



## Dickinson's Kestrel

### Dickinsonse Grysvalk

*Falco dickinsoni*

The distribution of Dickinson's Kestrel is restricted to the northern and northeastern parts of the region, this being a southern extension of a range which extends across south-central Africa to include much of Mozambique, Zambia, Malawi, Tanzania and Angola. The tropical nature of its range is also reflected in its preference for lower-lying areas. In Zimbabwe it does not occur above 1500 m (Irwin 1981) and in Zambia it is most abundant on low-lying floodplains (Colebrook-Robjent & Tanner 1978). The majority of atlas records are from the Okavango and the Caprivi, while in Zimbabwe records are from the Zambezi catchment and lowlands in southeastern Zimbabwe from where it extends into the northeastern Transvaal lowveld.

The species is generally considered uncommon, but the only population estimate is for the northeastern Transvaal, essentially within the Kruger National Park, where less than 50 pairs are thought to be resident (Tarboton & Allan 1984). In prime habitat, further north in Africa, it is often much more abundant, with pairs sometimes nesting only several hundred metres apart (Colebrook-Robjent 1976). Home range sizes of 26–28 km<sup>2</sup> have been measured in the Kruger National Park (Benn & Kemp 1995).

**Habitat:** In much of its range it is associated with palms, especially *Hyphaene* palms, and Baobab trees in tropical savanna woodlands. The areas in which it is most abundant in southern Africa are also those where one or both of these trees are abundant: the Okavango and Caprivi, north and

southeastern Zimbabwe and the northeastern Transvaal. The species is, however, not regularly present in the palm savannas of Etosha and Owambo in northern Namibia. The vegetation analysis shows the highest reporting rates in the Okavango, Northern Kalahari and Mopane vegetation types. Large trees in these habitats are used both for nesting and as hunting perches. It often perches conspicuously on the tops of dead trees, from where it scans the ground below for prey, predominantly insects and lizards.

**Movements:** Regular seasonal movements have been mentioned for Zimbabwe and Zambia (Aspinwall 1979; Irwin 1981; Hartley 1989; Tree 1991c) and peak numbers were recorded in winter in the Okavango (Borello & Borello 1988; Brewster 1991). During winter 1994, it was about 10 times more common in northern Botswana than during the previous three years, suggesting irruptive movements (Herremans & Herremans-Tonnoeyr 1994d). Movements may also be inferred from the substantial number of records away from the core of its range. The atlas models support a winter influx into the region, though the slightly higher reporting rates during winter could also result from greater conspicuousness when the birds spend more time hunting from prominent perches in winter, while in the hot summer months they spend more time hidden on shady perches.

**Breeding:** It breeds in early summer, eggs usually being laid September–November (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). The few atlas records span October–January. Most nests have been found in cavities in the tops of dead *Hyphaene* palms and in Baobab trees; the nests of Hamerkops *Scopus umbretta* are also often used.

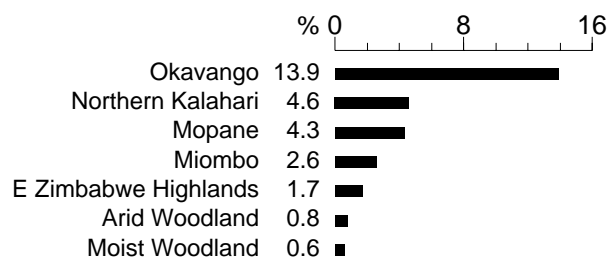
**Interspecific relationships:** In much of its range it is allopatric with the Grey Kestrel *F. ardosiaceus*. The two species are similar in appearance, habitat and prey preferences, and in choice of nest sites (Brown *et al.* 1982).

