Protea Canary

Witvlerkkanarie

Serinus leucopterus

This drab seedeater is endemic to the fynbos biome (Clancey 1986a), inhabiting the slopes of the Cape fold mountains and, to a lesser extent, coastal forelands. It forages singly or in flocks that are smaller than those of sympatric canaries (Milewski 1978b). It is less shy than generally appreciated, but may be difficult to detect as it feeds quietly in dense vegetation. It mimics other birds' songs (Skead 1960; Fraser & Richardson 1989) and may have been overlooked on this account. Nevertheless, the atlas data are likely to be reliable and the only species with which it might conceivably be confused, the Whitethroated *S. albogularis* and Streakyheaded *S. gularis* Canaries, are scarce in pure fynbos vegetation, although the three do co-occur in ecotonal vegetation (pers. obs).

Habitat: The Protea Canary is found in mature *Protea* shrublands and marginally on the edges of Afromontane forest and karroid areas. It is ranked top of a list of 'characteristic bird species' in old mountain fynbos at Swartboskloof (3418BB) (Siegfried & Crowe 1983). On a finer scale, it was found only in Tall Open, Tall Closed, and Mid-dense Shrublands (cf. Campbell *et al.* 1981) at the same site (Fraser 1989; Richardson & Fraser 1995). On coastal lowlands it frequents fynbos and other low-growing vegetation, including South Coast Strandveld (cf. Moll *et al.* 1984). It has been recorded in introduced Cluster Pine *Pinus pinaster* (Macleod & Stanford 1958), although this does not seem to be a widespread phenomenon despite the extent of this habitat in the fynbos biome.

Movements: The data do not suggest any obvious pattern of movements, although the occurrence of records largely in midwinter in the far east of the range (Zone 8) is of interest and worthy of further investigation. Ringing in the southwestern Cape Province has suggested local movements (pers. obs), which would be a natural response to fire and the flowering and fruiting phenology of food plants. It has been recorded in 'semi-arid thornveld' (Martin *et al.* 1989), which may represent movements across karroid valleys to reach fynbos-clad mountains. Such movements have not resulted in the colonization (or recolonization) of the Cape Peninsula (3419AB, AD), from which it is historically absent. This is despite the fact that here there is apparently suitable habitat less than 40 km from where the species occurs regularly. A population is ensconced, however, on the Piketberg (3218DC), an isolated fynbos-clad outcrop in the midst of west coast cereal croplands (Hockey *et al.* 1989).

Breeding: The few atlas breeding records span September–December. Breeding has previously been reported in spring (Macleod & Stanford 1958; Skead 1960) and Winterbottom (1968a) presented three October egglaying dates.

Interspecific relationships: The species does not form mixed flocks with other seedeaters. Its interactions with other birds appear to be limited to its mimicry of their songs.

Historical distribution and conservation: According to Skead (1960), the Protea Canary was 'confined to the mountains of the south-west[ern] Cape [Province] from Steenbras River Mouth and Caledon to Citrusdal'. This distribution was repeated by McLachlan & Liversidge (1970). The same authors later (1978) extended this to its present limits, i.e. east to the Baviaanskloof mountains (3324C,D). There is no evidence that the species has undertaken what would be a major eastwards range extension, and it appears that it was simply under-recorded in the past.

Previously a Red Data species (Siegfried *et al.* 1976), it is now considered 'neither rare nor vulnerable' (Brooke 1984b), owing to the relatively secure conservation status of mountain fynbos. However, it may be vulnerable to too-frequent burning and afforestation of mountain fynbos, and urban development and alien plant infestation of coastal fynbos. The species is considered globally 'near-threatened' by Collar *et al.* (1994). Despite some investigation of its natural history (Milewski 1976b; Fraser & Richardson 1989), the description by Siegfried (1972a) of the Protea Canary as 'The Bird Nobody Knows About' is still largely applicable.

