

## African Mourning Dove

### Rooioogtortelduif

#### *Streptopelia decipiens*

Unlike the three other common members of the genus *Streptopelia* in southern Africa, the African Mourning Dove has a localized distribution, with two apparently separate populations: a southern one in the lowveld of the eastern and northern Transvaal, the Limpopo Valley and adjacent lowlands, Zimbabwe and Botswana, extending eastwards into Mozambique (Urban *et al.* 1986); and a northern one extending from the Zambezi Valley in northern Zimbabwe, westwards through the Caprivi and at scattered localities across northern Namibia, southwards into the Okavango and along the upper Boteti River. Despite this clear separation in range, the populations have not been described as subspecifically distinct. Although there seem to be areas with suitable vegetation in northeastern Botswana (one of the better-covered parts of that country) to allow a link between the southern and northern populations, the two closest records between the populations in northern Botswana were about 300 km apart. There is some well-atlased, suitable habitat in between, e.g. the lower Nata River drainage (2026), where it does not occur. Many of the Zimbabwe records are associated with the Zambezi and Limpopo drainages. It is an Afrotropical species, more widespread and more common in savannas further north (Urban *et al.* 1986).

It is usually seen singly or in pairs, but flocks may occur, particularly at waterholes (Penry 1994). It resembles the Redeyed Dove *S. semitorquata* and the Cape Turtle Dove *S. capicola*, but has a different call and is smaller than the former and darker than the latter. It could have been confused with these better-known species over most of its range and may therefore have been under-reported. Its Afrikaans name is appropriate, but unfortunate, because it encourages confusion with the Redeyed Dove. Further-

more, some parts of its range were thinly covered and, being generally localized, though sometimes common (Howells 1985), it probably occurs somewhat more widely and uniformly than indicated.

**Habitat:** Riparian and adjacent woodland in savanna biomes, particularly with taller trees such as *Acacia albida*, are favoured (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). This is reflected in the relatively high reporting rate for the Okavango vegetation type and in its general pattern of distribution.

**Movements:** The South African birds have been previously described as occurring 'patchily and erratically', and there have been occasional records of pairs staying long enough to breed, above the escarpment on the Nyl Floodplain (2428DA) (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). The only ringing recovery is of a bird ringed at Pafuri (2231AD) and recovered 33 km to the northeast in Zimbabwe. The reporting rates for the northern Zimbabwe birds (Zone 5) stayed constant, which is contrary to suggestions that these birds may not be resident (Tree 1989d). The reporting rates for Zone 1 were too erratic to allow conclusions to be drawn from a possible winter decrease. Rowan (1983) reported that 'an outward dispersal from riverine habitats may occur during the rains'.

**Breeding:** Breeding was recorded throughout its range, in all months, but with a distinct winter peak in the northern Zimbabwe population (Zone 5). Breeding in the Okavango appears to be throughout the year (Skinner 1996a).

**Interspecific relationships:** It has the smallest range of the four *Streptopelia* doves and overlaps extensively with the other species, mostly the Redeyed Dove which prefers similar habitat. Redeyed and Mourning Doves both have a stronghold in the Okavango region.

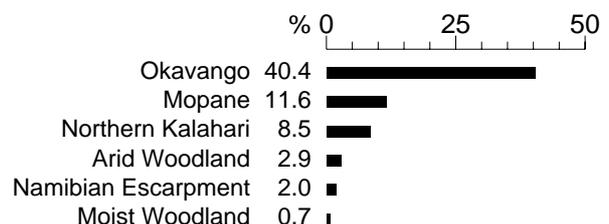
**Historical distribution and conservation:** The present distribution suggests an expansion when compared to the earlier inventory from the Transvaal (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). It seems more likely, however, that increased observer effort contributed to a more comprehensive picture.

