

Scarlet-chested Sunbird

Rooiborssuikerbekkie

Nectarinia senegalensis

The Scarlet-chested Sunbird is fairly common and wide-ranging, found from Senegal eastwards to Eritrea and southwards to Namibia, northern Botswana and Zimbabwe, the eastern half of the Transvaal, Swaziland and KwaZulu-Natal. There were apparently confirmed records of vagrants from the East London (3327BB) and Port Alfred (3326DB) areas during the atlas period; Skead (1967c) also reported isolated records from the same region. All records west of East London (3327BB) should be regarded as unusual, however. The western population in Namibia is fairly widespread but scattered, being found wherever there is some degree of tree cover, even through the Namib Desert along the watercourses of ephemeral rivers. It is restricted to the extreme north of the Kalahari biome, and in Botswana it is most strongly associated with woodlands in the Okavango. It occurs to the east through varied woodlands into Zimbabwe where it is widespread but only really common in the intensive farming area of northern Mashonaland. It appears to have increased considerably with the fragmentation of miombo woodland, usually being absent from undisturbed miombo (Irwin 1981). In the Transvaal, it is restricted to the lowveld and base of the escarpment, where it is scarce to fairly common (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). In KwaZulu-Natal it is relatively common in the north but scarce in the south (Clancey 1964b). The three subspecies recognized in the region (Clancey 1980b) have continuous ranges on the present map.

Habitat: It occurs in a variety of open savanna woodlands, preferably broadleaved or mixed, and it avoids the dry thornbelt on well-drained Kalahari sands. It is most com-

mon in fragmented miombo woodland. It adapts quite well to habitat alteration, and is commonly found in parks and well-established gardens. During the winter months it is attracted to abundant nectar sources.

Movements: It is a nomadic wanderer and few individuals return to the same site in subsequent seasons, either as breeders or as nonbreeding visitors (Tree 1990d). A recent ring recovery is a good example: ringed at Chirawanoo Farm (1730CB) on 1 July 1992 and recovered at Chegato (2029DD) on 13 July 1994, some 360 km to the south (SAFRING). Further north in Africa there are indications that it may be migratory or partially migratory in Tanzania, Ethiopia and the Sudan (Skead 1967c).

The models show slightly higher reporting rates in Namibia and northern Botswana (Zones 1 and 2) during spring and summer. By contrast, reporting rates were apparently highest in the eastern Zones during winter. In Zimbabwe there is a definite influx on to the plateau during the dry season but the extent of this varies from year to year and normally occurs March–July (Tree 1990d), coincident with a decline in northern Botswana (Herremans 1992d). In the drought year of 1987, a major irruption into Zimbabwe occurred June–September and included specimens of the western race *N. s. saturator*, which may have come from Namibia (Tree 1990d). It is possible that the artificial habitats in urban Windhoek (2217CA) and other towns, as well as rural farm gardens in Namibia, now create more suitable year-round conditions in that region. It occurs commonly along the northern KwaZulu-Natal coast in winter (Skead 1967c).

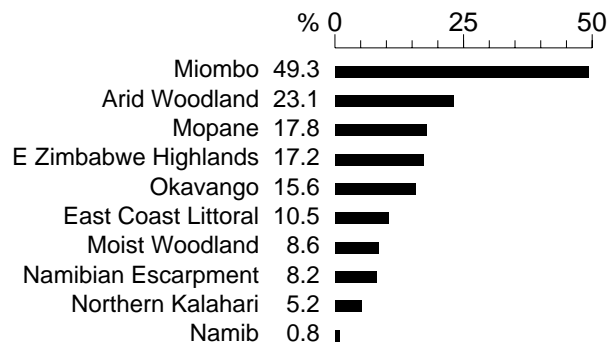
Breeding: The models show that breeding in central Namibia (Zone 2) peaks later (December–April) than elsewhere in the range (*c.* September–December) and this is confirmed by egg-laying data (Dean 1971; Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Brown & Clinning in press). The models also possibly suggest slightly later breeding peaks with increasing latitude, a trend also confirmed by egg-laying data.

