

## Namaqua Dove

### Namakwaduifie

#### *Oena capensis*

The Namaqua Dove, while obviously favouring the dry interior, is found virtually throughout southern Africa. Apparently erratic movements by some birds make it uncommon and irregular in many areas, and even where common, numbers often fluctuate widely. While usually seen singly or in pairs, larger groups occur, sometimes of several hundred birds (Rowan 1983). A population of 200 birds was estimated for Swaziland (Parker 1994). It is widespread in the Afrotropical region, and is also found in southwestern Arabia, and on Socotra and Madagascar (Rowan 1983).

Its call, though distinctive, is weak; the bird is usually seen when feeding on bare ground, or perched on a fence or overhead line. It is unlikely to be confused with any other species in southern Africa, and the atlas data are reliable. Gaps in its distribution tend to correspond with areas thinly covered, but real gaps exist in the east, including the Transvaal escarpment and in eastern Zimbabwe, where the annual rainfall exceeds 750 mm, and in the extremely arid Namib 'sand sea'.

**Habitat:** A preference for dry to semi-arid open woodlands and savannas is clearly reflected in the analysis of vegetation types. It is also common in more open habitat, with relatively high reporting rates from the Karoo vegetation types and Sweet Grasslands, where patches of scrub provide nest sites. While not associated with forest habitat, there is a record of it nesting in a Durban (2931CC) mangrove swamp (Sinclair 1976a). Areas of high reporting rates generally appear to be those parts of the semi-arid interior where water is perennially available, albeit at boreholes and small reservoirs.

**Movements:** The status of 'partial migrant' was already suggested at the beginning of the 20th century (Stark & Sclater 1906). The distribution map shows a wide swath of territory with low reporting rates in the south and east; this is suggestive of nomadism. The seasonal distribution maps show that there are extensive movements in southern Africa, and the models suggest annual cycles that should be examined in conjunction with the seasonal maps.

Simply stated, there is a trend towards greater numbers of birds in the region as a whole, and particularly in the southwest, during the summer. This is the period when most of southern Africa has its rainy season when both seeds and water are available but, given that much of the region is semi-arid with unpredictable rainfall, a degree of nomadism is necessary to exploit patchy resources. There is also a summer

influx into the winter-rainfall region of the western and south-western Cape Province where the seeds of annual herbaceous plants are likely to be relatively abundant after the winter-spring flowering season.

In winter, when much of the species' range becomes dry and relatively cold, there appears to be a partial retreat into tropical mesic areas to the north. This is best illustrated in the model for Zone 5 (mainly Zimbabwe), but is likely to include other territories to the north of the atlas region where the species is predominantly a nonbreeding winter visitor (Urban *et al.* 1986). The southern subspecies *O. c. capensis* has been identified in Zambia (Benson *et al.* 1971; Clancey 1980b). The only ring recovery, which is unfortunately equivocal, was of a bird ringed in the Gobabis district (2218BD) and recovered in Bulawayo (2028BA) (SAFRING; T.B. Oatley *in litt.*). **Breeding:** Breeding was reported throughout the year, with a trend towards a peak in spring. In the southwest the season is relatively well defined with a summer peak. In more arid areas with erratic rainfall, breeding is likely to be opportunistic to some extent; in Namibia, for example, egg-laying records span September–April as well as July (Brown & Clinning *in press*).

