

Greywing Francolin

Bergpatrys

Francolinus africanus

The Greywing Francolin is endemic to South Africa and Lesotho (Clancey 1986a), occurring from the southeastern Transvaal, through the KwaZulu-Natal Drakensberg, Lesotho, the eastern Free State and the highlands of the eastern Cape Province westwards to the southwestern Cape Province. Atlas data indicate gaps in distribution in the Great Karoo (Hilton-Taylor & Le Roux 1989), i.e. the open plains between the Great Escarpment mountains north of Beaufort West (3222BC) and the Cape fold mountains to the south, and in the Tankwa Karoo (3119, 3219). This is probably due to the sparse vegetation cover in these areas. The outlier population in the northwest corresponds to an isolated area of fynbos vegetation in the Kamieskroon district (3017B).

The alleged subspecies *F. a. proximus* was not supported by genetic investigation (Little 1992b). The Greywing Francolin has previously been considered to be conspecific with the Moorland Francolin *F. psilolaemus* of East Africa (Del Hoyo *et al.* 1994), but as these are spatially remote and differ markedly in plumage pattern, it is better seen as a South African endemic (Clancey 1986a). Crowe *et al.* (1992) grouped it with two other genetically similar species, Orange River *F. levaillantoides* and Shelley's *F. shelleyi* Francolins. Recent mtDNA sequence analysis suggests that the Redwing Francolin *F. levaillantii* also belongs with this group (Bloomer *et al.* in press).

It usually occurs in coveys of *c.* eight birds, occasionally in larger groups of up to 25 individuals (Urban *et al.* 1986; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). Like most francolins, its presence is often revealed by its distinctive call.

Habitat: It is commonest in Alpine Grasslands at altitudes of *c.* 1800–2750 m in patches of short grass and among small bushes. Its distribution and numbers become more patchy in the south and west, where it inhabits Fynbos and Karoo down to sea-level in the southwestern Cape Province. Within montane grassland areas, veld management and the resultant structure of the sward determines the number of coveys, while annual variation in arthropod availability in summer and autumn influences the number of individuals per covey (Little *et al.* 1993a).

Movements: Although apparently sedentary and territorial, its populations on the Stormberg Plateau, eastern Cape Province, show a high degree of outbreeding, suggesting that 8–9 individuals move between neighbouring farms each generation (Grant & Little 1992). Fluctuations in reporting rate presumably reflect variations in conspicuousness linked to the breeding cycle.

Breeding: It breeds during spring/summer throughout its range, with peak egg-laying August–November. The nesting period is contracted in the southwestern Cape Province, where it starts about one month earlier and ends three months earlier than in the eastern Free State and the eastern Cape Province, where laying occurs August–March (Little & Crowe 1993c). This pattern is apparent in the models.

Interspecific relationships: It is partially sympatric with the Redwing Francolin in the

highland grasslands and the Cape Francolin *F. capensis* in the southwestern Cape Province. In KwaZulu-Natal, it is more tolerant of grasslands which are frequently burnt and moderately grazed than is the Redwing Francolin *F. levaillantii* (Mentis & Little 1992), and it apparently favours the moderately grazed grasslands of the Stormberg Plateau (3126B, 3127A), where its density equals that of both itself and Redwing Francolin combined in the KwaZulu-Natal Drakensberg (Little *et al.* 1993b). In the Transvaal, they are widely sympatric; the Greywing Francolin is the more common at the highest altitudes (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b).

Historical distribution and conservation: The historical distribution was probably similar to the current distribution. Alleged declines in numbers in KwaZulu-Natal could not be substantiated (Mentis & Bigalke 1973). Greywing Francolin have been hunted for recreation, and commercially, in the eastern Cape Province since at least the turn of the century (Gilfillan 1908). Recent commercial hunting in the eastern Cape Province is biologically sustainable (Little & Crowe 1993b; Little *et al.* 1993a), economically viable (Smith 1994) and provides landowners with an incentive to conserve grassland habitats (Little & Crowe 1993a). Veld burning during early summer is the most detrimental human-induced influence on breeding success (Little & Crowe 1993c).

