Rock Bunting

Klipstreepkoppie

Emberiza tahapisi

The Rock Bunting is distributed mainly in the eastern half of southern Africa, from the eastern Cape Province northward through Lesotho, KwaZulu-Natal, the Free State (where it avoids the northcentral area), throughout the Transvaal, Swaziland and Zimbabwe, and eastern Botswana. It clearly avoids coastal regions. The distribution seems entirely confined to summer-rainfall areas, although it occurs in northern Namibia in an area that receives late-summer and autumn rains. The distribution shown here does not differ substantially from that shown by Skead (1960), although the larger number of records have defined its range more clearly in some areas, such as eastern Botswana, where there were formerly few records. The Rock Bunting is widely distributed throughout eastern Africa, north to Somalia and Eritrea, and across to Ghana in West Africa. It also occurs in Angola and Zambia.

This bunting is usually seen singly, in pairs or in small groups of three to four birds. However, it may occur in large flocks at times (Skead 1960). The atlas data are probably reliable and comprehensive. Confusion between the Rock Bunting and the Cape Bunting *E. capensis* is possible in the southwestern parts of its range, particularly as these two species can occupy similar habitats in the eastern Karoo. The Cape Bunting differs mainly in having a white throat and grey underparts.

Habitat: The Rock Bunting inhabits rocky ridges and hillsides, eroding stony slopes and gullies, and bare stony areas. It occurs and nests in abandoned quarries and borrow-pits, and will forage on the bare gravel and soil of roads. It also occurs on bare or sparsely vegetated patches within woodland. Reporting rates show that it was more commonly observed in nutrient-rich Mopane and Moist Woodland habitats than in shrubland or grassland habitats, although it is fairly frequently reported from Alpine Grasslands. Rock Buntings drink regularly and may leave an area when surface water dries up (Brewster 1992b).

Movements: The seasonal maps and models for this species show that there is an obvious drop in reporting rates in the eastern parts of its southern African range during the winter and spring, suggesting a large-scale northward migration out of the region during this period. This supports earlier observations on local movements in the eastern Cape Province (Skead 1960). It also appears to have extensive movements in the Transvaal, where it is considered to be a 'regular breeding migrant' by Tarboton *et al.* (1987b). In Zimbabwe it is reported to undertake seasonal movements (Irwin 1981). A bird ringed on 1 July 1995 in the Kimberley district (2824DC), northern Cape Province, was recovered in Mwenezi district (2131CA), Zimbabwe, on 1 May 1996, a distance of 1037 km (SAFRING). The reporting rates in Namibia suggest some movements to the drier south of the country during the summer. Whether or not all these movements are regular annual migrations is debatable, and movements in the more arid parts of its range are more likely to be nomadic, as suggested by Benson *et al.* (1971) for the Zambian situation.

Breeding: Atlas data show a summer breeding season, with a suggestion of breeding occurring later in the year with decreasing latitude, although sample sizes are small. Egglaying data from the Transvaal (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b) span October–April, mainly December–March, and in Zimbabwe (Irwin 1981) span November–June, mainly January–April, adding weight to the suggestion of later breeding further north.

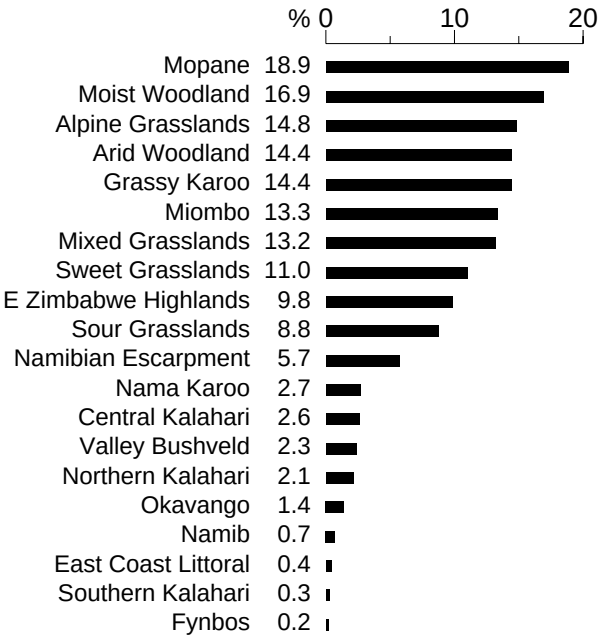
Interspecific relationships: Although Skead (1960) noted that the Rock Bunting may often occur together with the Cape Bunting, this association does not seem to be common or widespread.

