



## Fiscal Flycatcher

### Fiskaalvlieëvanger

#### *Sigelus silens*

The Fiscal Flycatcher is endemic to southern Africa, and the greater part of its range is in South Africa. It is common and widespread, but there are definite gaps in its distribution. It is largely absent from the western desert and the driest parts of the Karoo and Kalahari, and from the Lesotho highlands and adjacent cool, treeless grasslands.

Two subspecies are recognized (Clancey 1980b) and both have somewhat separated core distributions: *S. s. lawsoni* occurs in the dry interior from the northern Cape Province to the western Transvaal, while the more coastal nominate race has a stronghold in the southern and eastern Cape Province.

It can be confused with the Fiscal Shrike *Lanius collaris*, but differs in behaviour as well as morphology, so we can assume that atlas records are reasonably accurate.

**Habitat:** It was most frequently reported from the Sweet Grasslands, Valley Bushveld, the southern part of the Central Kalahari in the northern Cape Province, Fynbos, Grassy Karoo and Nama Karoo biomes. The low reporting rates from the true woodland biomes indicate that it likes fairly open vegetation, with trees or intermittent scrub upon which to perch (Skead 1967b). Watercourses are used in drier areas (Winterbottom & Winterbottom 1984). Alien trees in gardens suffice where other perches are absent (Kieser & Kieser 1978), especially in the nonbreeding season. It is notable that on the highveld it is common where the human population is dense, but not in the rural parts where there are few trees.

**Movements:** There is a well-defined winter peak and lower reporting rates during, and especially just after, breeding. This can be attributed to greater conspicuousness when it is not breeding and disperses to more open habitat and is more likely to use gardens; conversely, it keeps a lower profile during post-breeding moult.

The seasonal maps show it to be resident in parts of its range, but a partial migrant in others. The nominate race in particular is usually considered to be resident in the southern coastal areas, e.g. in the southwestern Cape Province (Hockey *et al.* 1989), the southern Karoo (Collett 1982) and western KwaZulu-Natal (Cyrus

& Robson 1980). In the Free State, *lawsoni* is said to be resident (Earlé & Grobler 1987). However, there are also altitudinal movements, possibly more so in the subspecies *lawsoni*, and most clearly visible at the edge of the range. In KwaZulu-Natal, Clancey (1964b) noted it to be plentiful on the coast in winter and it is present in Umfolozi Game Reserve (2831B) only in winter (Cyrus & Robson 1980; Macdonald & Birkenstock 1980), often in abundance. Altitudinal migration also occurs in the eastern Transvaal (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b) where the species is present in the lowveld only in winter; these winter movements extend into Swaziland (Parker 1994) and Mozambique (Maclean 1993b). At Barberspan (2625DA), the resident population is supplemented by winter migrants (Farkas 1962), presumably from the highveld. Except for some breeding in extreme southeastern Botswana, it is a winter migrant to that country primarily between late April and early October (Herremans 1994d), with birds moving a considerable distance into the Kalahari sandveld (Zone 2), and extending occasionally as far north as Orapa (2125A) (Penry 1994) and Nata (2026A) (Bishop *et al.* 1992), apparently more so during drought years (Brewster 1992b).

**Breeding:** Breeding begins in July, peaking October–December, with a tail of records after March. There were some atlas records in every month of the year. The timing is the same throughout the range, including the winter-rainfall region.

**Interspecific relationships:** The Fiscal, Black *Melaenornis pammelaina* and Marico *M. mariquensis* Flycatchers are all ‘pouncers’ (Fraser 1983). They are mostly geographically separated, the Fiscal having primarily southern, the Black eastern and northern, and the Marico central and northwestern ranges. The Fiscal is most similar in feeding ecology to Black Flycatcher (Fraser 1983), and their core distributions are non-overlapping. The Fiscal Flycatcher is also similar in feeding behaviour and plumage to the Fiscal Shrike *Lanius collaris*, with which it overlaps widely. The similarity in plumage could be adaptive mimicry (Hockey *et al.* 1989; Herremans 1992a).

