

Larklike Bunting

Vaalstreepkoppie

Emberiza impetuari

The Larklike Bunting is near-endemic to southern Africa and is distributed mainly in the Cape Province, western Free State and Namibia, with scattered records from Lesotho, the Transvaal, Swaziland, Zimbabwe and Botswana. The distribution of this species extends marginally into Angola where it occurs on the arid coastal plain as far north as Benguela (Traylor 1963). It also occurs as a rare vagrant in Zambia and Zaire. Probably one of the commonest birds in the southwestern arid zone, it is usually seen singly or in flocks ranging from a few individuals to thousands of birds. It can be particularly abundant at water-points (Maclean 1993b).

The atlas data can be regarded as comprehensive and reliable, although confusion between this rather nondescript bird and superficially similar larks is possible. Apart from plumage differences, the Larklike Bunting occurs in a wider range of habitats and usually in larger groups than either Pinkbilled Lark *Spizocorys conirostris* or Sclater's Lark *S. sclateri*. It is separated from the females of Chestnutbacked *Eremopterix leucotis* and Greybacked *E. verticalis* Finchlarks by the lack of a black patch on the belly and from female Blackeared Finchlarks *E. australis*, among other characteristics, in lacking dark streaking below.

Habitat: The Larklike Bunting inhabits arid and semi-arid savanna, sparse shrubland and grassland on rocky hills, particularly in sparse grassland on schists or tilted shales that provide shelter for nests, sparse woodland and shrubland along dry drainage lines, arid sparse perennial grasslands with scattered shrubs, and dune grassland and shrubland, both on the dunes and in the dune troughs. Reporting rates were highest from the Nama Karoo and the Namibian Escarpment, and it was most consistently recorded throughout the year in the central Karoo. Larklike Buntings apparently need to drink regularly and are usually found not far from water (Maclean 1993b).

Movements: It is an irruptive, nomadic species that apparently moves in response to rain in the Karoo, and is likely to occur and breed in almost any part of the southwestern arid zone. The distribution map suggests that it is a vagrant in the northeastern parts of its range, but is far

more regularly recorded in the west and south. The seasonal maps indicate that it moves into western Namaqualand during the spring and early summer (September–December) and into southern Namibia (including the Namib Desert) during late summer and autumn, corresponding with post-rainfall periods when plant growth is peaking and seeds are being produced. It is subject to periodic irruptions into areas where it does not usually occur (Skead 1960). For example, Irwin (1981) notes that it can have major irruptions into Zimbabwe, particularly during unusually cold or dry winters, and at these times can be widespread across the country. Large numbers can also irrupt into Botswana, including the northern woodlands (Bishop *et al.* 1992; Brewster 1994b).

Breeding: The data show that breeding peaks in the spring in the winter-rainfall region (Zone 4) and in the late summer–autumn in the late-summer rainfall region (Zones 1 and 2). Zone 3 includes areas of both summer and winter rainfall and the breeding data suggest bimodality, with both a spring and a late summer/autumn peak. Much of the area in which the Larklike Bunting nests has rainfall which is highly variable in amount and timing; therefore breeding can be expected to be opportunistic and irregular.

Interspecific relationships: It occurs in mixed flocks with finchlarks and often nests in close proximity to Grey-backed and Blackeared Finchlarks (pers. obs). It also forms mixed flocks with Blackheaded Canaries *Serinus alario* and with other buntings (Skead 1960).

Historical distribution and conservation: There is no evidence that the distribution of the Larklike Bunting has recently changed. It is not considered to be threatened and is common in a wide range of habitats, including heavily grazed rangelands.

