

Steppe Buzzard

Bruinjakkalsvoël

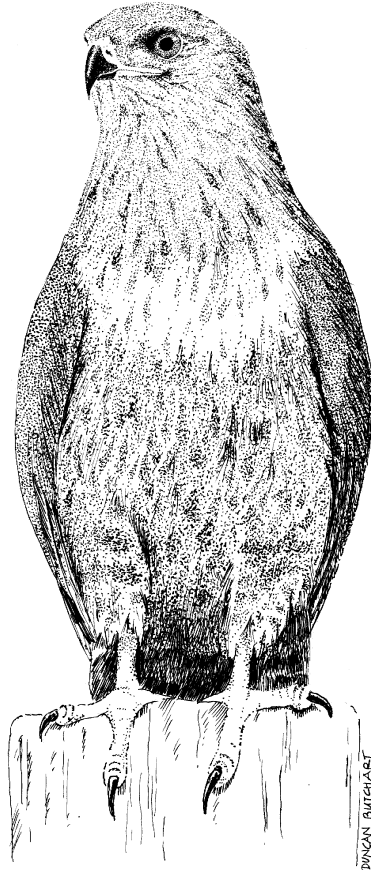
Buteo buteo

B. b. vulpinus, the Steppe Buzzard, is a race of the widespread Eurasian Buzzard breeding in northern Scandinavia, European Russia and central Asia, and is a nonbreeding migrant to sub-Saharan Africa. Eleven subspecies of the Eurasian Buzzard are recognized in the Palearctic; they range from migratory through partially migratory to sedentary (Del Hoyo *et al.* 1994). In southern Africa, the Steppe Buzzard is frequent to common, and even locally abundant, in the higher-rainfall eastern and southern regions during summer, but it is rare or absent in the drier western and central parts. It is often confused with the resident Forest Buzzard *B. trizonatus*. However, the distribution of the Forest Buzzard, which is far less common, is totally encompassed by that of the Steppe Buzzard and therefore the distribution map is not affected by such misidentifications. Confusion with immature Jackal Buzzard *B. rufofuscus* is also possible.

It usually occurs singly but is sometimes found in concentrations of up to about 80 birds (e.g. Hofmeyr 1995) and it is gregarious before and during migration (e.g. Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). A density of 7.7 birds/100 km² was recorded on the Springbok Flats (2429C,D) in the Transvaal (Tarboton & Allan 1984) and home-range sizes are 11–29 ha in the southwestern Cape Province (Whitelaw 1995). The higher reporting rates near the southern limit of the nonbreeding range are atypical for a Palearctic migrant but are borne out by roadside transect data: 1 bird/33 km in the Transvaal compared to 1 bird/2 km in the southwestern Cape Province (Tarboton & Allan 1984; Underhill *et al.* 1992b).

Habitat: It is largely associated with open country, favouring mainly dwarf shrubland, grassland, savanna, open woodland, thornveld and fynbos. It can, however, also be found in dense woodland and forests, including plantations of alien trees. The vegetation analysis shows that it occurs in a wide variety of vegetation types, with highest reporting rates in Fynbos, Grassy Karoo and Sweet Grasslands. The high reporting rate for Fynbos is misleading because a substantial proportion of lowland fynbos has been transformed into croplands in the southern and southwestern Cape Province; the species is attracted to croplands, especially wheatfields, where food is abundant. It is partial to hunting from utility poles in road reserves in agricultural areas.

Movements: The models show that arrival in southern Africa commences in September; reporting rates increase most rapidly in most Zones during November. The last birds depart in March and early April. Apart from Zone 2, both arrival and departure are closely synchronized for all Zones (Underhill *et al.* 1992b). A few overwinter in southern Africa (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Hockey *et al.* 1989; Boshoff 1991), but confusion with juvenile Jackal Buzzards could account for some of these records. Ring recoveries show that Steppe Buzzards migrating to southern Africa breed in Eurasia between Finland and the Black Sea eastwards to central Siberia and Tashkent (Mendelsohn 1986). Local movements within southern Africa have been recorded in the eastern