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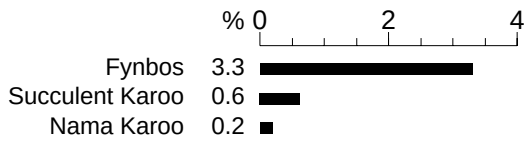
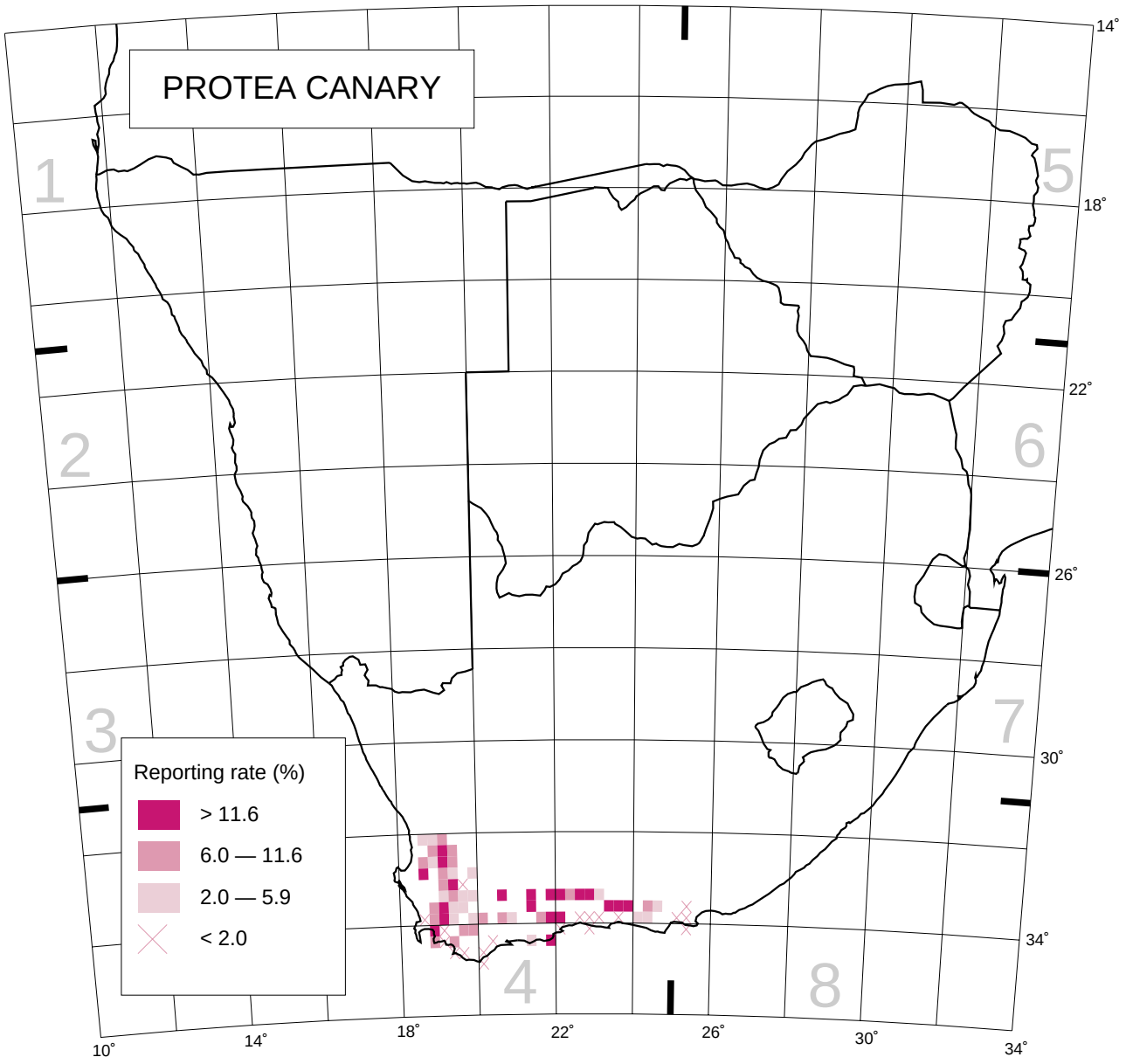
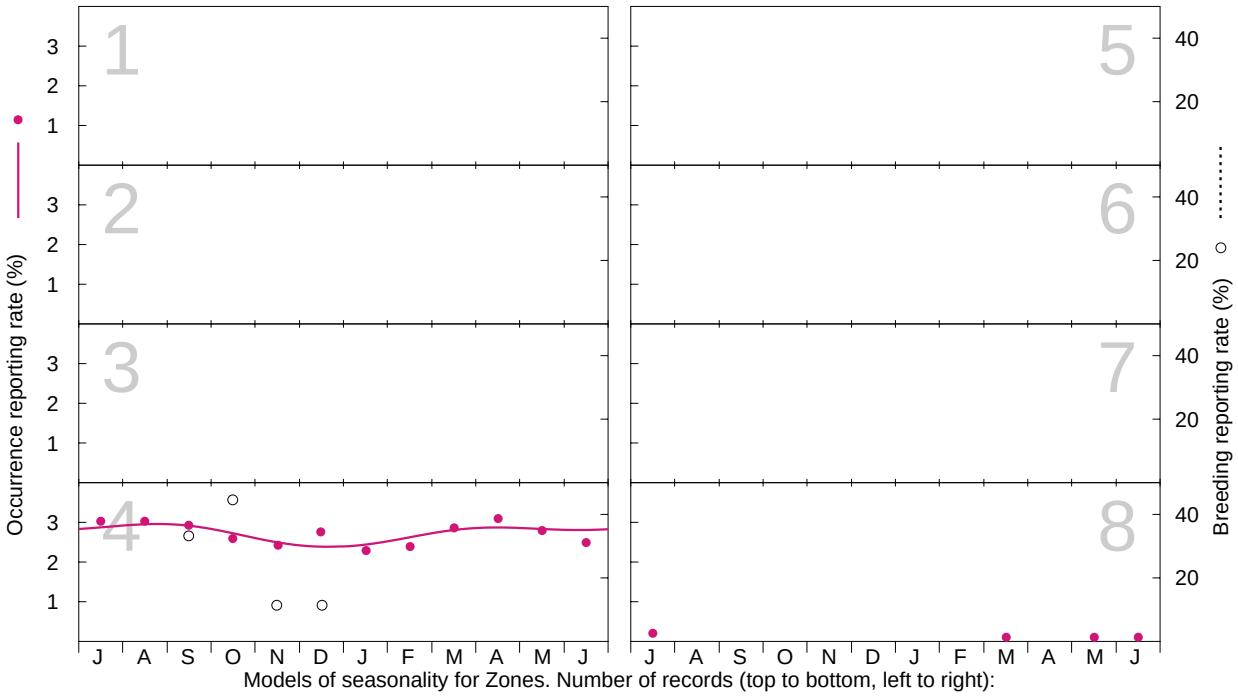
Recorded in 74 grid cells, 1.6%
Total number of records: 705
Mean reporting rate for range: 6.8%

Reporting rates for vegetation types







Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
Occurrence: 0, 0, 0, 700, 0, 0, 0, 5; Breeding: 0, 0, 0, 9, 0, 0, 0, 0.