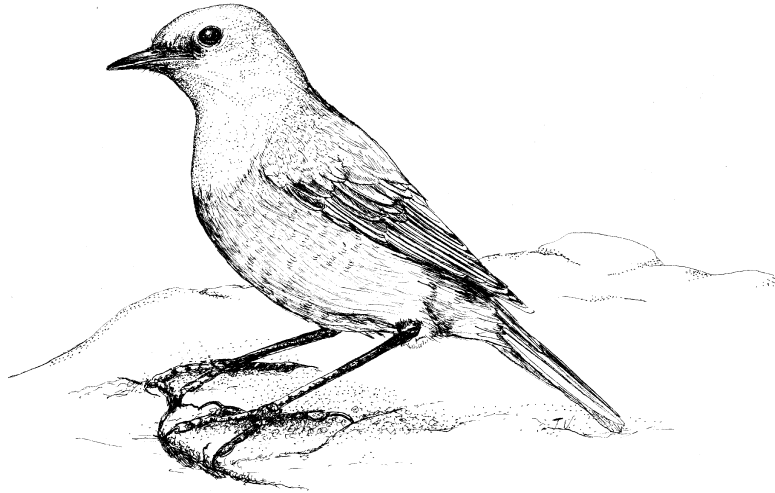




Sentinel Rock Thrush

Langtoonkliplyster

Monticola explorator

The Sentinel Rock Thrush is endemic to South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland, and the core of its distribution lies in Lesotho. The overall distribution resembles that of its congener, the Cape Rock Thrush *M. rupestris* (see text for that species), but there are striking differences. While the distributions of both species coincide with mountainous habitat in the mesic south and east, records are much more sparse than for the Cape Rock Thrush, except in Lesotho and the adjacent high Drakensberg to the northeast and southwest where the Sentinel Rock Thrush has higher reporting rates. It is much less widespread than the Cape Rock Thrush in the Transvaal, is absent from the Lebombo range (2632A,C, 2732A), and has fewer records from coastal areas. Overall, the pattern is one of a high-altitude specialist. There appears to be a break just north of Lesotho between populations belonging to the subspecies *M. e. explorator* in the south and the race *tenebriformis* to the north (Clancey *et al.* 1987).

Reporting rates were no doubt biased by the species' preference for high altitudes: in areas where modal altitudes are relatively high, e.g. the Lesotho massif, it was recorded frequently; in other areas where high altitudes are confined to inaccessible mountain peaks, it was recorded infrequently. For this reason it was probably under-reported in large parts of its range. Densities of 3–12 birds/km² have been recorded in Lesotho uplands (Osborne & Tigar 1990).

Habitat: It is associated mainly with rocky uplands in the grassland biome, but its range extends well beyond that biome in the southwest, principally into Fynbos and Karoo. The vegetation analysis shows its strong association with Alpine Grassland which has a scrub element and botanical affinities with fynbos and Karoo vegetation (Brown & Barnes 1984). In addition to its upland habitats, it is seasonally associated with grasslands at lower altitudes and may be encountered in virtually any unwooded grassland in winter (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). In Lesotho it is found above 2000 m (Osborne & Tigar 1990; Tarboton *et al.* 1993).

Movements: Seasonal movements have been reported and these appear to take the form of altitudinal migrations between high-altitude grasslands in summer and lower-altitude grasslands in winter (Clancey 1957; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Tarboton *et al.* 1993). This is clearly supported by the model for Zone 7 where reporting rates are markedly higher in winter, particularly midwinter, as a result of birds moving into

lower-lying areas where they are more readily observed. The migration is partial, however, and may involve only those birds forced to leave snowbound areas (Brown & Barnes 1984; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Osborne & Tigar 1990). The seasonal maps show the relatively narrow summer distribution (see January–February map) and the relatively wide winter distribution (see July–August map).

The atlas data do not support the idea that the migration of *tenebriformis* to northern KwaZulu-Natal, the Lebombo range and southern Mozambique (Clancey 1957; Clancey *et al.* 1987) is a regular event involving a substantial number of birds.

