



Longtailed Shrike

Langstertlaksman

Corvinella melanoleuca

The Longtailed Shrike is confined to eastern and southern Africa. Within southern Africa it is a breeding resident occurring in northern Namibia, Botswana (except the southwest), Zimbabwe (largely excluding the Zambezi Valley and eastern highlands), northern and central Transvaal, northwestern Free State, eastern Swaziland and northern KwaZulu-Natal. An isolated population occurs in suitable habitat in the vicinity of Bloemhof Dam (2725). There are strongholds in the Transvaal lowveld and in the dry floodplains in the periphery of the Okavango. Poor coverage may account for some of the gaps in central Botswana (Penry 1994). There are three subspecies in the region (Clancey 1980b) which have continuous ranges, except for the lowland race *C. m. expressa* and highveld *melanoleuca* which are separated by the Transvaal escarpment. It is usually encountered in groups of 3–12, each group occupying a home range of about 70 ha and a breeding territory of about 3 ha (Harris & Arnott 1988).

By virtue of its large size, striking appearance and its habits of perching in exposed places and foraging in the open, it is both conspicuous and easily identified; therefore the atlas data are reliable.

Habitat: It occurs most frequently in *Acacia* savanna and occasionally in broadleaved woodland in the lowveld. Because it hunts from exposed perches and seizes much of its prey on the ground (Harris & Arnott 1988), it prefers open savanna with short grass. This is reflected in the vegetation analysis with the highest reporting rates in vegetation types which include such habitat. It occasionally

perches on fences and powerlines but only where these coincide with suitable wild habitat. It has generally not adapted to man-made habitats though it may occasionally occur in lowveld towns where parks combine lawns with indigenous *Acacia* trees. It does not occur in thornveld areas where extensive bush encroachment has occurred.

Movements: It is essentially resident, with family groups remaining within their breeding territories for most, if not all, of the year. However, it may undertake short-range movements in response to severe drought (A.J. Tree pers. comm.) and move temporarily into areas recently cleared by fire (J. Gosnell pers. comm.). The models show a summer dip in reporting rates in Zones 5 and 6, but the reasons for this are unknown.

Breeding: The models show that nesting occurs mostly in the summer and commences earlier in the north. This is confirmed by egg-laying data from the Transvaal (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b) and Zimbabwe (Irwin 1981); mainly October–January in the former region and September–December in the latter.

Interspecific relationships: Its habitat requirements are similar in terms of habitat structure to those of the Fiscal Shrike *Lanius collaris*. Particularly in the more arid areas, their ranges are complementary, while overlap is wider in Zimbabwe and the Transvaal; on a finer scale, their distributions were largely complementary in Swaziland. The larger size and gregariousness of the Longtailed Shrike may allow it to exclude the Fiscal Shrike from some arid woodlands, specifically Marula–Knobthorn savanna in the lowveld (Parker 1994).

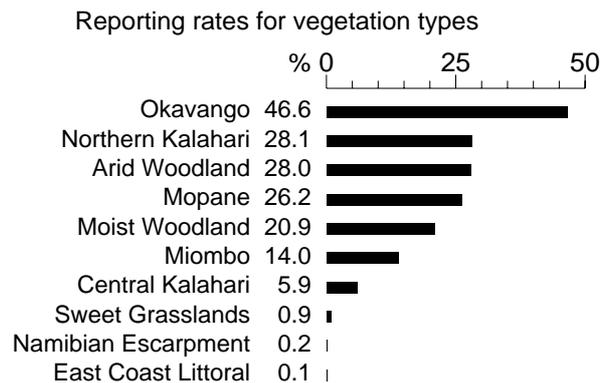
Historical distribution and conservation: Although there is no evidence that its overall range in southern Africa has changed over time, it is evident that it has become more sparse in, or disappeared from, some areas within its range in response to anthropogenic habitat modification (Harris & Arnott 1988; Parker 1994). Nature reserves which contain open savannas within the lowveld are therefore important havens, as can be seen from the high reporting rates in the Kruger National Park. Although the Longtailed Shrike has suffered from habitat modification resulting from overgrazing by cattle, it can potentially coexist with stock farming where this is conducted on a sustainable basis and without significant alteration of the natural vegetation.