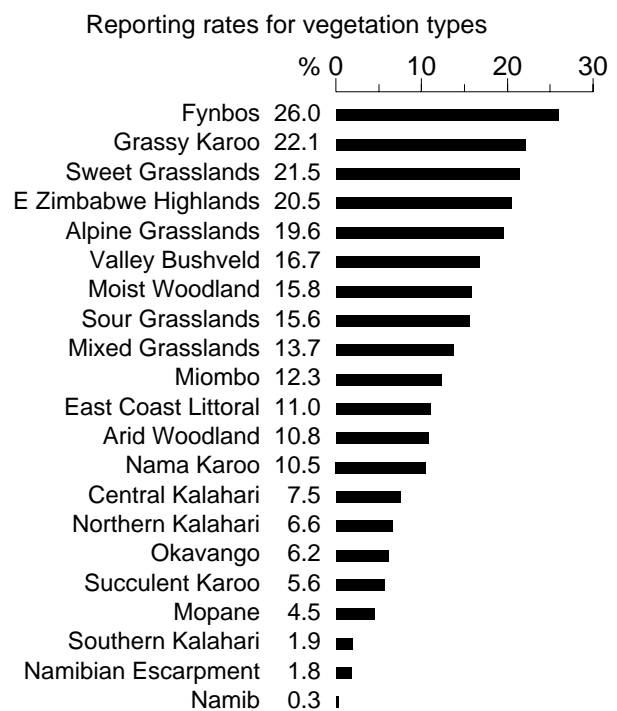
Transvaal (Simmons 1990b), but studies of individually marked or recognizable birds suggest that at least some return to the same nonbreeding areas every year (e.g. Tarboton & Allan 1984).

