

## European Starling

### Europese Spreeu

*Sturnus vulgaris*

Native to Europe and western central Asia, the European Starling was deliberately introduced to other continents by European settlers. It now occurs throughout temperate North America, New Zealand, and in southern and eastern Australia (Long 1981). Introduced at Cape Town (3318CD) in 1897, it is now widespread in the Cape Province, and well-established in the Transkei (Quickelberge 1989), with occasional birds east to KwaZulu-Natal (Cyrus & Robson 1980). Earlé & Grobler (1987) listed isolated sightings in the Free State where it is spreading in the south and east. It has also become established in the lowlands of Lesotho. In southern Namibia it is restricted to the town of Oranjemund (2816CB) and nearby irrigated lands. There are no records from the Transvaal (cf. Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). There is an October 1988 record far out of range in Orapa (2125A) (Bushell & Bushell 1989). Always closely associated with humans, it is common where it occurs and unlikely to be confused with other species.

**Habitat:** In South Africa it is always found in settled areas which are usually also irrigated. Since it frequently feeds by probing in the grass mat, lawns and fields provide ideal foraging areas, and it is absent from dry areas with hard substrates.

**Movements:** Although the models suggest an influx in October, this is probably when breeding birds are most conspicuous around houses. Particularly outside the breeding season, large flocks gather to roost in the evenings, often using reedbeds. In the western Cape Province, thousands fly to offshore islands to roost (Hockey *et al.* 1989). While many populations in Europe are migratory (Feare 1984), published ringing results show that starlings from the southwestern Cape Province are resident (Elliott & Jarvis 1970, 1973). In winter roving flocks are formed.

**Breeding:** Breeding is concentrated September–December, with no indication of a change in breeding season outside the

winter-rainfall region. This agrees with observations on Dassen Island (3318AC), and with nest record data (Cooper & Underhill 1991). Breeding in South Africa is six months out of phase with Europe (Cramp *et al.* 1989).

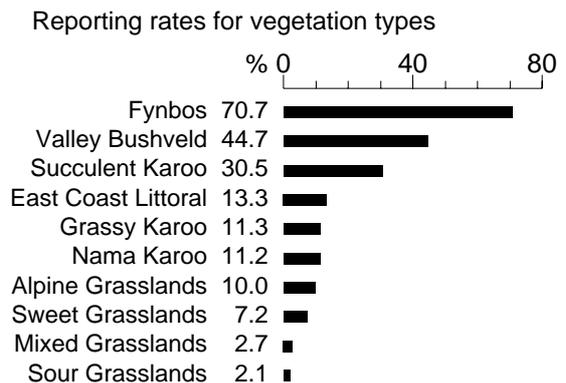
**Interspecific relationships:** Competition with starlings for nest sites in urban North America has proved serious for species such as the Purple Martin *Progne subis* (Brown 1981). In southern Africa, European Starlings may displace other hole-nesting species in suburban environments (e.g. Van der Merwe 1984), but most indigenous species are probably displaced by habitat change rather than by interspecific competition. The Indian Myna *Acridotheres tristis* and the European Starling do not appear to be in regular contact at this stage (Quickelberge 1989).

