



Tractrac Chat

Woestynspekvrer

Cercomela tractrac

This southern African endemic resident occurs from south-western Angola, through far western and southern Namibia to the northwestern and central Karoo regions of the Cape Province. Geographical breaks between the distributions of the five races (McLachlan & Liversidge 1970; Clancey 1980b) are not apparent, except in the case of *C. t. nebulosa* which is found on the coastal plains of Namaqualand. Reporting rates indicate that the Tractrac Chat's major population concentration is centred on Bushmanland in the northern Cape Province. A distinct, narrow extension of its range in the southwest follows the arid corridor of the Tankwa Karoo.

Although conspicuous, it is easily confused with the Karoo Chat *C. schlegelii* and especially the Sicklewinged Chat *C. sinuata* in the glare of the Karoo sun. This is particularly true in Namibia where the Karoo Chat is paler than in the south and has a white rump. *C. t. nebulosa* with its 'redder rump and greyer, less white underside' (McLachlan & Liversidge 1970) might be particularly susceptible to misidentification as the Sicklewinged Chat. There were numerous records of Tractrac Chat in a relatively isolated cluster in the southwestern Free State which probably arose because of confusion with the Sicklewinged Chat which is particularly common in that area; after careful consideration these records were vetted out of the data.

It is usually found singly or in pairs.

Habitat: It is a bird of open plains and is not generally found in broken terrain. Vegetation is always sparse to open scrub with low bushes on which to perch and plenty of bare ground on which to forage for insects. It is the most conspicuous inhabitant of some of the most desolate tracts of the Karoo. It does not frequent human habitations in the Karoo but may do so under desert conditions, as at Oranjemund (2816CB) and Ugab (2113BA) (T.B. Oatley pers. comm.). The third place ranking of the Nama Karoo in the vegetation analysis is not a reflection of low reporting rates *per se*, but of the fact that the species occurs at high den-

sities in only a small subset of that extensive vegetation zone, namely the plains of Bushmanland.

Movements: No regular movements are known or are discernible from the models. Some degree of nomadism associated with unpredictable rainfall can be expected.

Breeding: The few records obtained during the atlas period show a spring bias. A long season with opportunistic breeding linked to rainfall is probably the norm. Maclean (1993b) gave the breeding season as August–April, but mostly September–October.

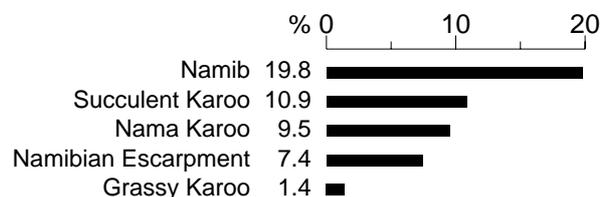
Interspecific relationships: Its preferred habitat differs from that of all other arid-country chats, and the Karoo Robin *Erythropygia coryphaeus*. Ecological separation is least clear with the Sicklewinged Chat, but the areas of greatest abundance of the two species do not overlap.