**Historical distribution and conservation:** Prozesky (1963) reported it from Sandwich Harbour (2314AD) and the Kuiseb (2315) in Namibia; it was not confirmed there subsequently and the records could be in error. The historical distribution is probably little different from the present, although the Fiscal Flycatcher was probably able to expand its range and numbers in several areas when it started using plantations of alien trees. It is common and under no threat.

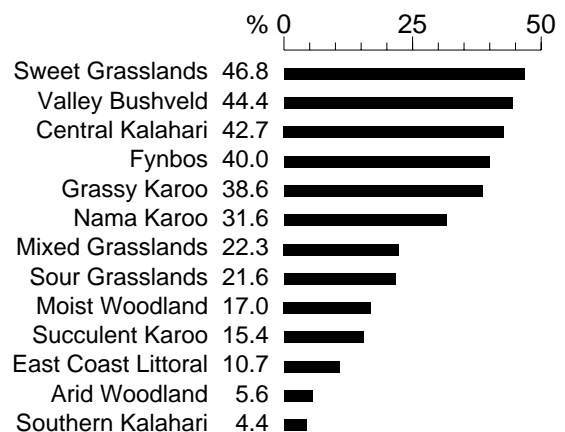
D.N. Johnson and M. Herremans

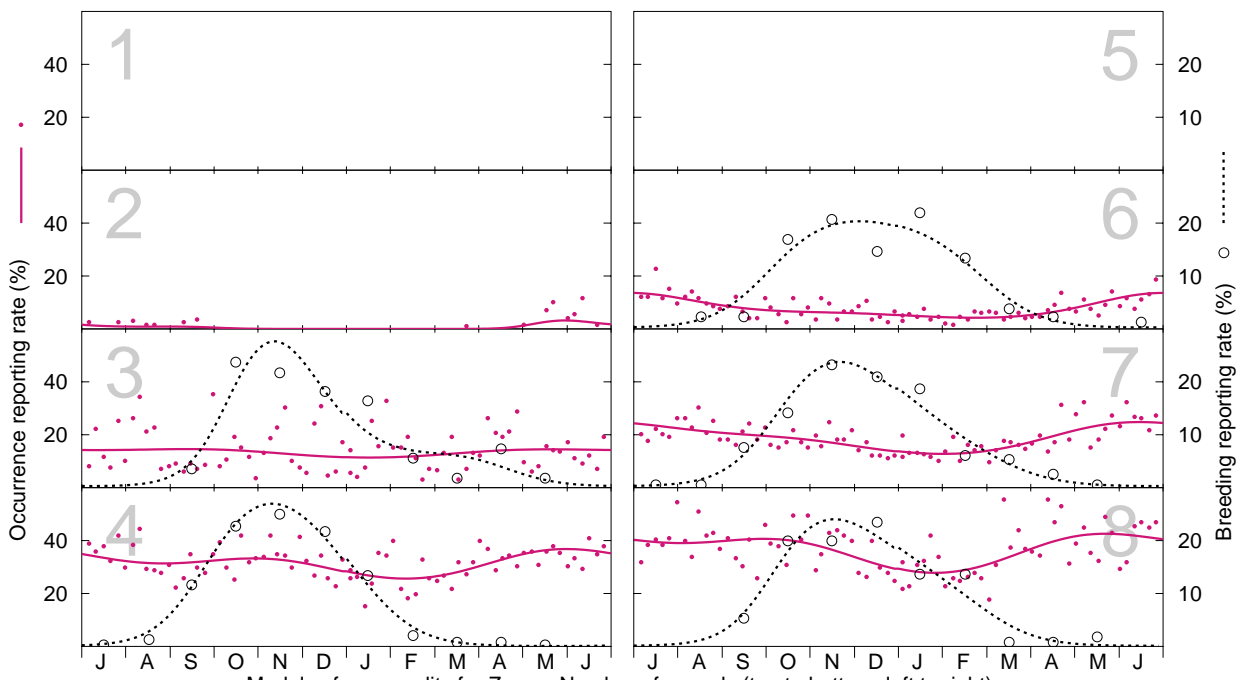
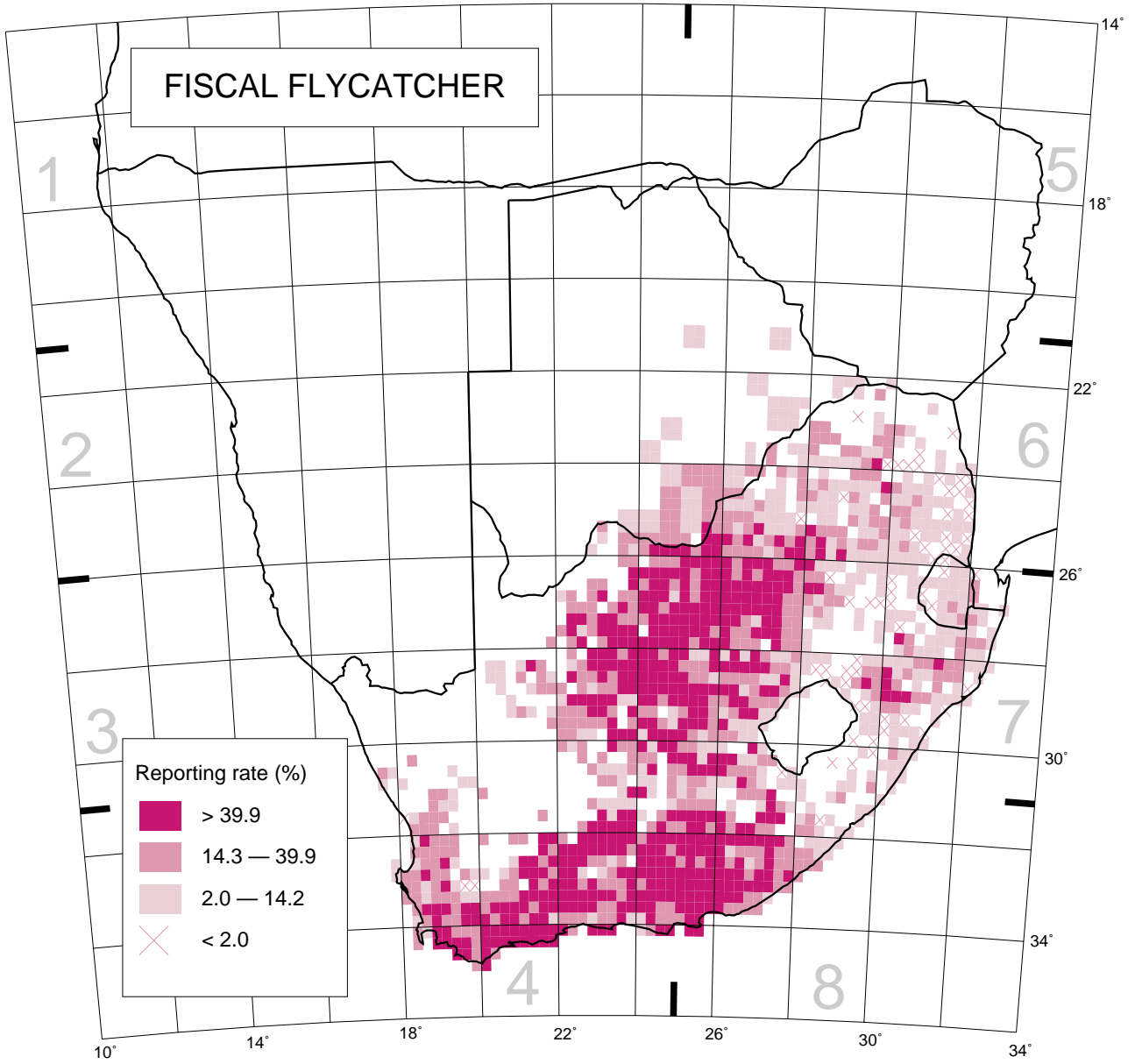
Recorded in 1384 grid cells, 30.5%