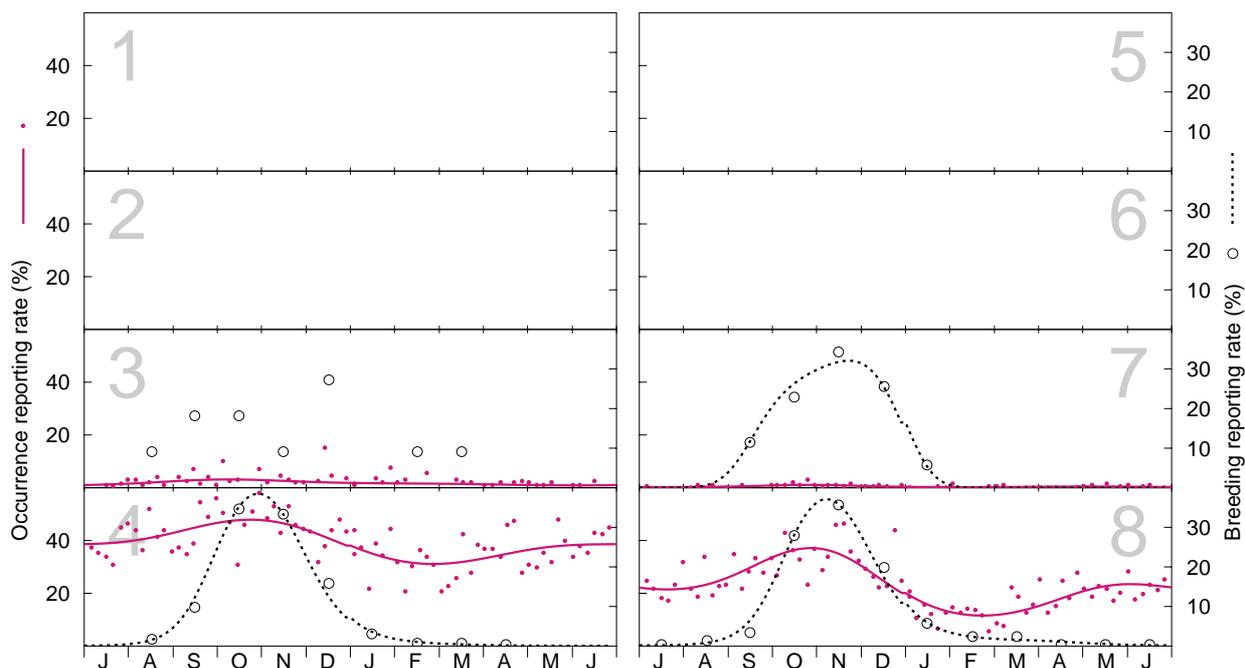
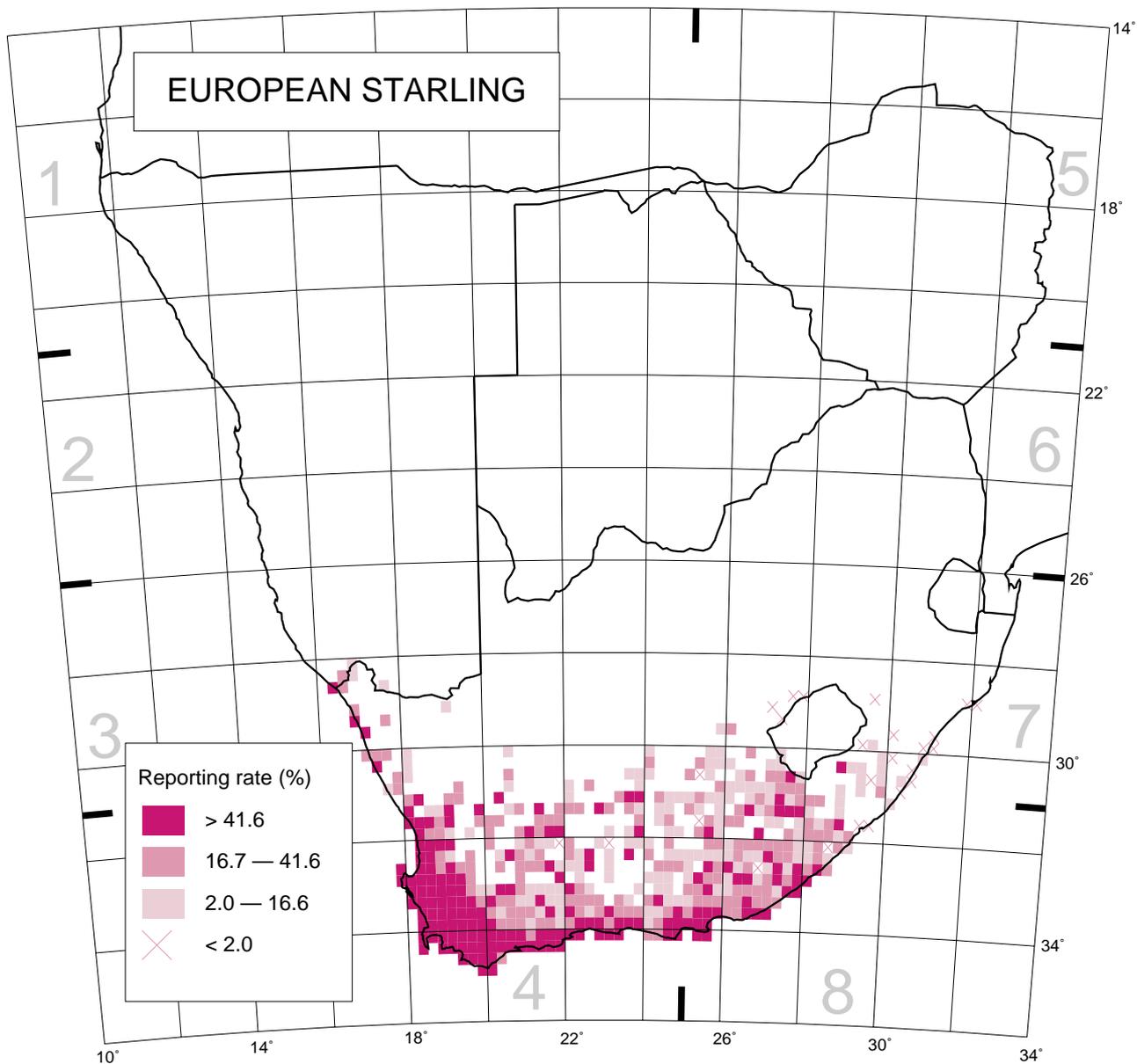
**Historical distribution and conservation:** The original birds released at Cape Town were reportedly caught at a winter roost in England and given to Cecil John Rhodes by Meinertzhagen (1952). Brooke *et al.* (1986) gave the date of introduction as April 1897, based on Rhodes's known visits to Britain. By 1954 it had reached Clanwilliam (3218BB) in the north, and Port Elizabeth (3325DC) in the east (Winterbottom & Liversidge 1954). It spread slowly compared to North America (Gebhardt 1954). In 1967 birds were seen at Beaufort West (3222BC) in the Karoo (Frost 1967), and they reached Cradock (3225BA) by 1970 (Collett 1982), but had not been recorded at De Aar (3024CA) up to 1977 (Kieser & Kieser 1978). Liversidge (1962a) described its spread in the eastern Cape Province, while Quickelberge (1972) recorded its arrival in East London (3327BB) in 1966 and at Kei Mouth (3228CB) in 1971; birds reached Umtata (3128DA) by 1981 (Quickelberge 1989). Subsequent range expansion has not been well documented. In Namibia it is restricted to Oranjemund where it is resident and has been present since 1970 (Brown 1985d). The European Starling is not on the Lesotho list of Bonde (1993), but it is now numerous in Maseru (2927AD) (D. Ambrose; D.G. Allan pers. comms). In the adjoining northeastern Cape Province it was noted only at Maclear (3128AB) in 1982, whereas it is now widespread in that region (Craig 1994a).

It is unprotected with pest status; further range expansion in the eastern Free State could lead to significant damage to orchards (cf. Feare 1984). Extermination rather than preservation would be favoured by most people, but there is no prospect of eliminating this resourceful bird.

A.J.F.K. Craig

Recorded in 507 grid cells, 11.2%  
Total number of records: 21 667  
Mean reporting rate for range: 48.8%





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 0, 0, 96, 3421, 0, 0, 93, 1277; Breeding: 0, 0, 11, 780, 0, 0, 35, 360.