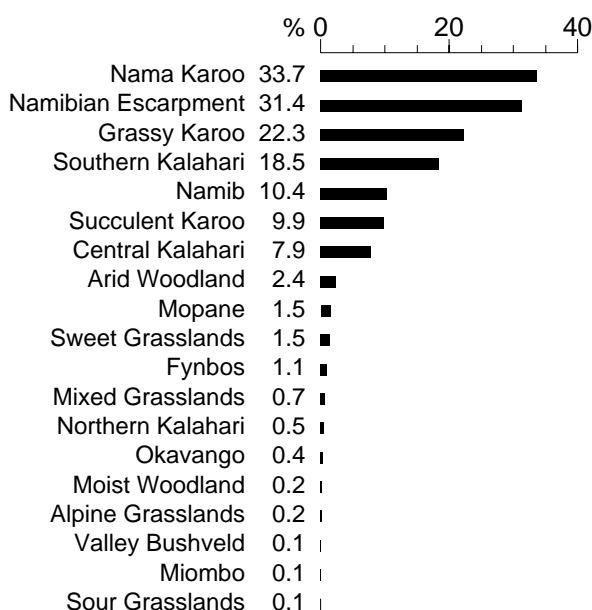
W.R.J. Dean

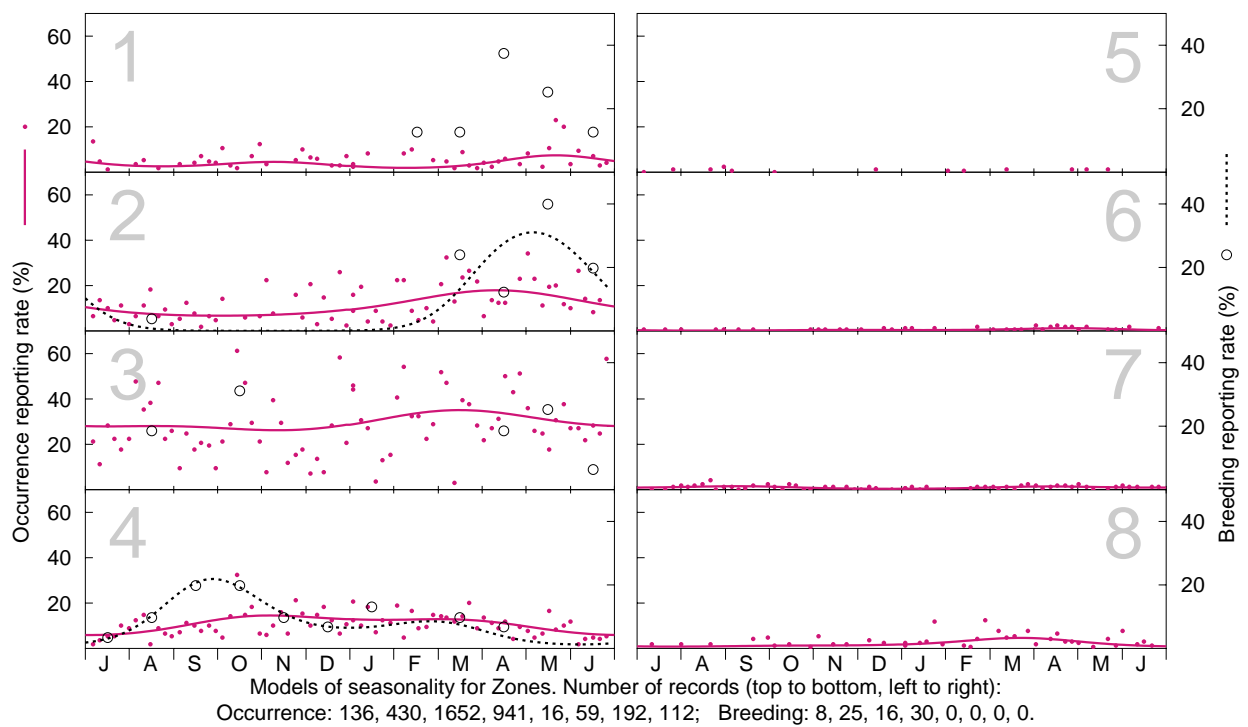
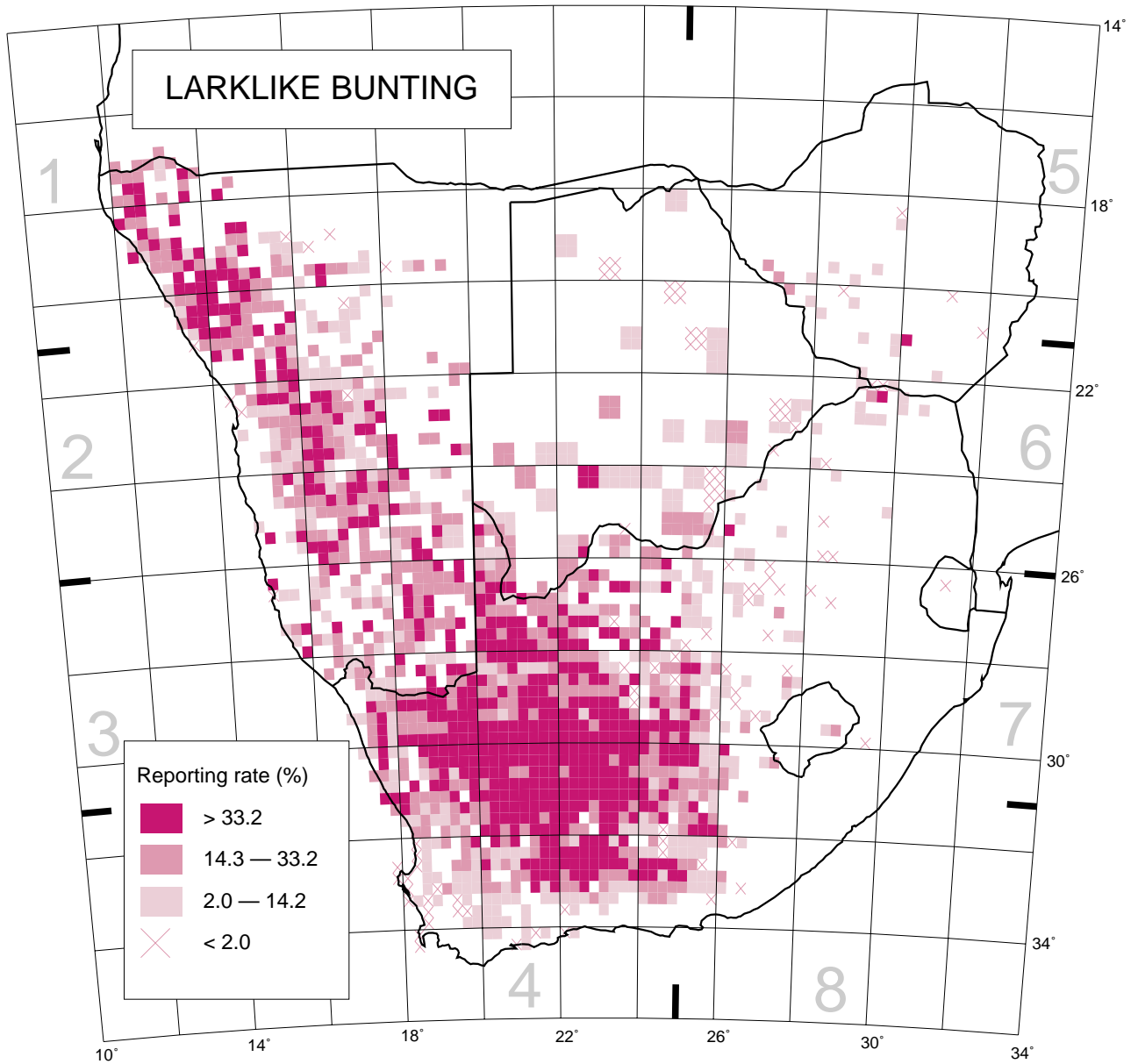
Recorded in 1561 grid cells, 34.4%