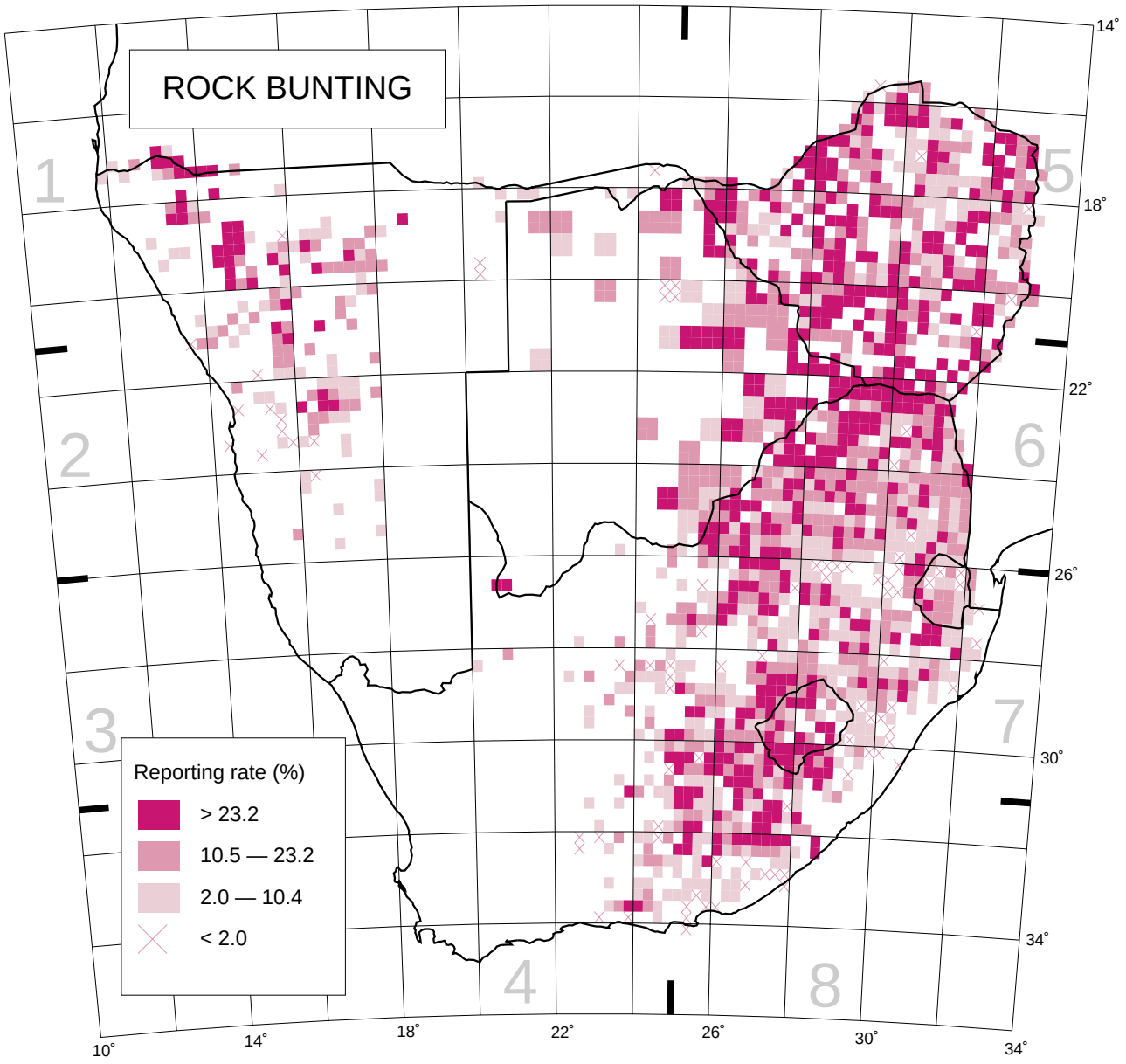
Historical distribution and conservation: There is no evidence that the distribution of the Rock Bunting has changed in the recent past. It may occur more widely and more abundantly than before because it is favoured to some extent by the lack of soil conservation measures and concomitant erosion in the higher-rainfall parts of its range. The Rock Bunting is not threatened.