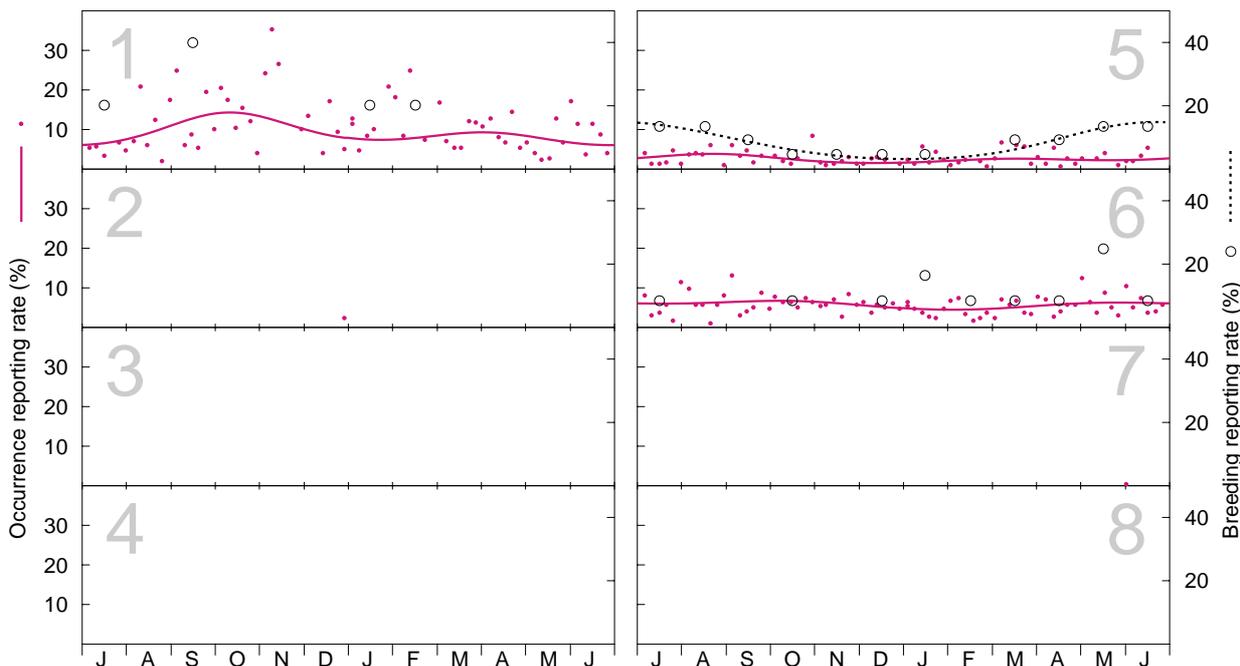
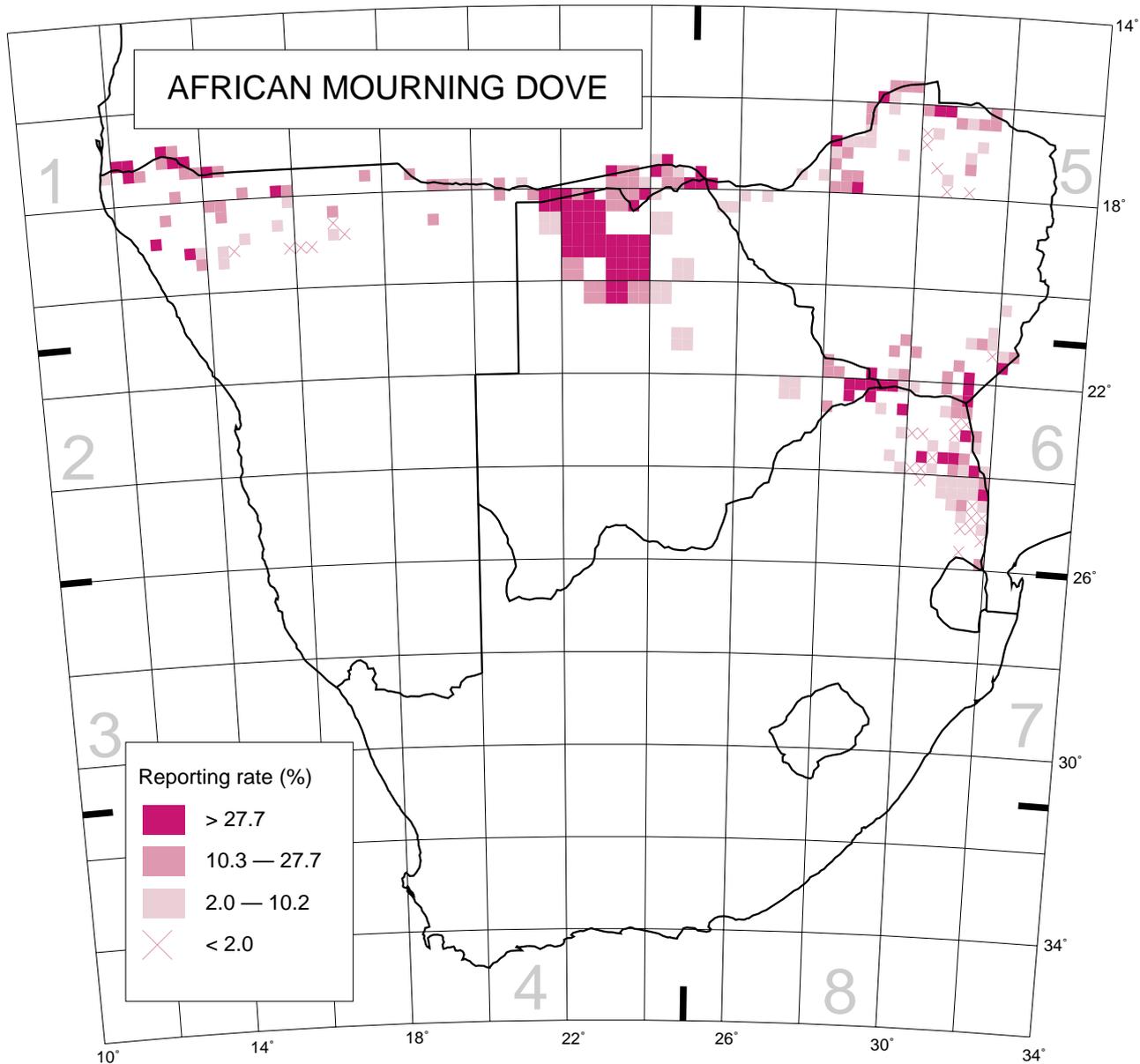
It has a limited range in southern Africa because of particular habitat requirements. The African Mourning Dove does not seem to be of particular conservation concern and it occurs in many protected areas in the region. It was previously considered to 'merit careful monitoring' in South Africa (Brooke 1984b).

B.D. Colahan

Recorded in 296 grid cells, 6.5%  
Total number of records: 2053  
Mean reporting rate for range: 15.4%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 304, 1, 0, 0, 225, 658, 1, 0; Breeding: 5, 0, 0, 0, 22, 12, 0, 0.