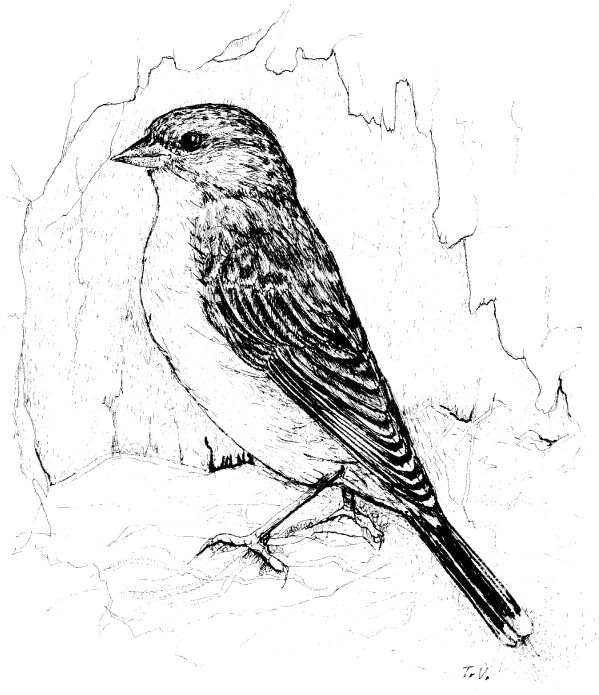


Cape Siskin

Kaapse Pietjiekanarie

Pseudochloroptila totta

The Cape Siskin is endemic to the fynbos biome (Clancey 1986a), the sclerophyllous shrublands of the southern and southwestern Cape Province. Its phylogenetic status is unclear (Clancey *et al.* 1991). It was formerly considered conspecific with the Drakensberg Siskin *P. symonsi* which occurs to the northeast. The ranges of the two do not overlap, however. In general it is a poorly known species, despite being widespread and frequent in its chosen habitat. The species is characterized by white spots on its primaries and tail feathers, but the yellow coloration of adult males may lead to confusion with other canaries, e.g. Siegfried & Crowe (1983) appear to have mistaken this species for Yellow Canary *Serinus flaviventris* in their studies of avian trophic structure in fynbos.

Habitat: It is found almost exclusively in fynbos vegetation, on mountain tops and slopes and along coastal forelands, where it avoids strandveld. The few records from the Succulent Karoo are likely to refer to siskins in ecotonal vegetation or pockets of fynbos within or adjacent to non-fynbos habitat in the Little Karoo. The species does occur, however, in alien vegetation, notably pine plantations, and light infestations of alien Rooikrans *Acacia cyclops* (Fraser & Crowe 1990).

Movements: Data from the extreme eastern part of its range (Zone 8) suggest a winter influx and spring emigration. It is not clear if this represents altitudinal migration or arrival from the west. There are no corresponding seasonal changes in the west which would account for birds arriving from or departing for the east; a more refined analysis of the atlas data in this regard is called for.

The Cape Siskin is known to undertake local movements to forage in newly burnt fynbos. Here it feeds on exposed and serotinous seeds, notably those of the Mountain Cedar *Widdringtonia nodiflora* which it extracts directly from fire-split cones on the trees (Fraser 1989). On the Cape Peninsula, flocks of up to 150 have been recorded feeding on the ground in areas from which Rooikrans has been cleared and annual weeds have flowered and set seed (pers. obs). No recoveries have resulted from the small numbers of birds ringed to indicate how far they travel to exploit such resources.

Breeding: Notes on the species' breeding biology are given by Schmidt (1982), whose observations support the findings of the atlas that it breeds in spring and summer (September–January) in the southwestern Cape Province. Breeding was not recorded in the extreme eastern part of its range.