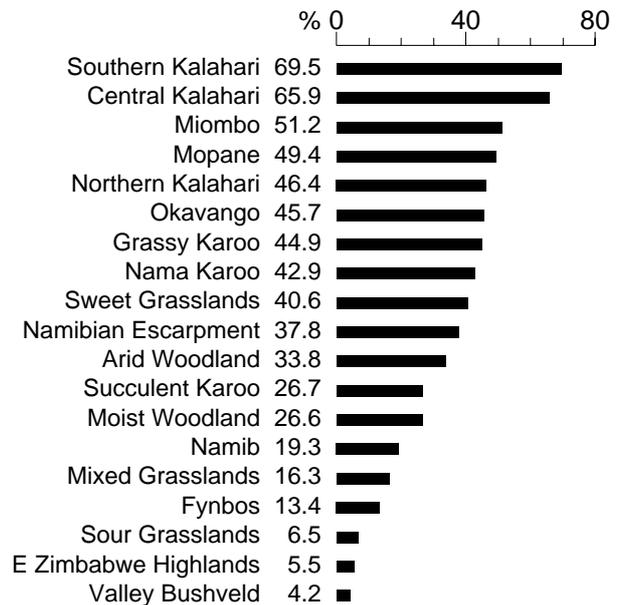
**Interspecific relationships:** Its associations with other dove species, even those as widespread as itself, are very limited (Rowan 1983). Of the commoner dove species in the region, it is the one least associated with human habitation.