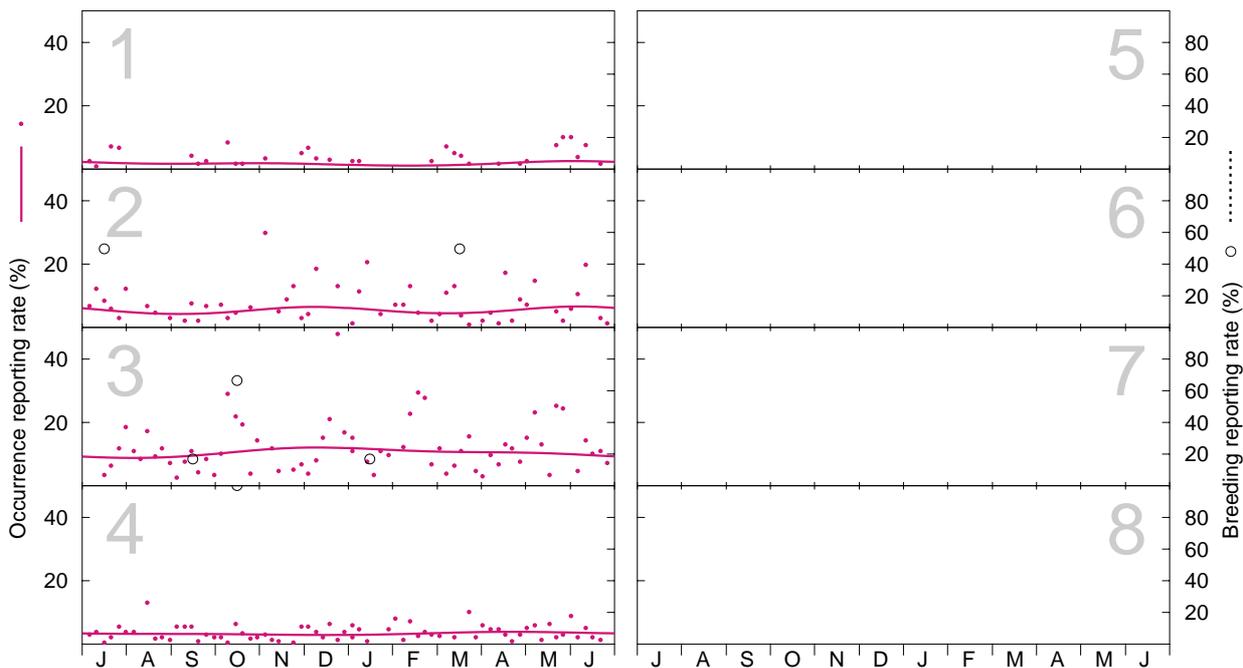
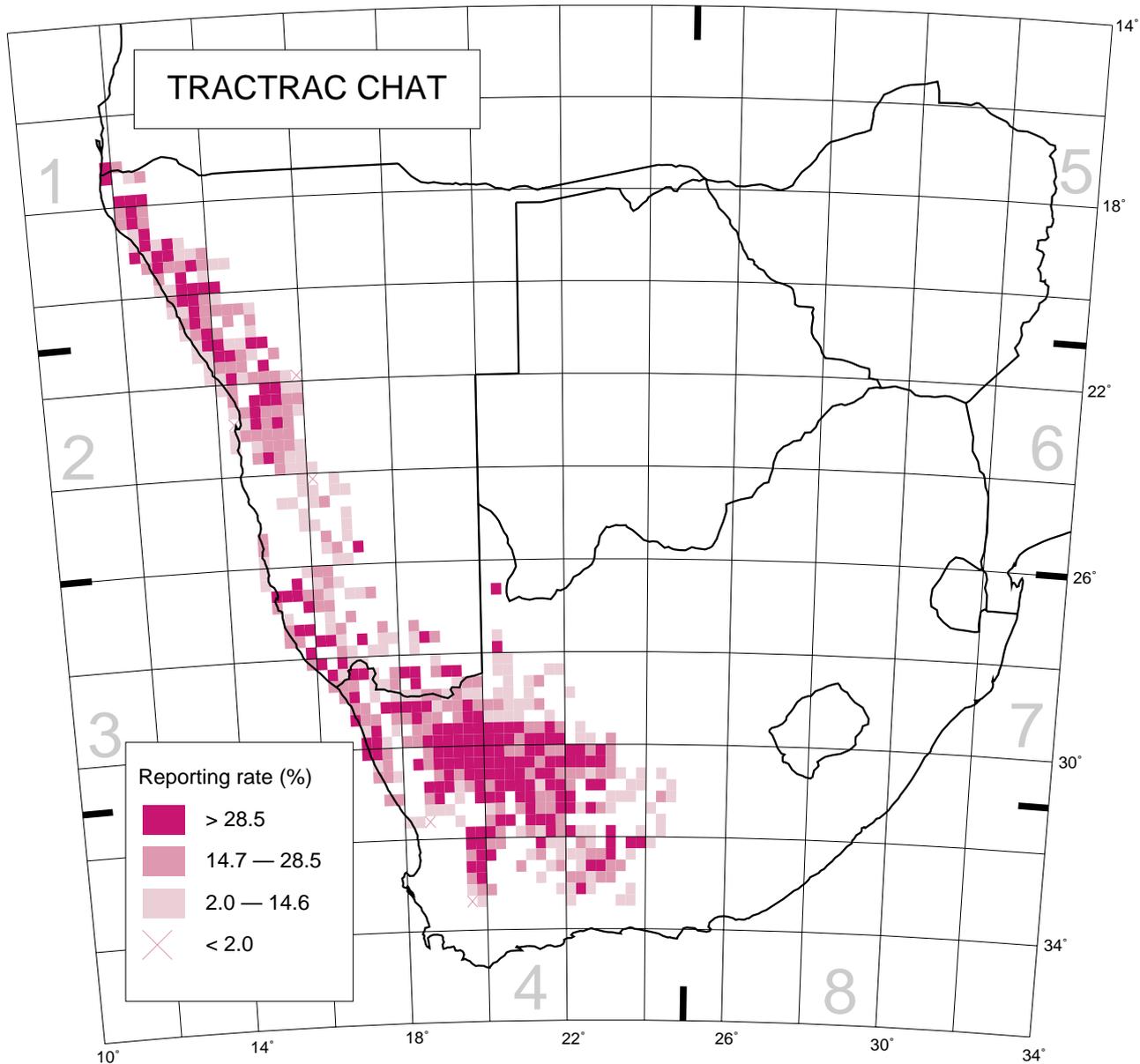
Historical distribution and conservation: There is no evidence for historical change in distribution. The Tractrac Chat may benefit from the opening of habitats through overgrazing. Widespread and poorly monitored spraying of insecticides during locust-control operations may have a negative impact on this and many other Karoo species, but no data are available.

J.A. Harrison

Recorded in 551 grid cells, 12.1%
Total number of records: 2248
Mean reporting rate for range: 19.0%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 60, 194, 571, 290, 0, 0, 0, 0; Breeding: 0, 2, 6, 1, 0, 0, 0, 0.