Breeding: The models indicate a spring and summer breeding season. September–December are recorded months of egg-laying (Dean 1971; Brown & Barnes 1984; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Maclean 1993b), but records from Lesotho suggest a season extending to February (Osborne & Tigar 1990; Bonde 1993; Tarboton *et al.* 1993), which could be expected given the relatively long and severe winters in the highlands.

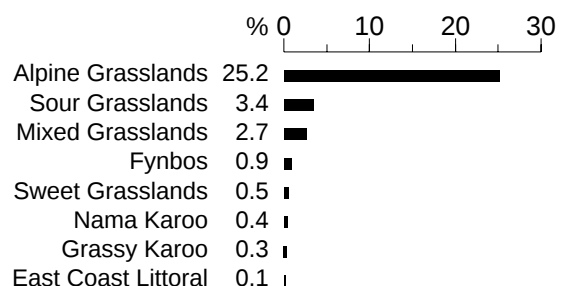
Interspecific relationships: See text for Cape Rock Thrush.

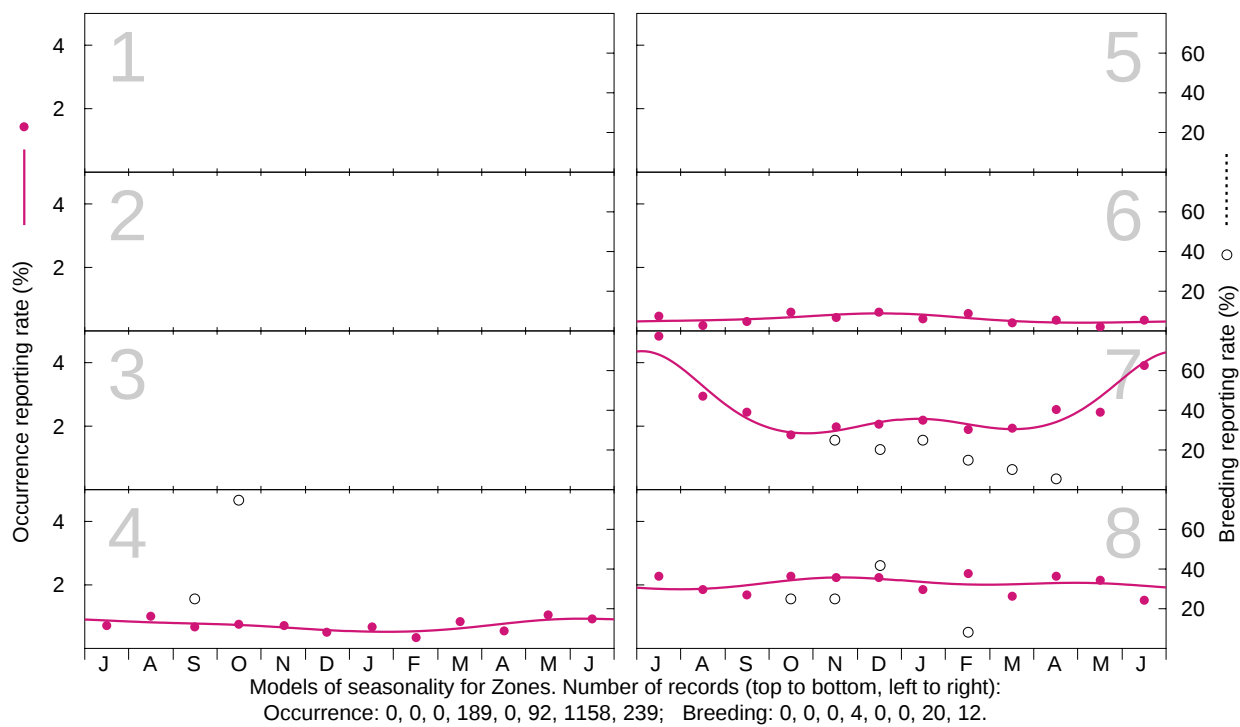
