



Lesser Doublecollared Sunbird Klein-rooibandsuikerbekkie

Nectarinia chalybea

The Lesser Doublecollared Sunbird is virtually confined to South Africa. Its stronghold is in the southwestern Cape Province and it extends from there northeastward in the forests associated with the escarpment into the Transvaal and western Swaziland. The three subspecies in the southwest (Clancey 1980b) have apparently continuous ranges, but there is a break in northern KwaZulu-Natal which separates the northern race *N. c. capricornis* along the Transvaal escarpment and in Swaziland.

It can be mistaken for the Greater Doublecollared Sunbird *N. afra* but the atlas data were carefully vetted in this regard. Aspects of the species' biology have been detailed by Schmidt (1964), Skead (1967c), Clancey & Irwin (1978) and Lloyd & Craig (1989).

Habitat: It inhabits a remarkable range of habitats, including arid and mesic shrublands, woodland, forest, forest-edge, timber plantations and gardens. It is distributed in semi-desert vegetation in the western and southern Karoo. The highest reporting rates were in the Fynbos biome, within which it prefers dune thicket and riparian woodland (Schmidt 1964; Skead 1967c; Siegfried & Crowe 1983; Fraser 1989). It is 'one of the dominant birds' in dune thicket (Skead 1967c) and, at a density of 2 birds/ha, was the most abundant species in this habitat on the Cape Peninsula (unpubl. data). It was also the most numerous bird (1.5 birds/ha) in 'moist forest' (Koen & Crowe 1987) in the southern Cape Province. In the east of its range it is more habitat specific, being restricted to evergreen montane forest. It gathers at flowering plants such as *Cunonia capensis*, *Leonotis leonurus*, *Salvia africana-lutea*, *Lycium* spp., tubular-flowered *Erica* spp. and *Aloe* spp.

Movements: As with other sunbirds, it tracks flowering food plants, but its movements are poorly known. The most distant ringing recovery in the southwestern Cape Province

is 34 km (Fraser *et al.* 1989). There is a partial movement out of the arid western regions, July–December (Hockey *et al.* 1989), and a partially complementary movement into the southeastern Cape Province, May–November. This is similar to the pattern shown for the Malachite Sunbird *N. famosa* but the timing is different. Males assume an eclipse plumage after breeding (unpubl. data) which may render them less conspicuous (Martin 1983b) and may result in lower reporting rates at this time. Indeed the models show that higher reporting rates in the southeastern Cape Province correspond to pre-breeding and breeding periods.

Breeding: Atlas data show a protracted breeding period, with an extended peak July–November in the southwest (Zone 4) and slightly later (August–December) in the east. Data from the southwestern Cape Province also show an extended egg-laying period, peaking July–October (Winterbottom 1968a).

Interspecific relationships: Sunbirds and opportunistic nectarivores co-occur at food plants, but the hierarchical structure of these feeding communities has been little studied. Where its range overlaps with Greater Doublecollared Sunbird, the Lesser avoids the woodland habitats in which the Greater is found; where the Greater is absent (such as in the western Cape Province), the Lesser occupies a wider range of habitats (Hockey *et al.* 1989). It has been recorded as a brood host of Klaas's Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx klaas* (Skead 1967c; Follett 1990; Schmidt 1991).

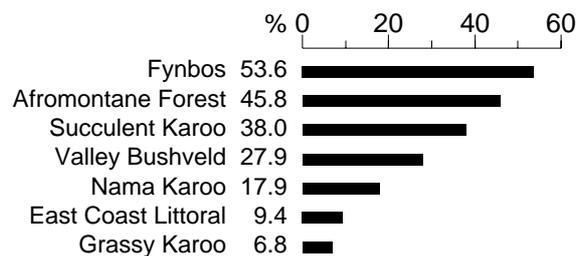
Historical distribution and conservation: The atlas distribution accords with that of Skead (1967c), indicating that no recent broad-scale changes have taken place. (Skead's *N. c. intermedia* in Zimbabwe is now recognized as a separate species, the Miombo Doublecollared Sunbird *N. manoensis*.) Skead's records from outside forested regions in the east were probably in error.

