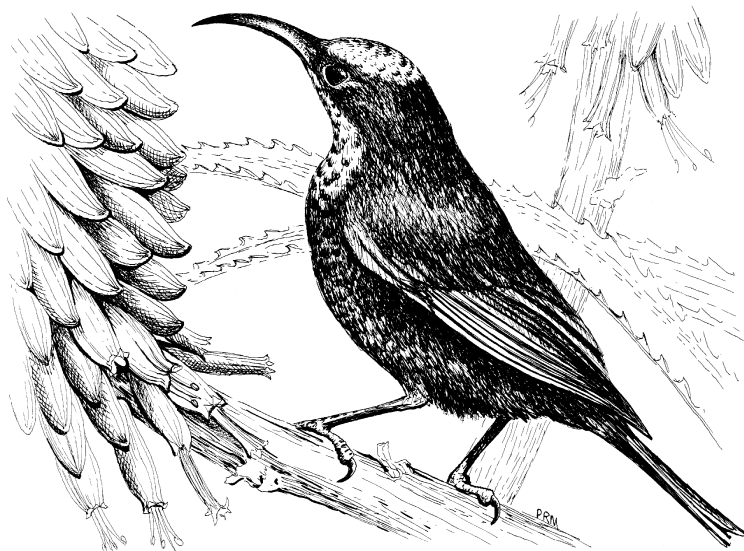




Black Sunbird

Swartsuikerbekkie

Nectarinia amethystina

The Black Sunbird occurs from southern Sudan southwards through East Africa to southeastern Zaire, Angola and southern Africa. In southern Africa it is fairly widely distributed in the east, largely avoiding the drier areas of Namibia, the Kalahari and most of the interior of the Cape Province. In Botswana it is found mainly in the Okavango area and adjacent to the Caprivi Strip. There are some peripheral records along the Zimbabwean and South African borders. In Zimbabwe it is widely distributed, being most frequently recorded from the Mashonaland highveld and eastern highlands. The distribution map reveals scarcity in the low-lying Limpopo Valley and the lowveld of southern Zimbabwe, northern and eastern Transvaal. This break separates the central subspecies *N. a. adjuncta* in the south from *kirkii* to the north, while the peripheral races *amethystina* and *deminuta* (Clancey 1980b) have continuous distributions to the south of the former, and to the west of the latter, respectively. As there appears to be a strong core of distribution in the overlap between *amethystina* and *adjuncta*, it is perhaps likely that their differences are of a clinal nature.

The distribution map shows two centres of particularly high reporting rates, one in the southeastern Transvaal and western Swaziland (race *adjuncta*), and the other in southern KwaZulu-Natal (race *amethystina*).

It is occasionally confused with the Marico Sunbird *N. mariquensis* and the Scarlet-chested Sunbird *N. senegalensis*; atlas records from outside the usual range and inside the range of these two species were carefully vetted in this regard.

Habitat: It inhabits a variety of predominantly broadleaved woodland types, including gardens and stands of alien trees, and it ranges occasionally into adjacent habitats, but probably only as a nonbreeding visitor. It is partial to concentrations of nectar-bearing plants, particularly in the Gusu woodlands of western Zimbabwe and northeastern Botswana in late summer when the Zambezi Teak *Baikiaea plurijuga* is in flower (Irwin 1981; Tree 1991c; Herremans 1992d). The Zimbabwean population appears to be dependent on undisturbed woodland and, with the fragmentation of the miombo, this species has given way to the Scarlet-chested Sunbird over much of the Mashonaland plateau (pers. obs). The relatively high reporting rates for sour grasslands seems incongruous, but there are

extensive human settlements with gardens and alien plantations within that biome.

Movements: As with other sunbirds, it may be locally migratory to nomadic within its range. The models show a decrease in reporting rates during the late summer and early winter in eastern South Africa (Zones 6 and 8), and during the winter to spring in northern Botswana and the Caprivi Strip (Zone 1). The seasonal distribution maps show a winter decrease in the latter region and reveal an increase in reporting rates in eastern Zimbabwe during winter, indicating an eastward movement in winter in the north; this was suggested by Irwin (1981) for the population in western Zimbabwe which leaves the area May–August. This movement is confirmed by field evidence of massive active migration to the east in autumn, following a habitat ecotone along the Chobe River-front in northern Botswana (Borello 1992a; Herremans 1992d), and along the Zambezi and Kariba escarpment in Zimbabwe (pers. obs). The seasonal distribution maps show little seasonal change in abundance elsewhere in South Africa and Swaziland. It can be erratic in its occurrence at any site from year to year, despite apparent consistency of winter nectar sources (pers. obs). There is one ring recovery from a bird in Addo (3325DA) which was ringed in Bathurst (3326DB), 105 km to the east (SAFRING).