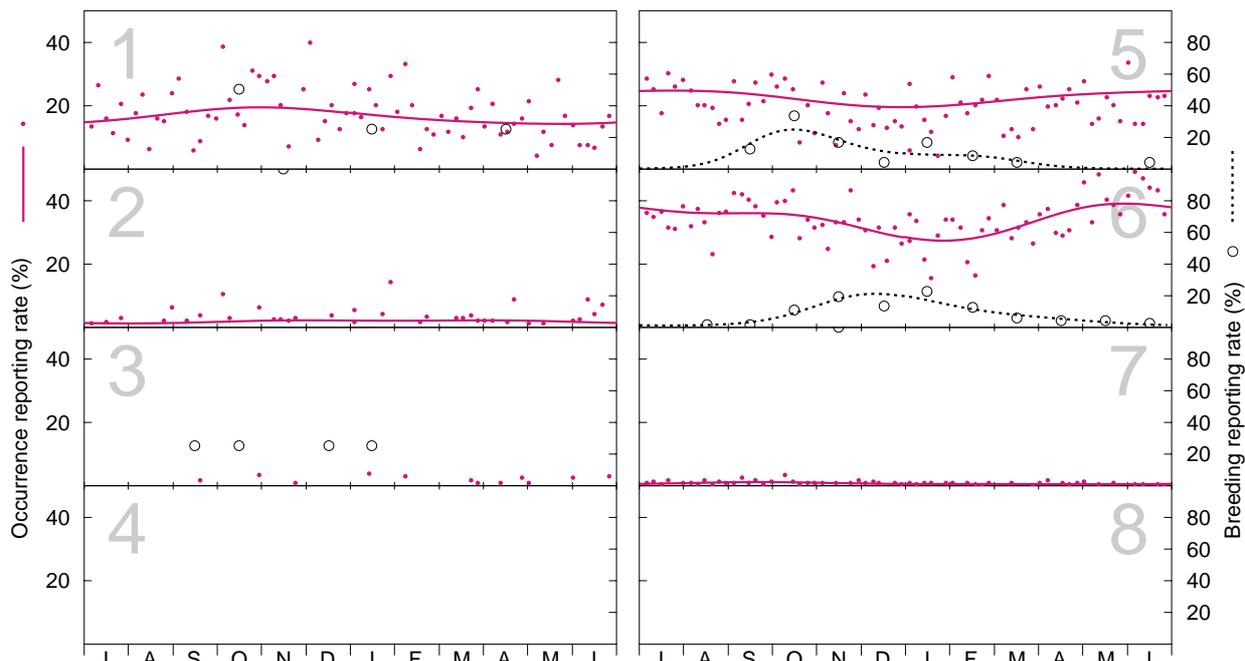
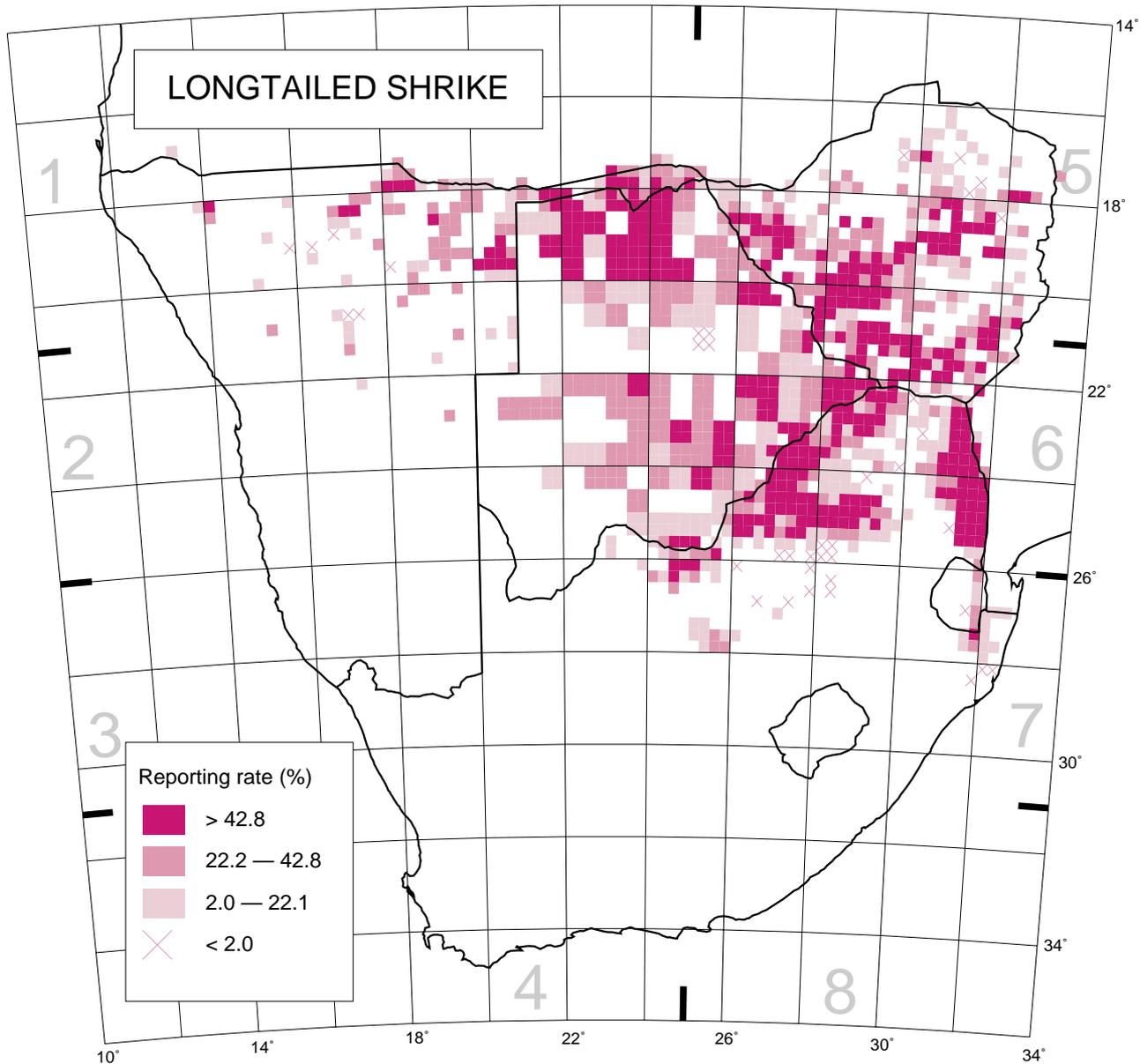
V. Parker

Recorded in 1117 grid cells, 24.6%

Total number of records: 11 324

Mean reporting rate for range: 30.4%





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 539, 68, 17, 0, 1974, 3886, 137, 0; Breeding: 4, 1, 4, 0, 24, 66, 2, 0.