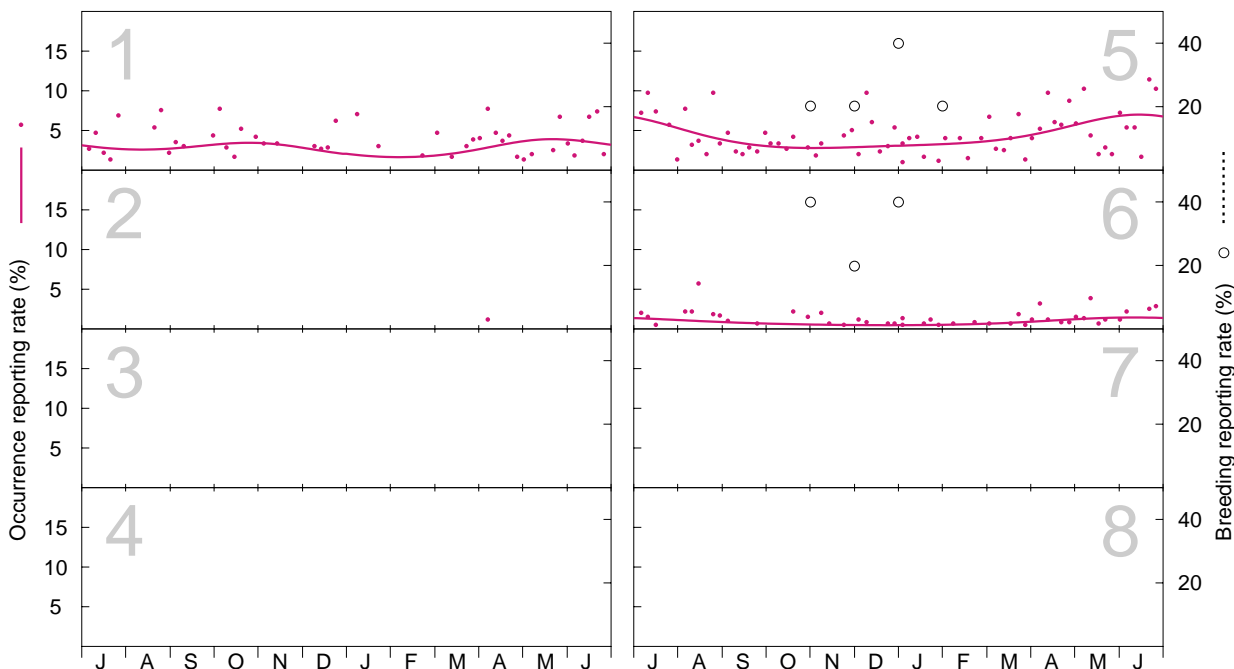
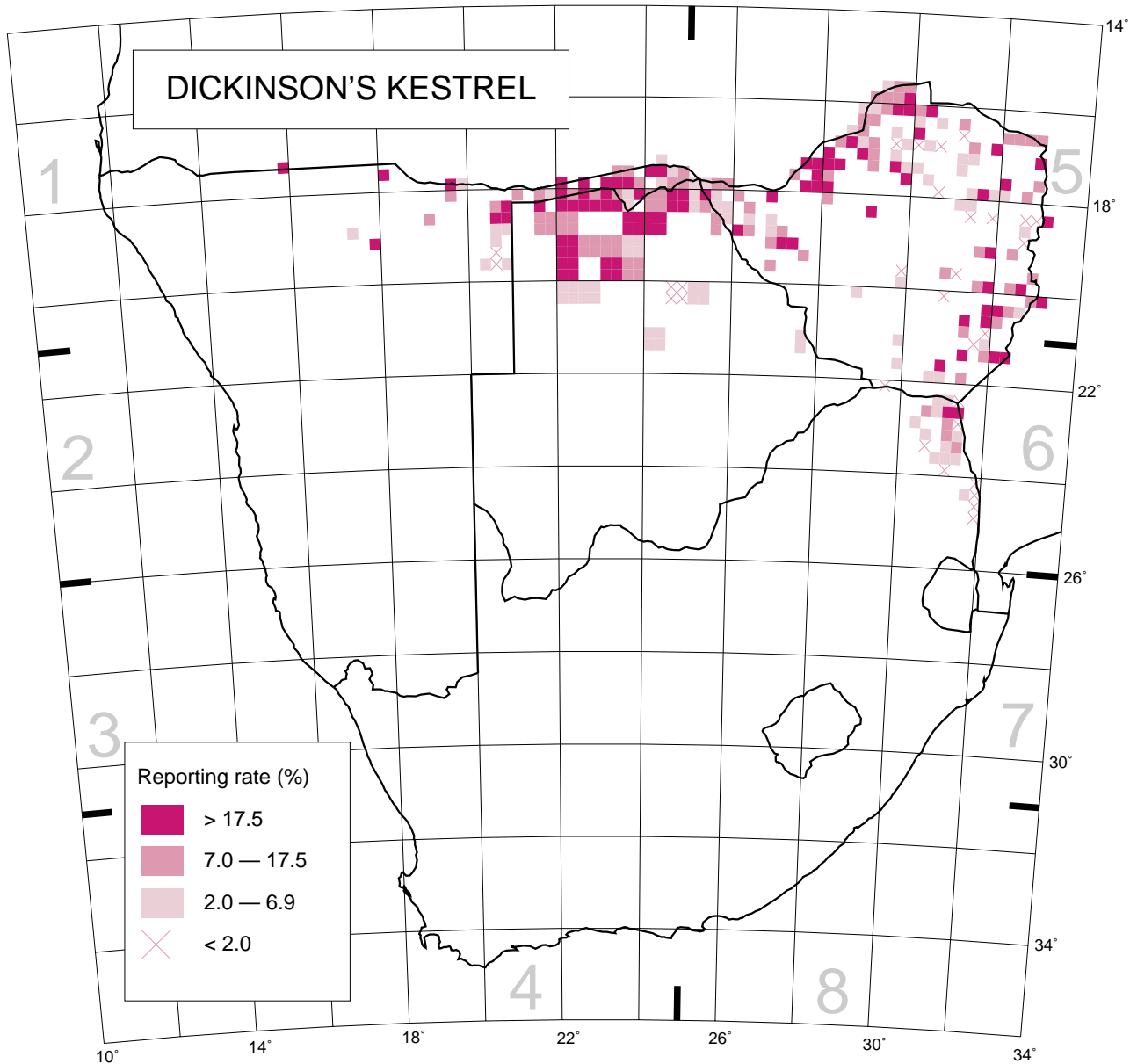
**Historical distribution and conservation:** There is no information to suggest changes in distribution or populations during historical times. Although palm savannas are locally under pressure by elephants in the Okavango, the preferred habitats of Dickinson's Kestrel are unlikely to be changed substantially in the near future, and its conservation status would seem to be quite secure. It is, however, listed as 'rare' in South Africa (Brooke 1984b) on the basis of its small peripheral population in that country.

J.M. Mendelsohn

Recorded in 301 grid cells, 6.6%  
Total number of records: 887  
Mean reporting rate for range: 8.6%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 96, 1, 0, 0, 374, 98, 0, 0; Breeding: 0, 0, 0, 0, 5, 5, 0, 0.