Breeding: Breeding takes place mainly in the spring and early summer, with a tendency to start earlier in the north of the range. Breeding outside the typical period occurs occasionally, except in the southwestern Cape Province (Zone 4).

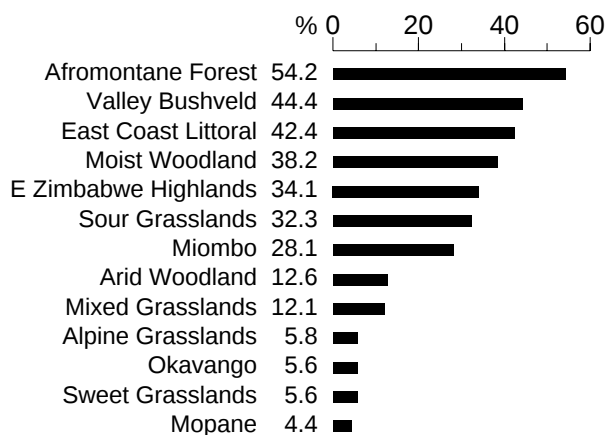
Interspecific relationships: It shows a pattern of abundance in the east which is somewhat complementary to that of the Scarlet-chested Sunbird. That species is most common in Zimbabwe, the northeastern Transvaal, eastern Swaziland and northeastern KwaZulu-Natal. In northern Botswana both species co-occur at low density, but high numbers of one coincide with low numbers of the other (Herremans 1992d).