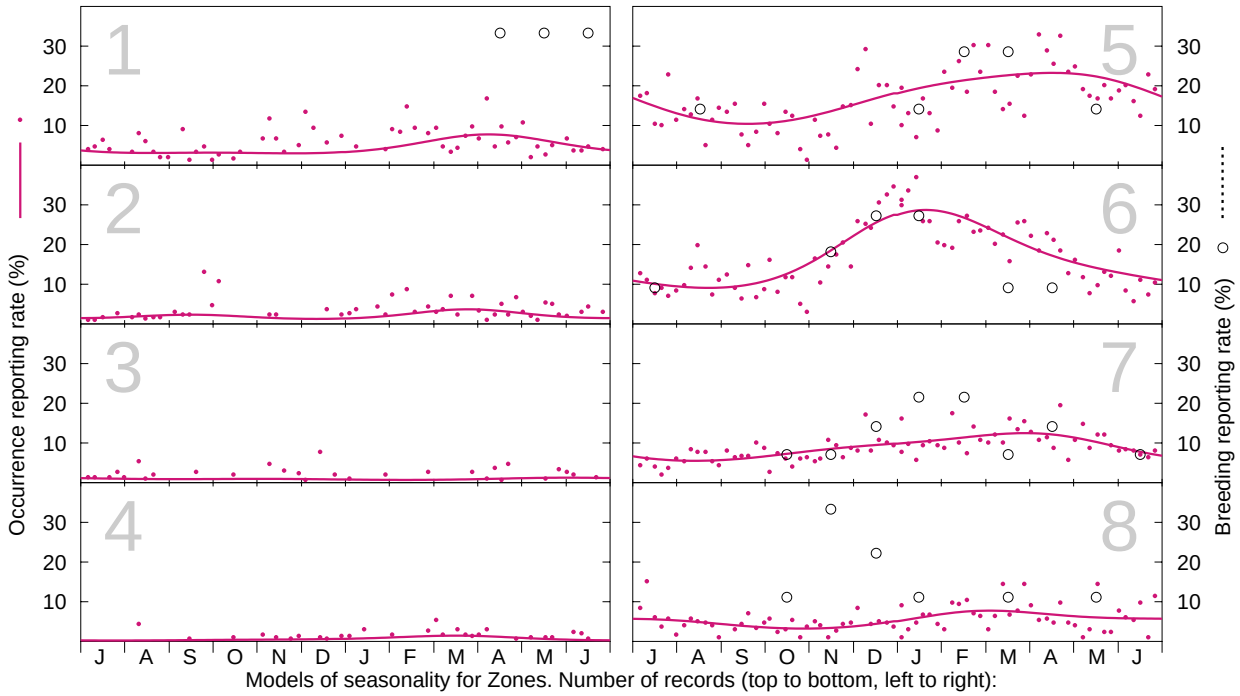
W.R.J. Dean

Recorded in 1638 grid cells, 36.1%
Total number of records: 12 104
Mean reporting rate for range: 13.6%