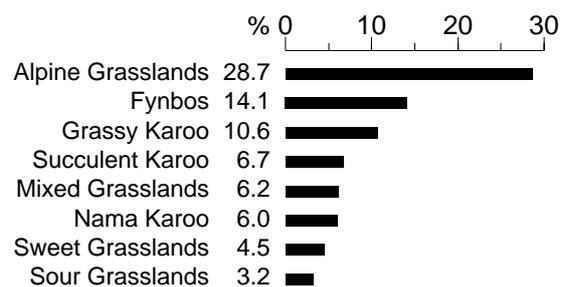
R.M. Little

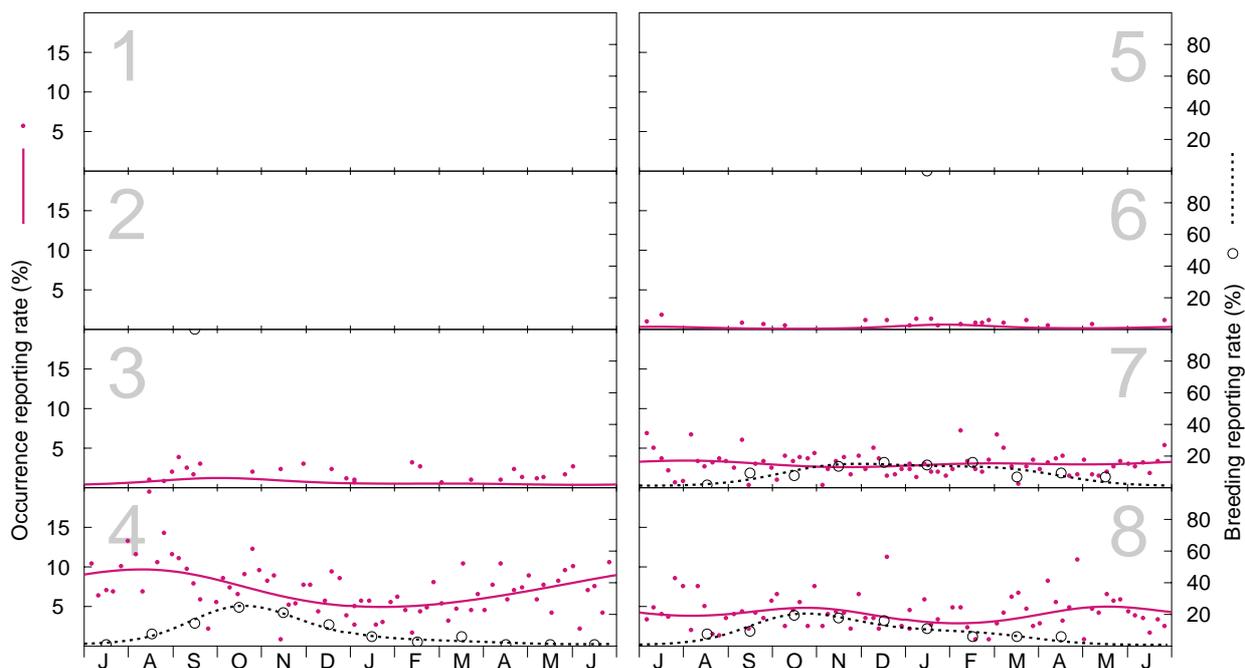
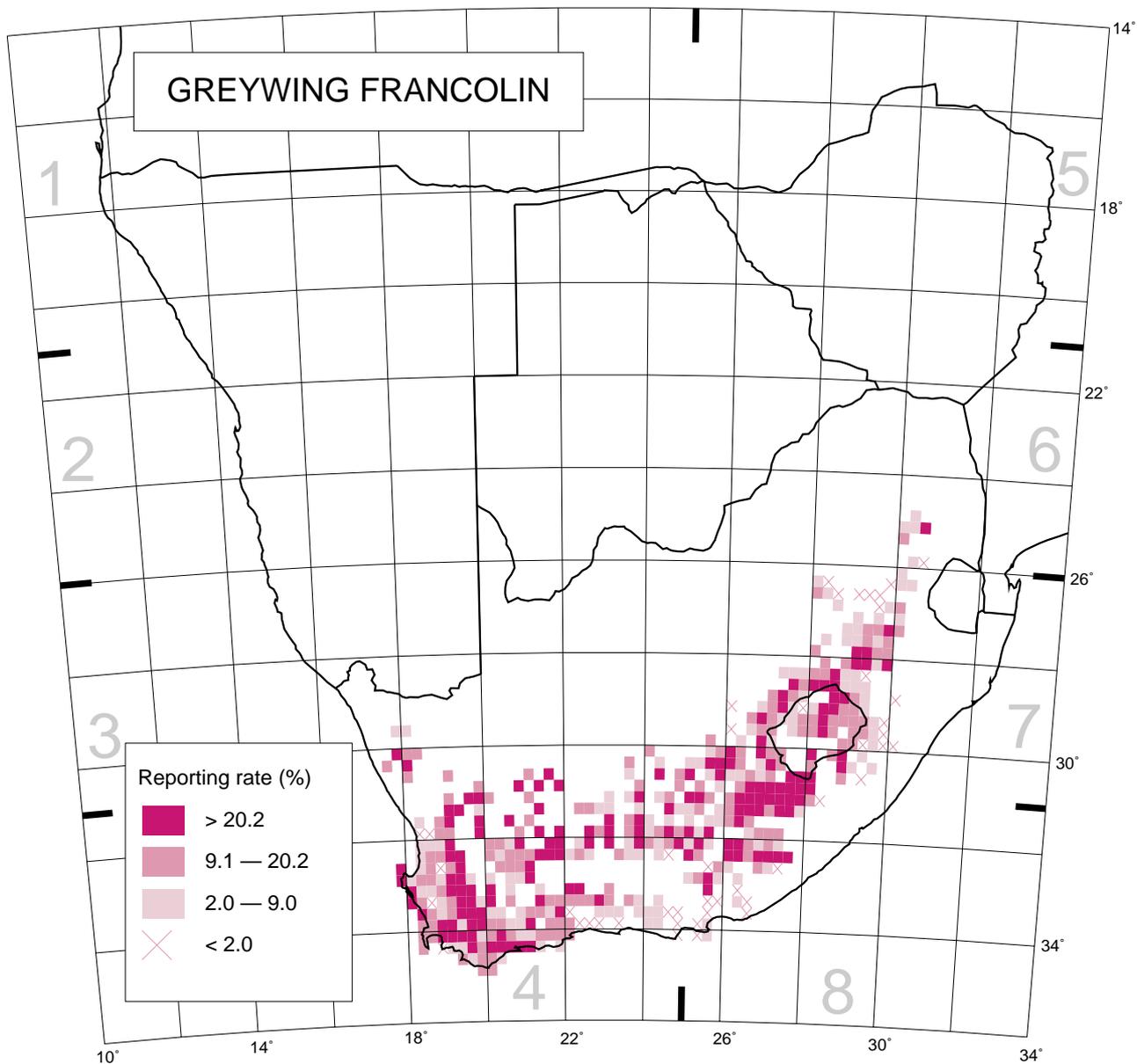
Recorded in 493 grid cells, 10.9%

Total number of records: 5879

Mean reporting rate for range: 14.7%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 0, 0, 36, 628, 0, 30, 587, 225; Breeding: 0, 0, 1, 141, 0, 1, 76, 81.