



## Grey Cuckooshrike

### Bloukatakeroe

*Coracina caesia*

The Grey Cuckooshrike is an Afrotropical species with a wide but disjointed distribution, occurring in the Cameroon highlands and in montane areas of the eastern half of sub-Saharan Africa south to KwaZulu-Natal, the eastern Cape Province and the southern coastal forests. It is characteristically an Afromontane species, much given to altitudinal migration during the dry season, so there are many records of it from lowland localities.

It is dove-grey with a prominent jet-black eye. The only other cuckooshrike within the atlas region with which it might be confused is the Whitebreasted Cuckooshrike *C. pectoralis*, but that is a woodland bird, seldom if ever seen in forests.

It is sometimes encountered singly or in a family group, but more usually in pairs. It is quiet, the most common vocalization being a rather faint, high-pitched, descending whistle. It feeds mainly in the canopy, and can be seen to best advantage from positions outside of and above the

canopy, e.g. from the grassy upper slopes of forested gullies.

The comparatively low reporting rates on the distribution map confirm that it is neither common nor conspicuous. A density of 6 birds/4.5 ha has been reported from the Transvaal (Keith *et al.* 1992).

**Habitat:** The vegetation analysis clearly shows its affinity for Afromontane forest. During the winter months it may be seen in woodland habitats where it usually frequents denser growths of trees along drainage lines. Its presence in coastal forests of the East Coast Littoral is largely seasonal in the north, as shown by Cyrus & Robson (1980). In the winter-rainfall area it is restricted to larger forest patches as far west as Rivier-sonderend (3419BB), but has been observed to forage extensively in pine plantations adjacent to indigenous forest (Hockey *et al.* 1989). The well-camouflaged nest is usually sited high up on the branch of a forest tree.

**Movements:** It is a known altitudinal migrant (Vernon 1972b; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Oatley & Tinley 1989; Vernon 1989; Keith *et al.* 1992), but the models lend clear credence for such movements only in Zone 7. This happens to be the area where altitudinal migration of all involved species is most easily observed; the equivocal nature of the models for other Zones is probably largely due to comparatively low reporting rates.

**Breeding:** Maclean (1993b) gave the breeding season as November–December. Little is known about its breeding biology.

**Interspecific relationships:** It has a strong propensity to join mixed bird parties during the nonbreeding season.

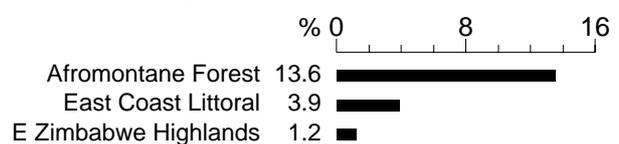
**Historical distribution and conservation:** Although described originally in 1823 from a specimen collected in the eastern Cape Province, very little has been written about this species. Because of its widespread Afrotropical range, the Grey Cuckooshrike is not considered