Total number of records: 30 127

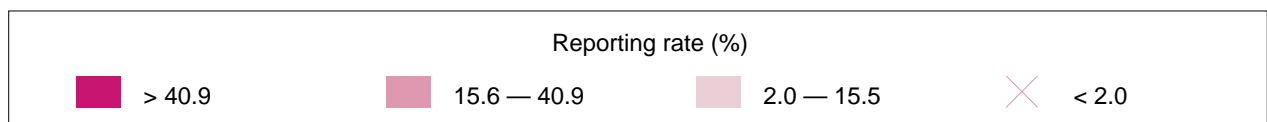
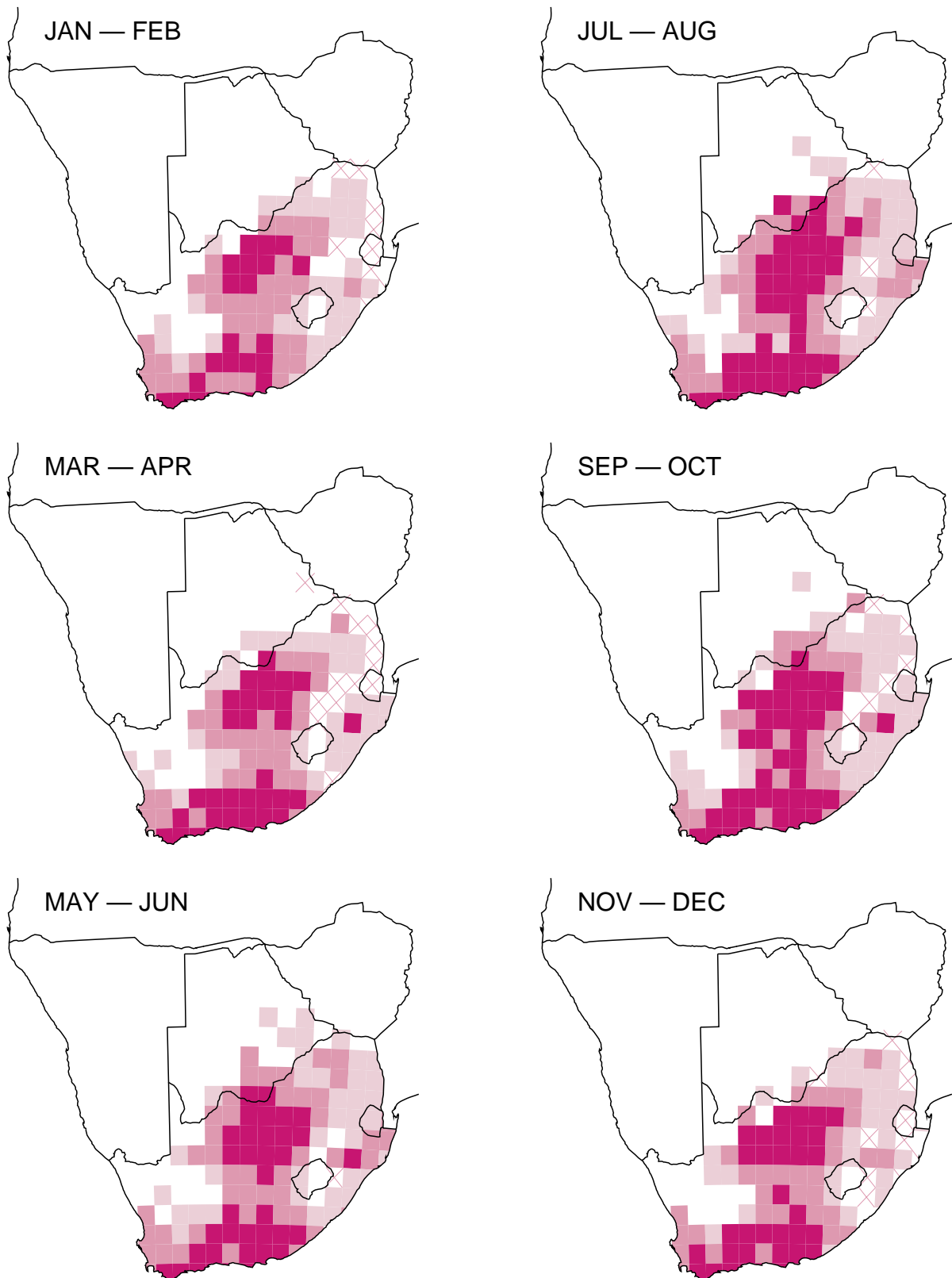
Mean reporting rate for range: 29.5%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types





## FISCAL FLYCATCHER



Seasonal distribution maps; one-degree grid.