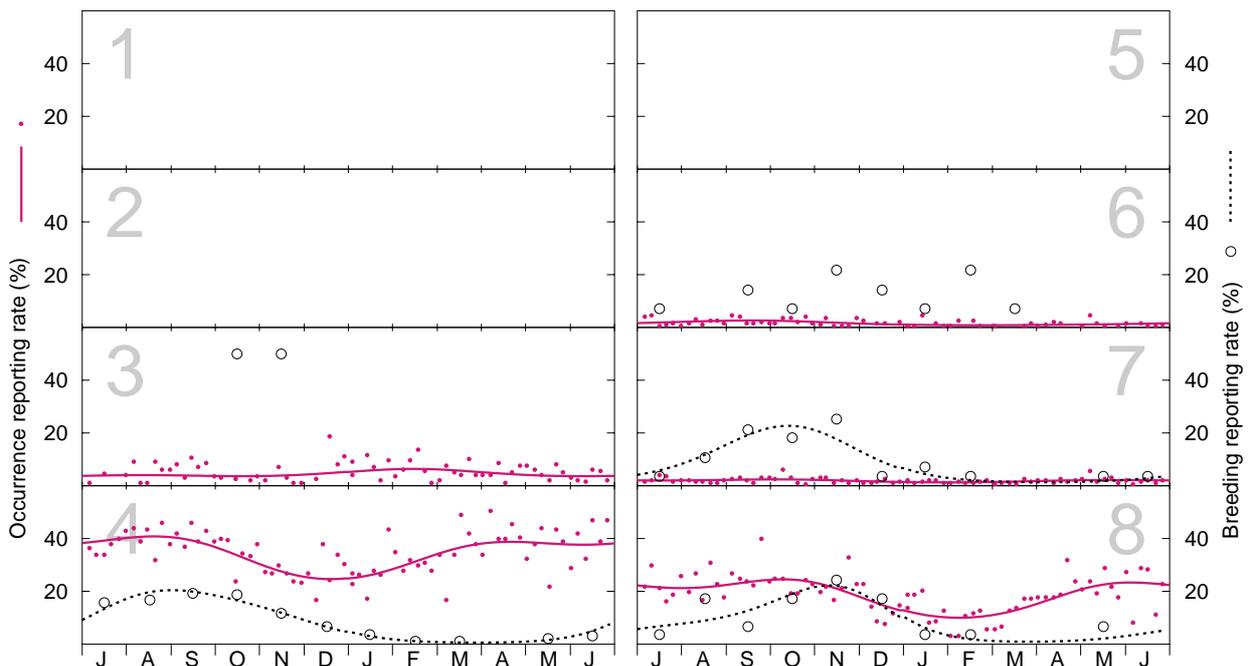
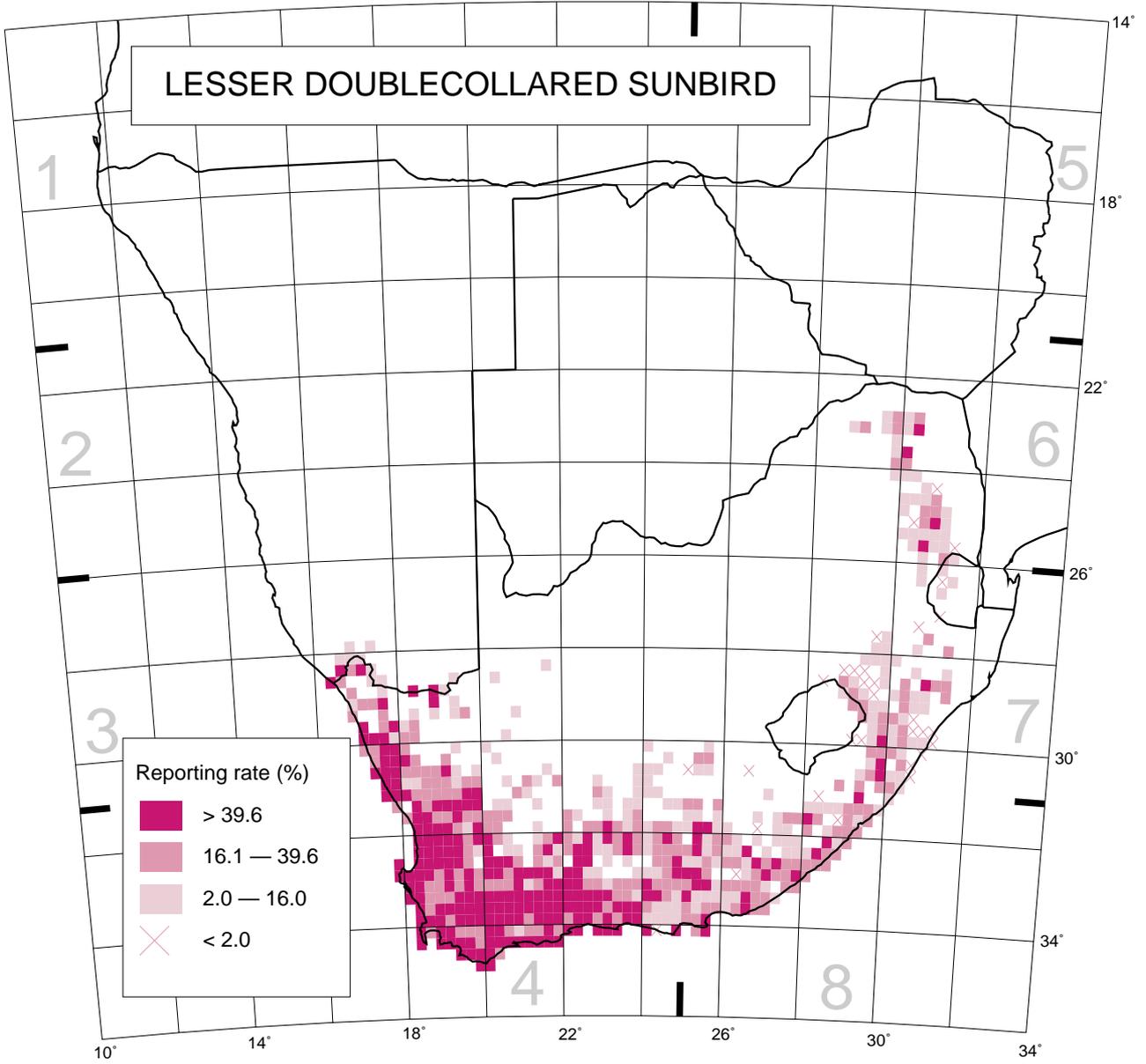
Urbanization and agriculture have reduced the natural habitat in some coastal lowland areas. Other threats are the felling of indigenous forests and overburning of fynbos (which can reduce forest patches and riparian woodland therein). It has recently taken to nesting in suburban gardens in the Cape Town (3318CD) area (Martin *et al.* 1991; Schmidt 1991). It increased fifteen-fold from uninfested open fynbos to 100% canopy cover of woody aliens (mainly *Eucalyptus lehmannii*) on the Cape Peninsula (Fraser & Crowe 1990). It has also extended its range into plantations of alien trees in western Swaziland (Parker 1994). Such habitat transformations may allow the Lesser Doublecollared Sunbird to expand its range.

M.W. Fraser

Recorded in 680 grid cells, 15.0%
Total number of records: 18 648
Mean reporting rate for range: 33.9%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 0, 0, 245, 3043, 0, 174, 371, 1037; Breeding: 0, 0, 2, 270, 0, 14, 28, 29.