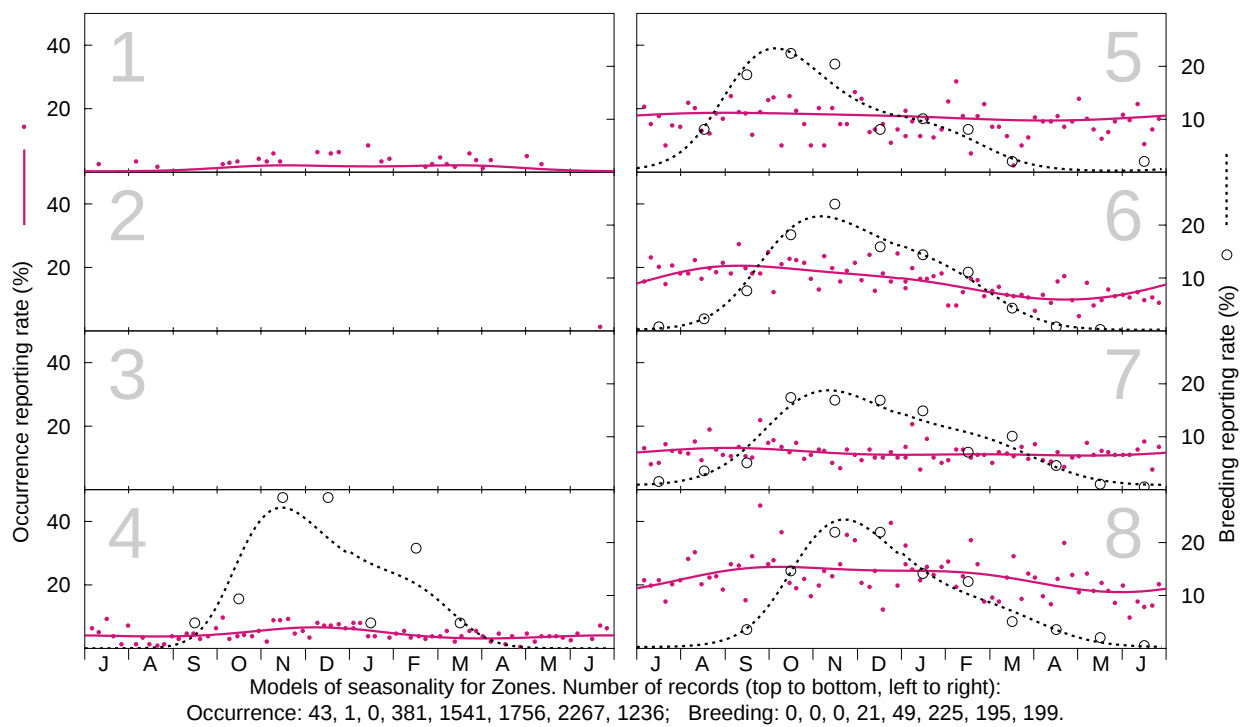
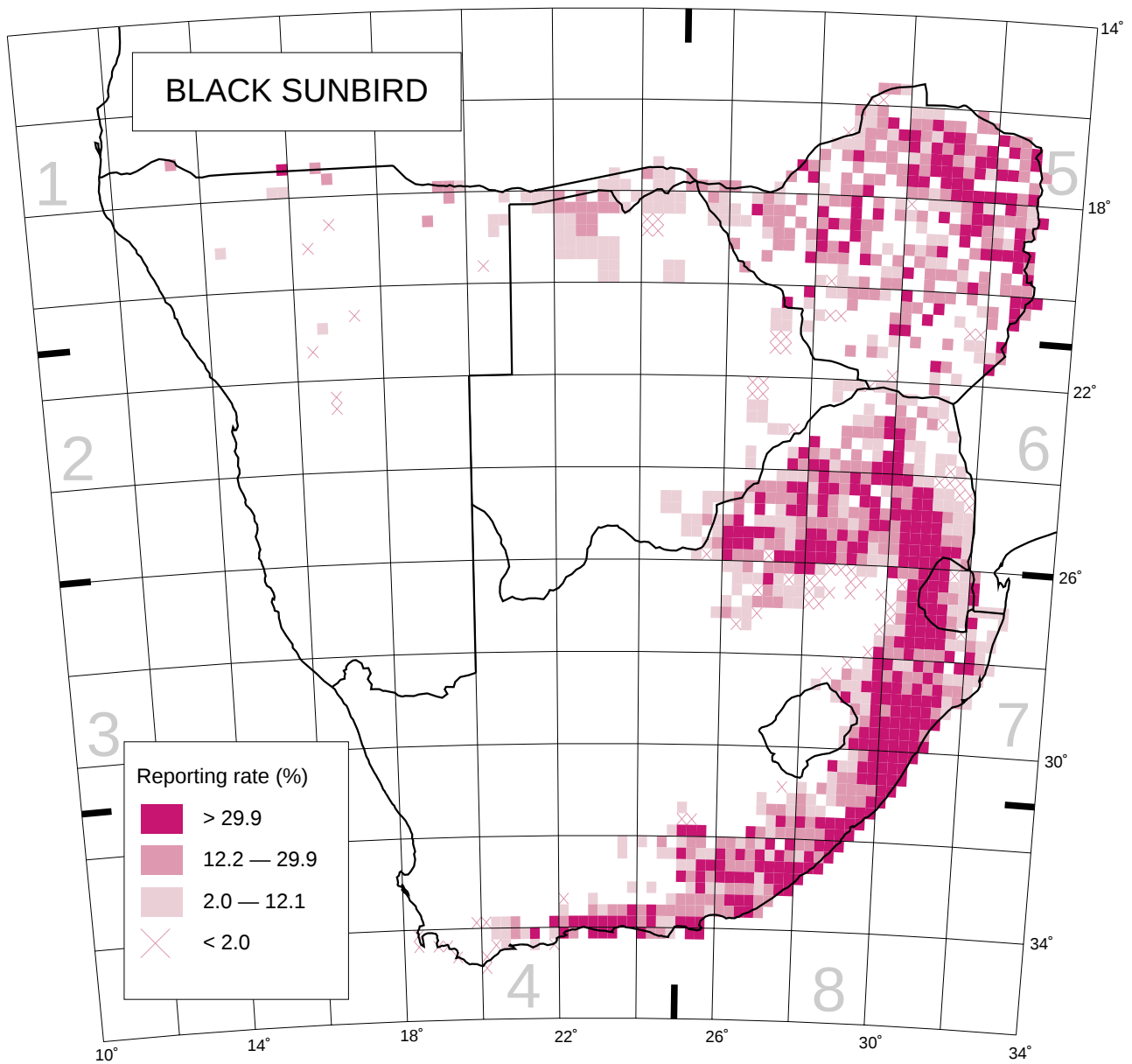
Historical distribution and conservation: The atlas map is similar to that of Skead (1967c) but shows more records from Namibia, as well as records from the Limpopo Valley, eastern Botswana, Swaziland and peripheral areas in South Africa. The Black Sunbird is not a conservation priority.