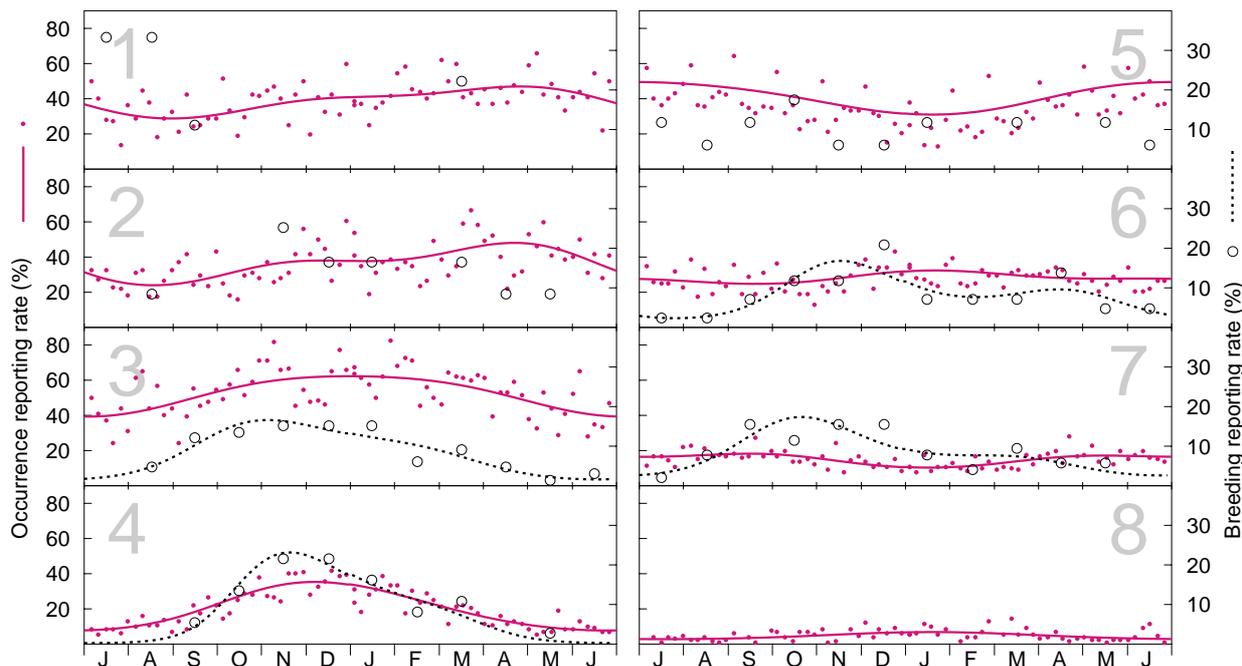
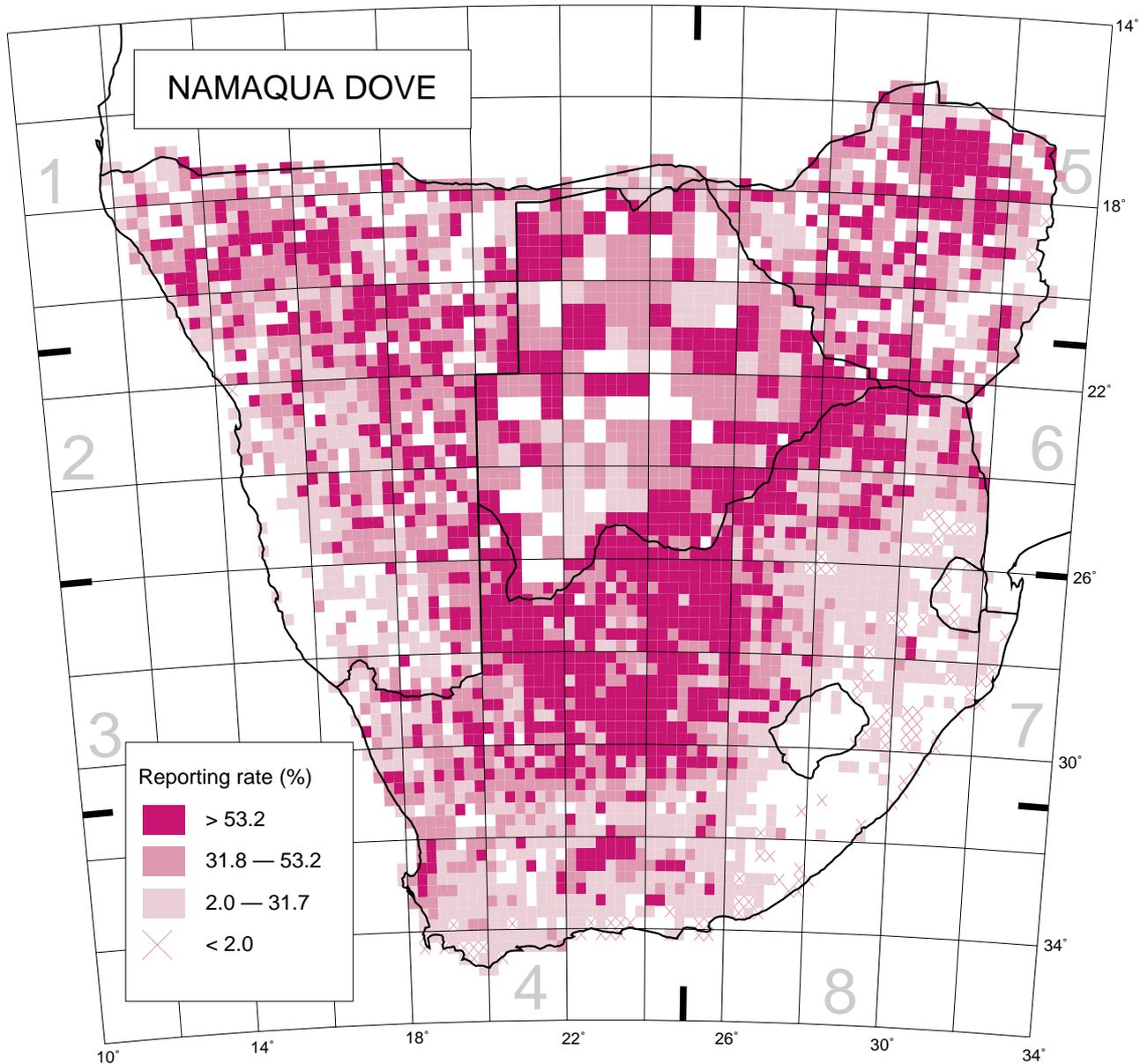
**Historical distribution and conservation:** No major changes in distribution are known, but the provision of watering points in drier regions has probably been beneficial to the species. It seems to have declined in Lesotho (Bonde 1993) and possibly in the Transkei and other east coast areas, probably because of high human population densities. Nevertheless, the Namaqua Dove does not give cause for conservation concern at present.