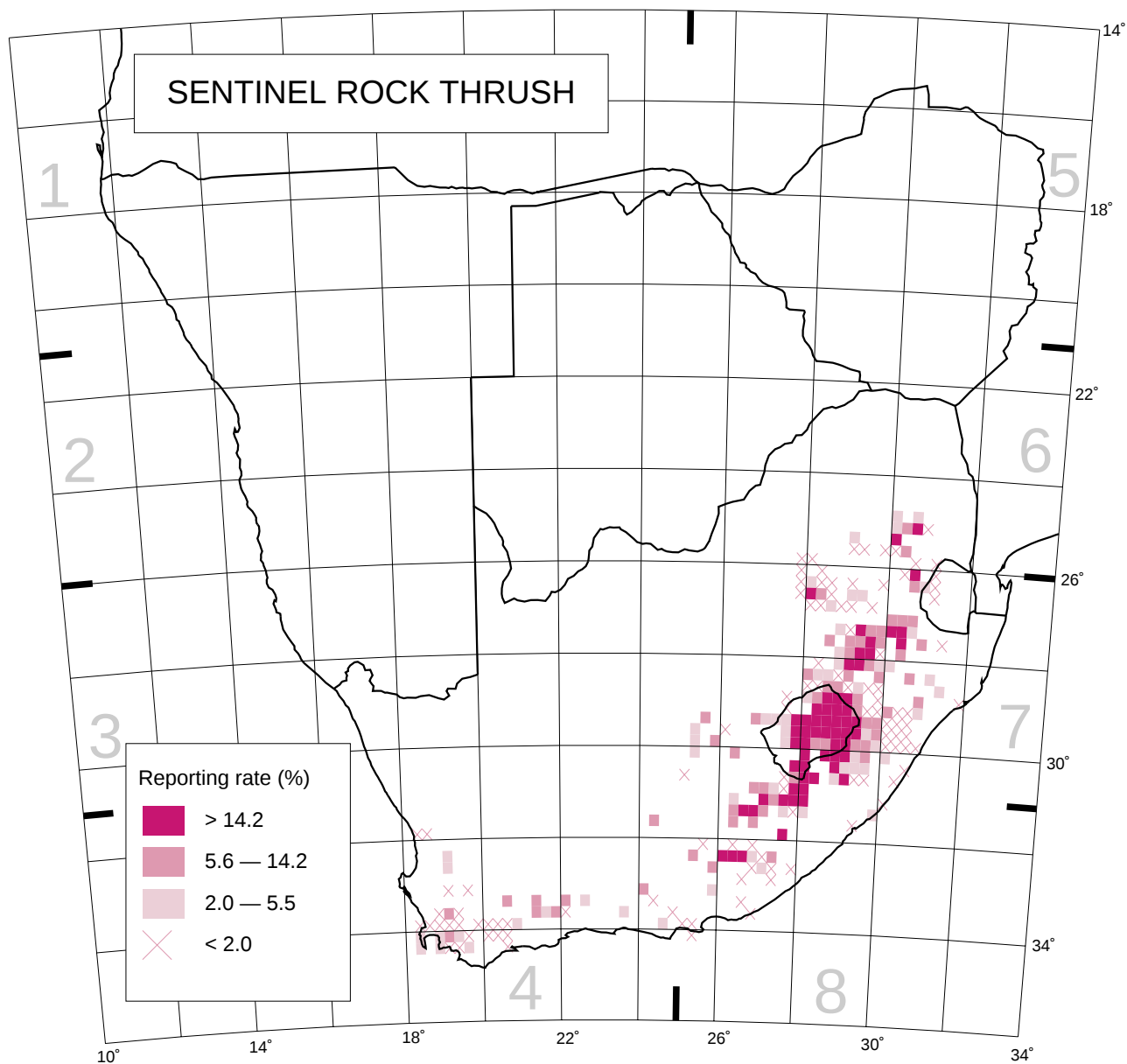
Historical distribution and conservation: Many of its upland haunts are in a pristine state, with the notable exception of the Lesotho massif and the Transkei uplands where heavy grazing pressure is evident even on the high plateaus. The relative abundance of the Sentinel Rock Thrush in those areas suggests that it may derive some benefit from overgrazing. It is not threatened.

J.A. Harrison

Recorded in 282 grid cells, 6.2%
Total number of records: 1692
Mean reporting rate for range: 4.5%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





SENTINEL ROCK THRUSH