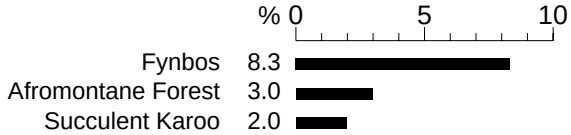
Interspecific relationships: The Cape Siskin forms monospecific flocks even if other canary species are sharing the same habitat, such as post-fire fynbos. Its diet may overlap to some extent with the other typical fynbos seedeater, the Protea Canary *S. leucopterus*, but there is unlikely to be competition between them as the latter can process much larger food items and occurs singly or in much smaller flocks (Milewski 1978a; Fraser & Richardson 1989).

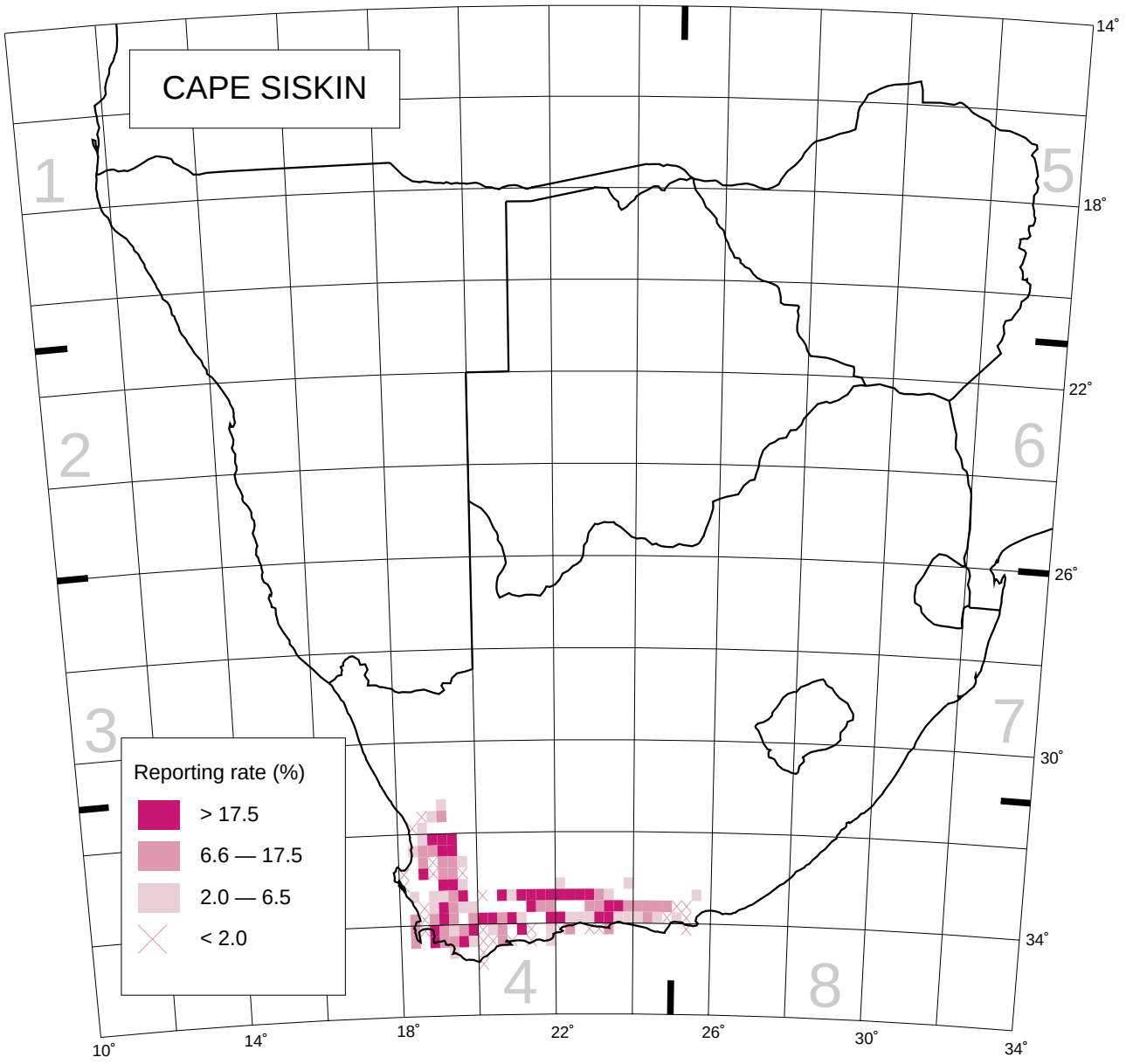
Historical distribution and conservation: The distribution of the Cape Siskin does not appear to have changed historically. Although endemic to the fynbos biome, the Cape Siskin may be able to adapt to, and even successfully exploit, two of the major threats facing this floristically rich region, namely infestation by alien woody plants and overburning. Coastal development is reducing parts of its habitat, but it is under no immediate threat, although it is considered globally 'near-threatened' by Collar *et al.* (1994).

