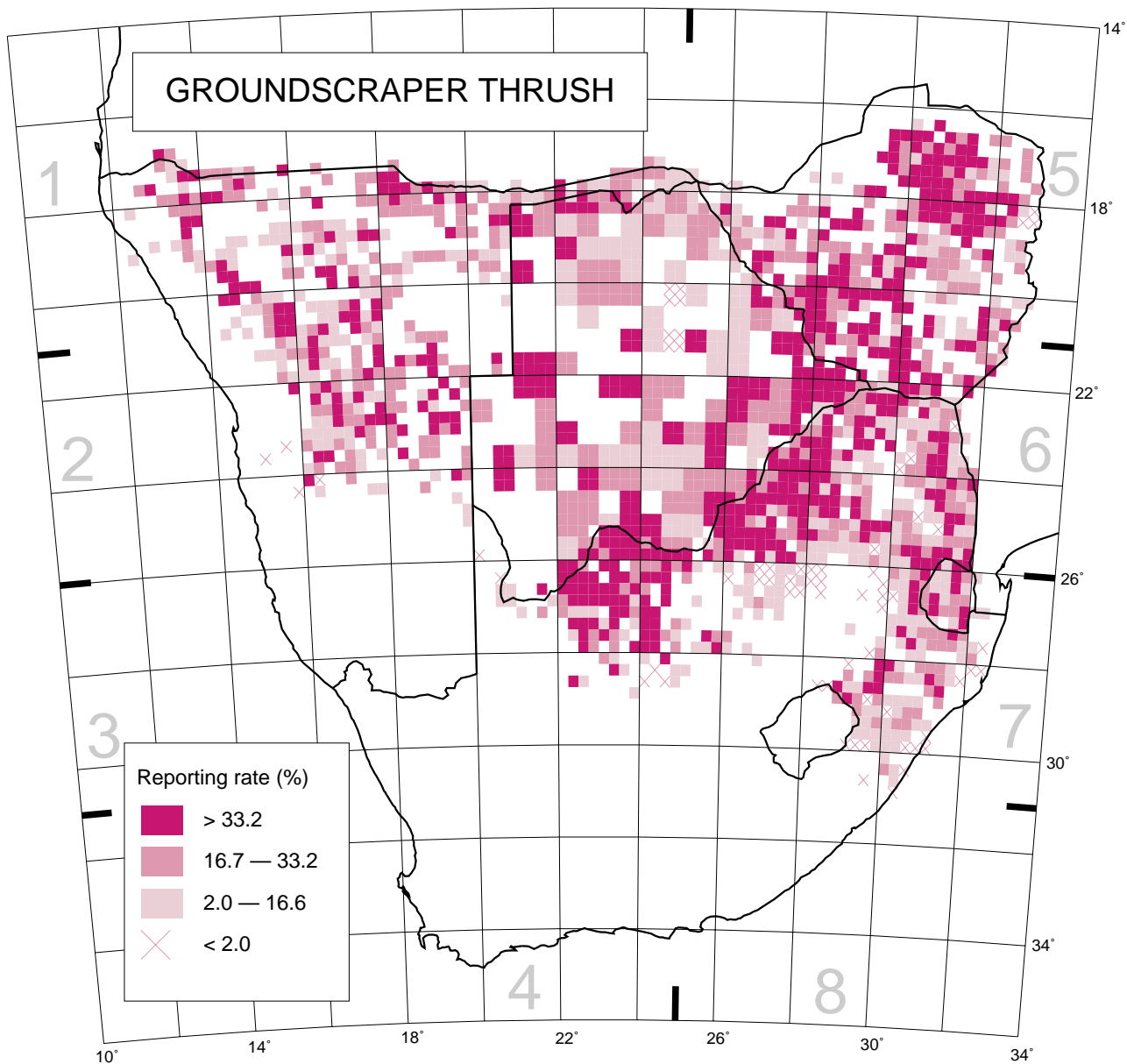
Historical distribution and conservation: It is likely that the Groundscraper Thrush expanded its range in the open arid areas and upland grassland biomes when more farmyards and alien-tree plantations became available, but it must have lost habitat through extensive clearing of miombo. It is widespread, locally common and currently under no particular threat.

M. Herremans

Recorded in 1792 grid cells, 39.5%
Total number of records: 16 979
Mean reporting rate for range: 22.2%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 483, 393, 199, 0, 2409, 2406, 542, 0; Breeding: 19, 27, 20, 0, 77, 144, 43, 0.