A.J. Tree

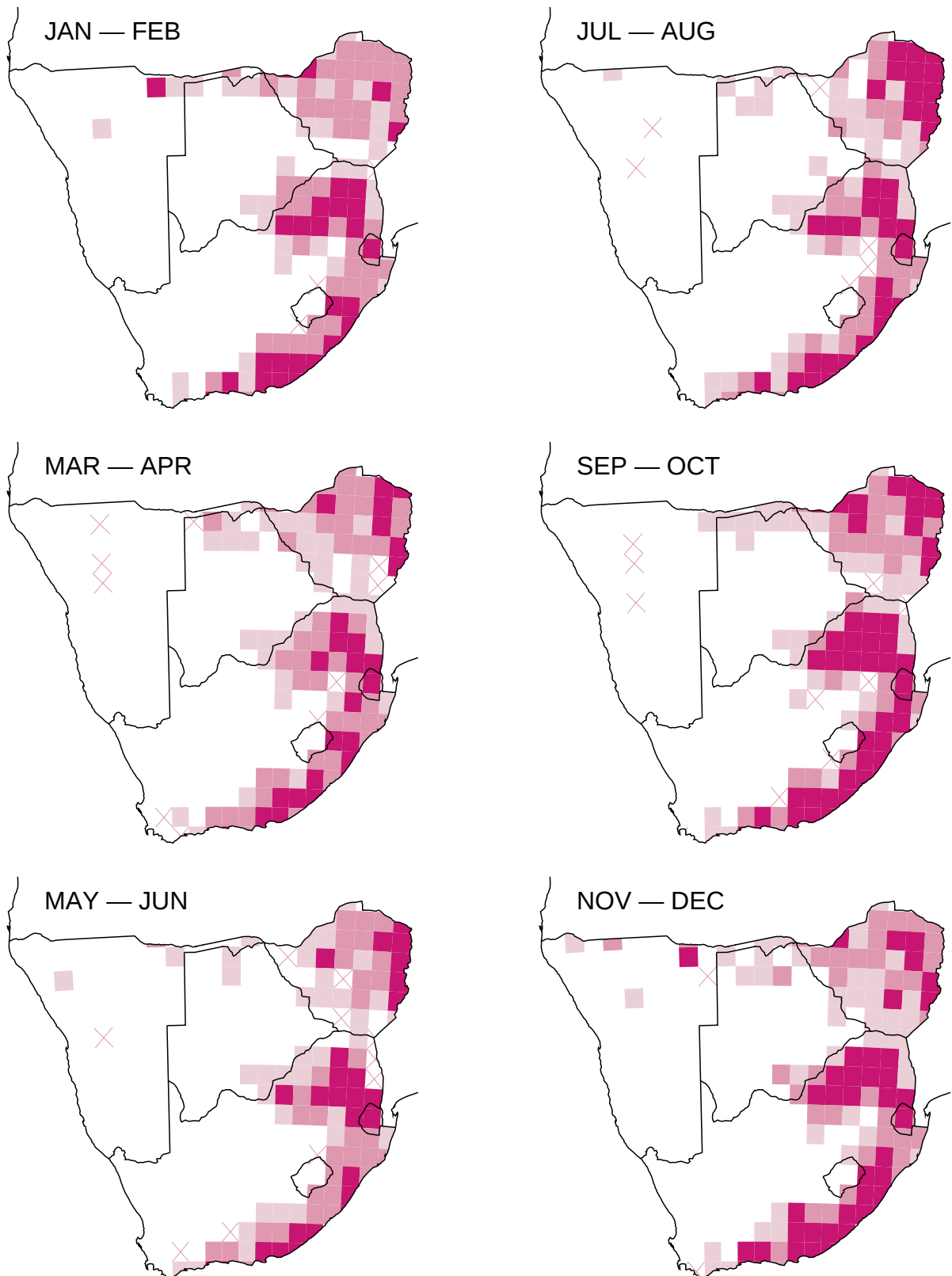
Recorded in 1161 grid cells, 25.6%
Total number of records: 26 022
Mean reporting rate for range: 28.8%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





BLACK SUNBIRD



Seasonal distribution maps; one-degree grid.