Reporting rates for vegetation types

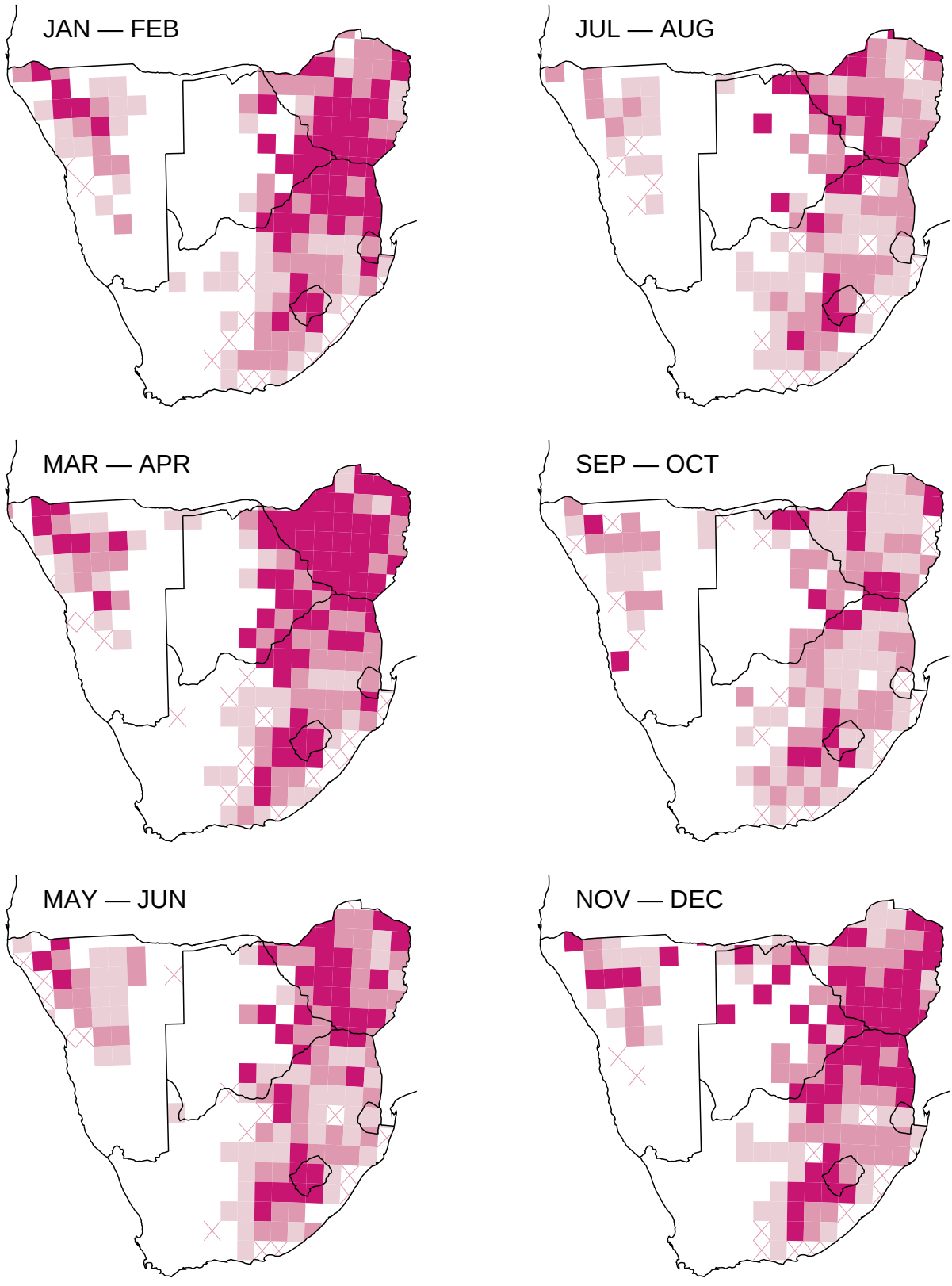






Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
Occurrence: 158, 81, 53, 57, 1483, 1963, 1749, 297; Breeding: 3, 0, 0, 0, 7, 11, 14, 9.

ROCK BUNTING



Seasonal distribution maps; one-degree grid.