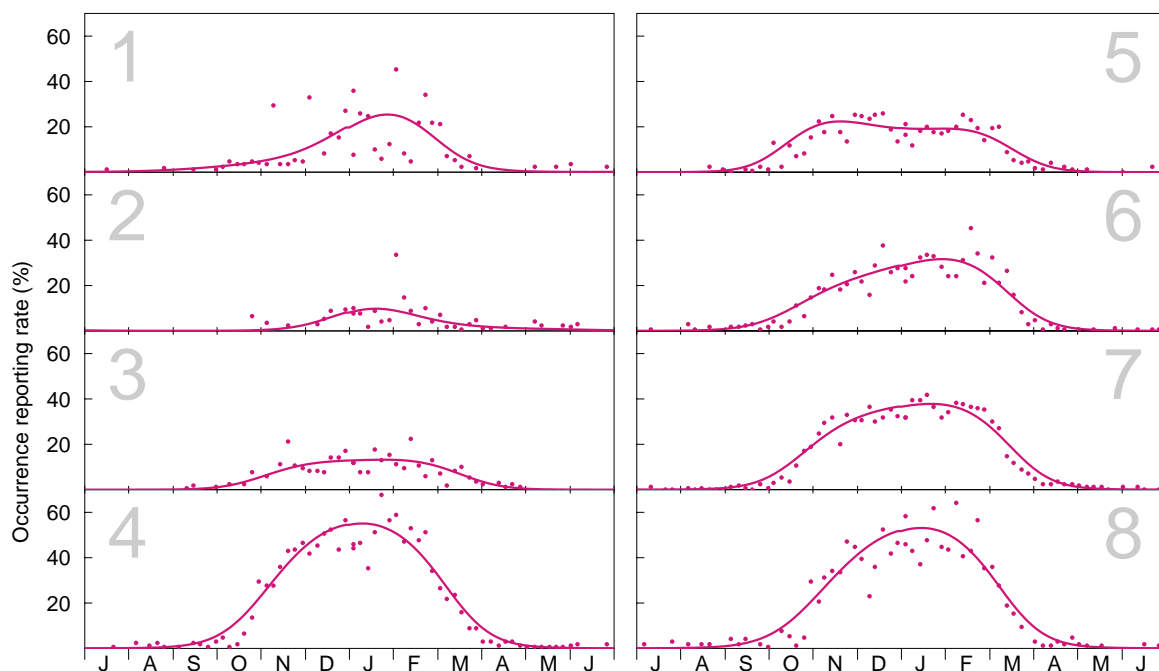
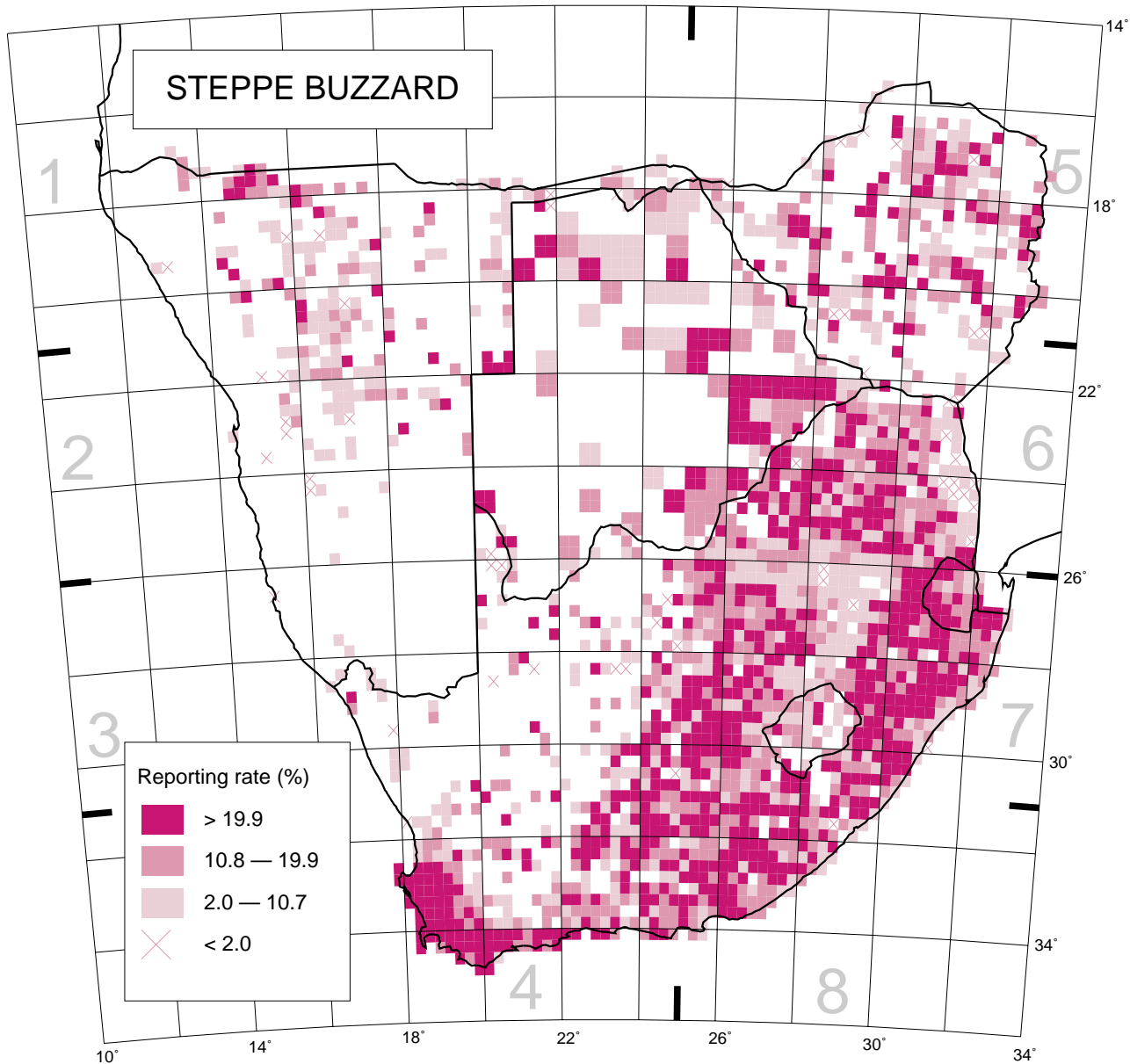
Historical distribution and conservation: No apparent change in distribution has occurred in the Cape Province in recent decades (Boshoff *et al.* 1983) and overall the current distribution is considered to reflect the historical distribution in southern Africa closely. The species, however, has adjusted its distribution locally in accordance with changes in farming activity (Boshoff *et al.* 1983). For example, in the Transvaal it is most numerous in the grassland/agricultural mosaic of the highveld, followed by the bushveld region where extensive areas of woodland have been cleared for agriculture (Tarboton & Allan 1984). In the lowlands of the southern and southwestern Cape Province, it is particularly abundant in cropland areas (Hockey *et al.* 1989).

The Steppe Buzzard is not threatened in southern Africa. Agricultural practices have benefited it by creating additional foraging habitat and food sources. In Eurasia it has decreased in many parts of its breeding range, from human persecution, pesticides, poisoning and habitat changes (Cramp *et al.* 1980).

A.F. Boshoff

Recorded in 2089 grid cells, 46.0%
Total number of records: 20 461
Mean reporting rate for range: 15.9%





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 163, 81, 223, 1468, 760, 1302, 2812, 978.