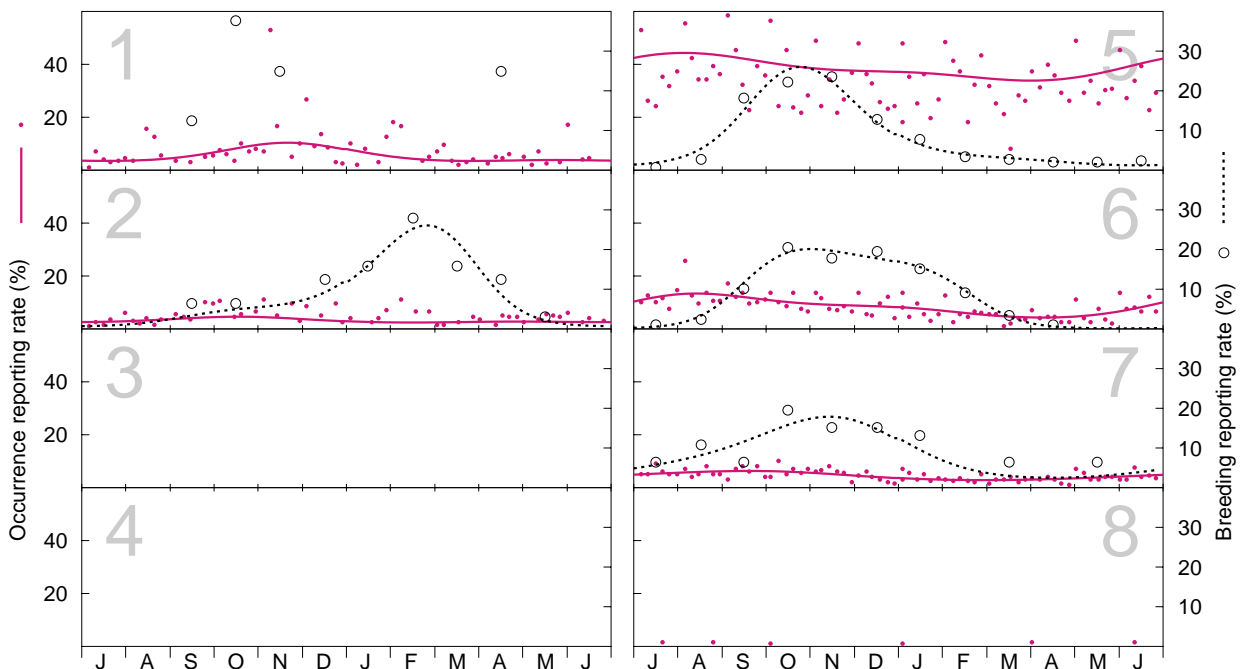
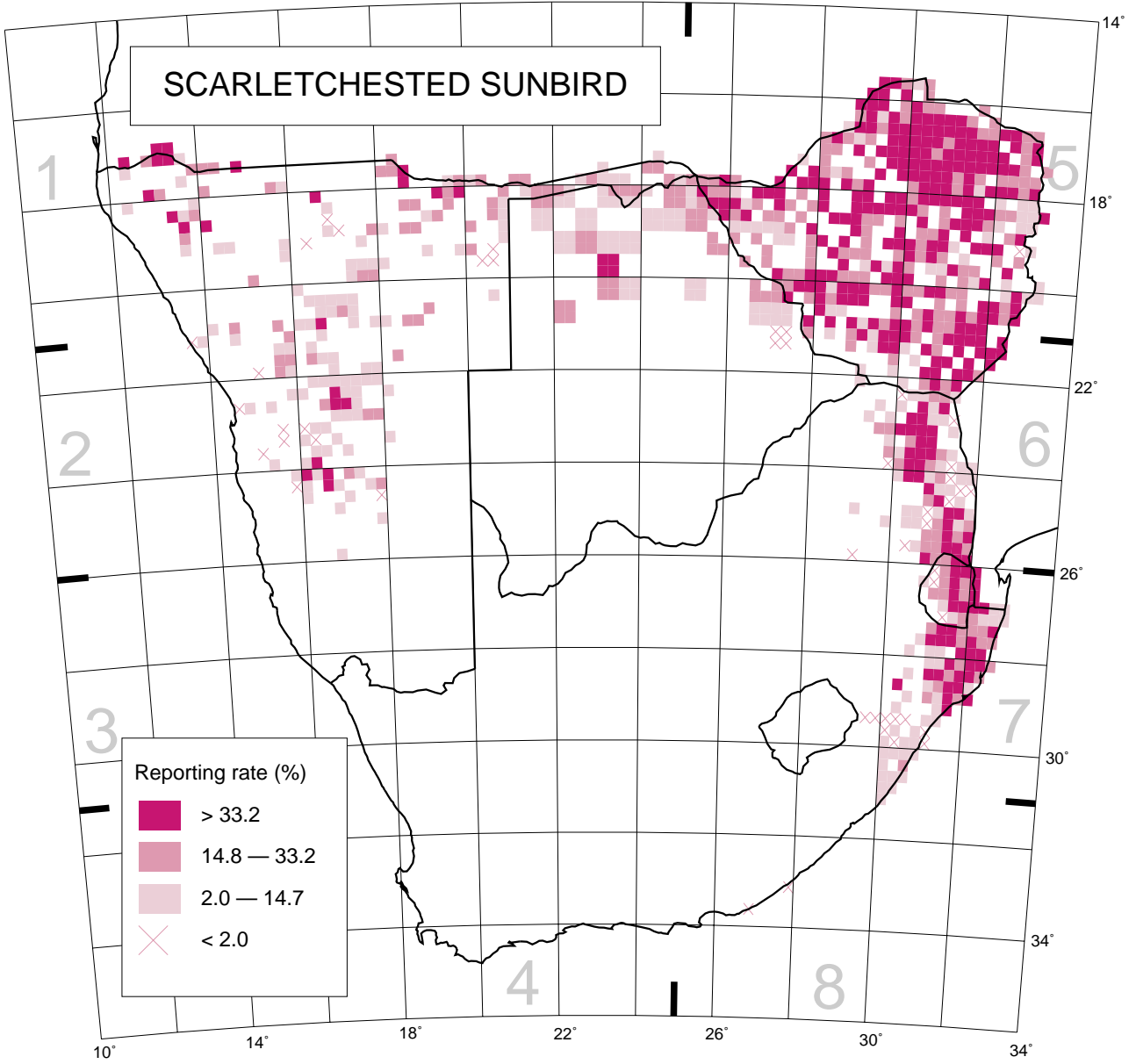
Historical distribution and conservation: There has been little change in the overall distribution shown by Skead (1967c) but the atlas map provides greatly refined detail. The Scarlet-chested Sunbird is not a conservation priority.

A.J. Tree

Recorded in 909 grid cells, 20.0%
Total number of records: 11 447
Mean reporting rate for range: 24.3%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 167, 109, 0, 0, 3383, 957, 869, 6; Breeding: 8, 32, 0, 0, 209, 118, 46, 0.