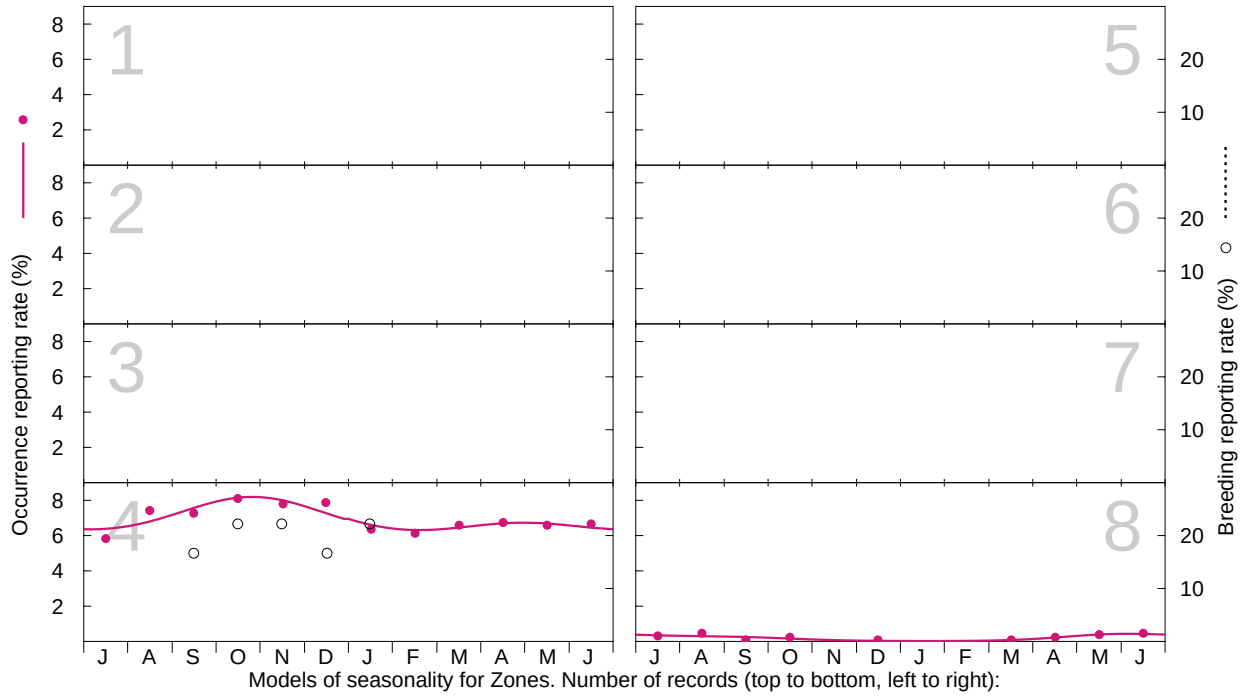
M.W. Fraser

Recorded in 128 grid cells, 2.8%
Total number of records: 1804
Mean reporting rate for range: 9.5%

Reporting rates for vegetation types







Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
Occurrence: 0, 0, 0, 1781, 0, 0, 0, 23; Breeding: 0, 0, 0, 18, 0, 0, 0, 0.