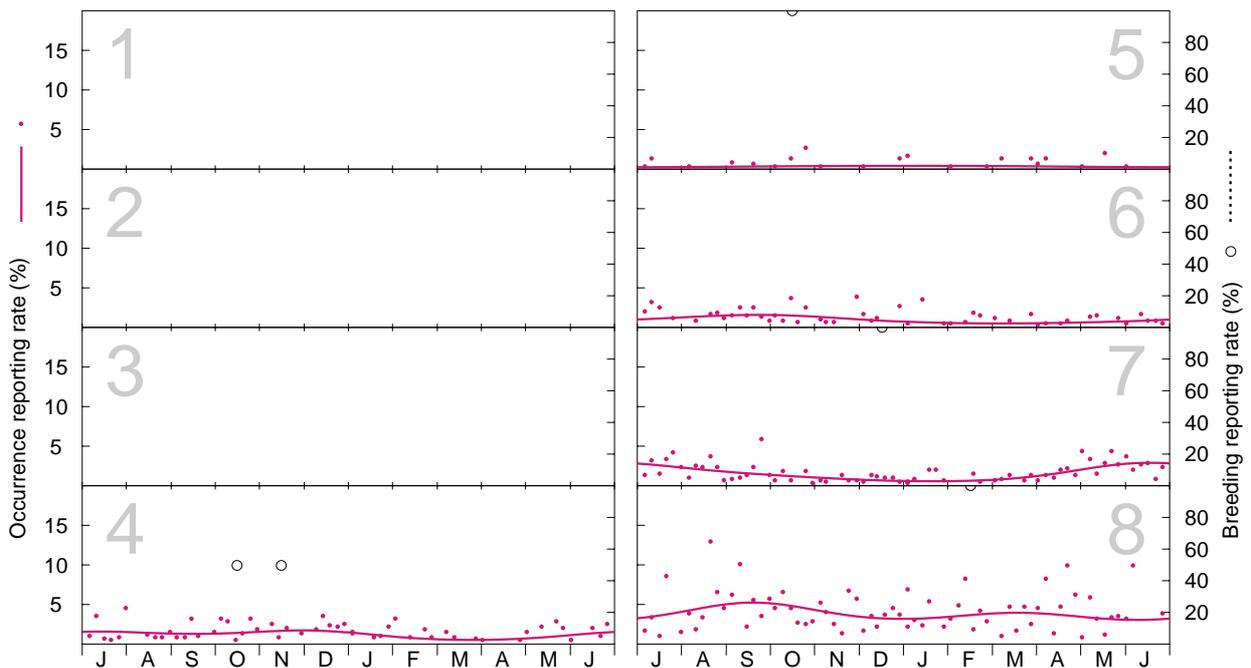
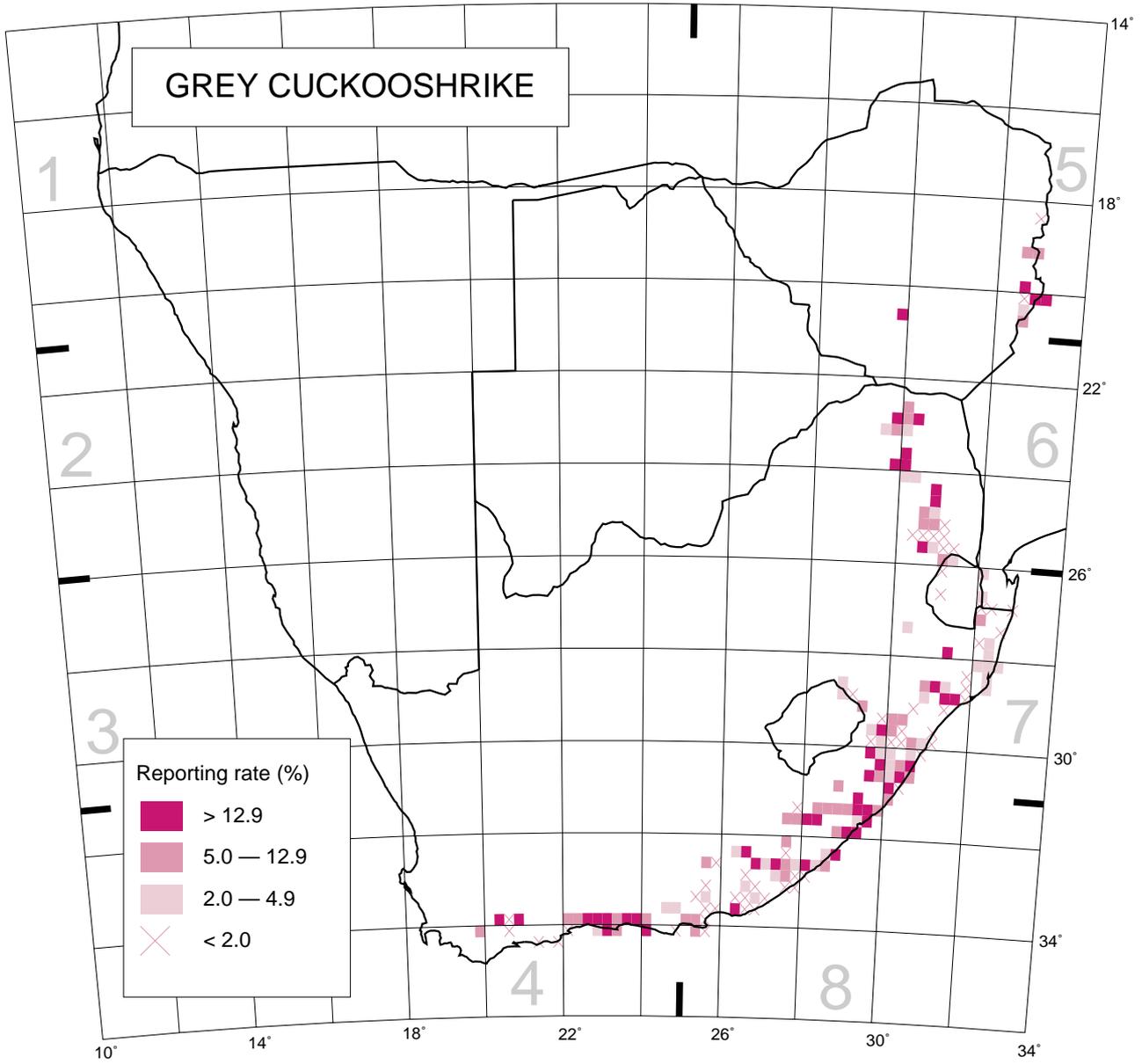
threatened, and as an established altitudinal migrant it has the ability to move through and live in a range of habitats. Local populations that might experience destruction of their montane forest breeding habitat may therefore have a better prospect of natural relocation than do more sedentary forest species.

*T.B. Oatley*

Recorded in 188 grid cells, 4.1%  
Total number of records: 1696  
Mean reporting rate for range: 6.3%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 0, 0, 0, 103, 29, 108, 292, 212; Breeding: 0, 0, 0, 2, 1, 0, 1, 1.