*B.D. Colahan and J.A. Harrison*

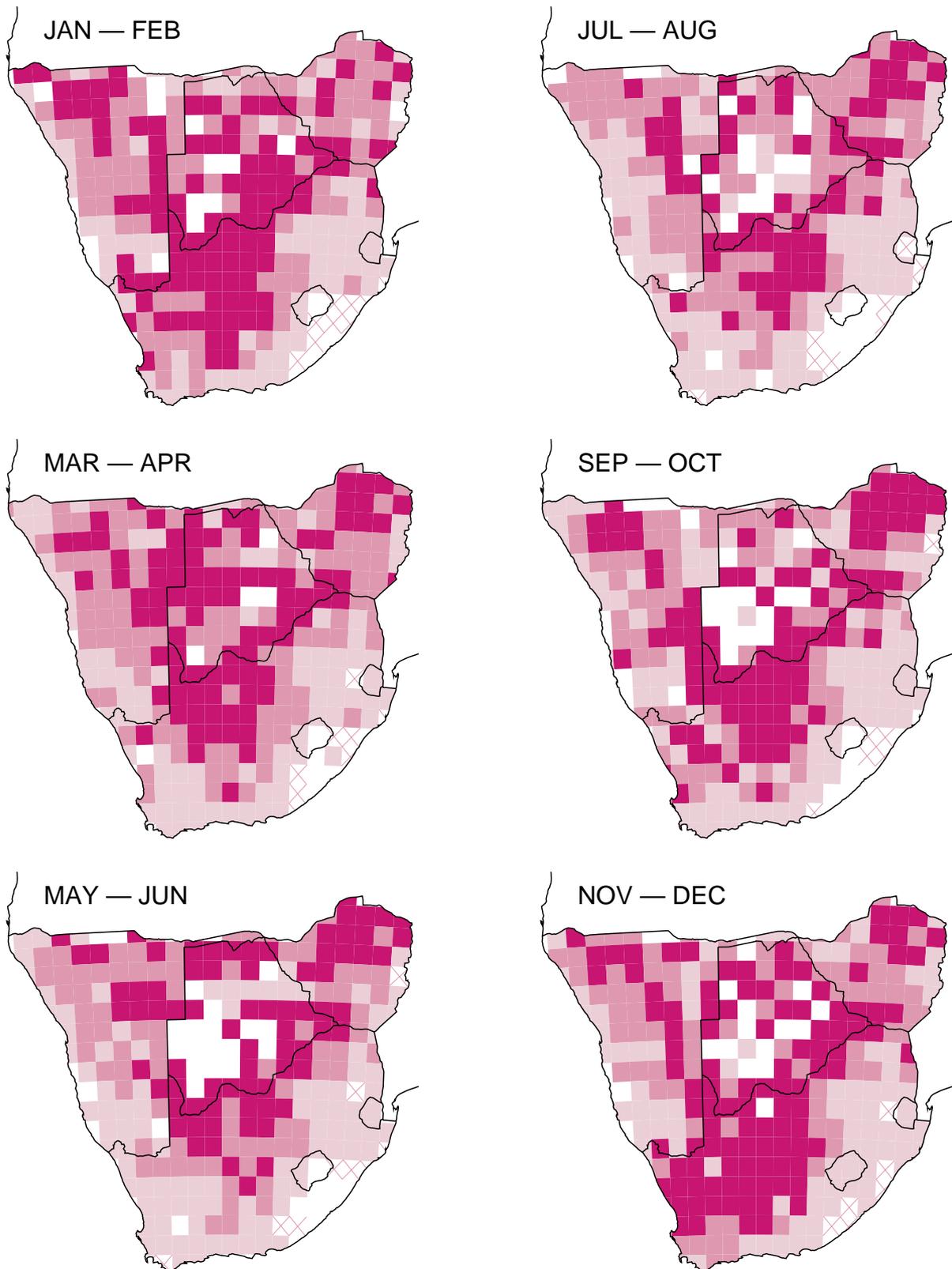
Recorded in 3671 grid cells, 80.9%  
Total number of records: 37 221  
Mean reporting rate for range: 27.5%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types





# NAMAQUA DOVE



Seasonal distribution maps; one-degree grid.