Total number of records: 6731

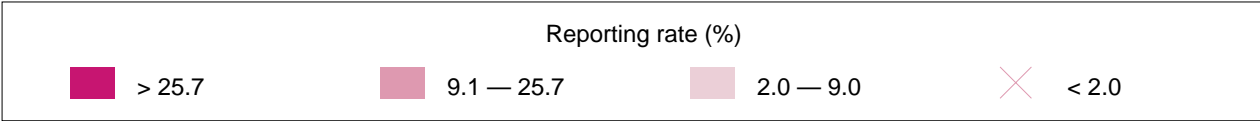
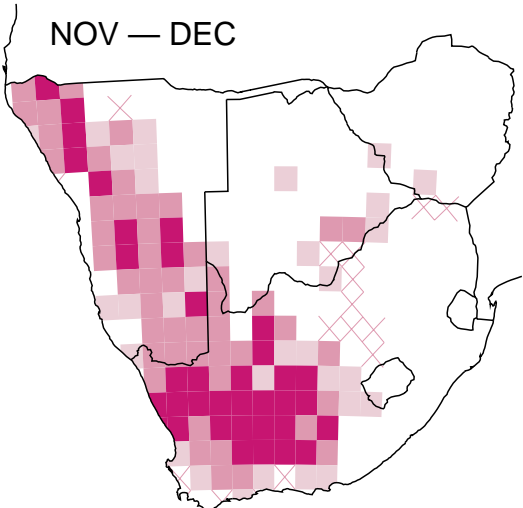
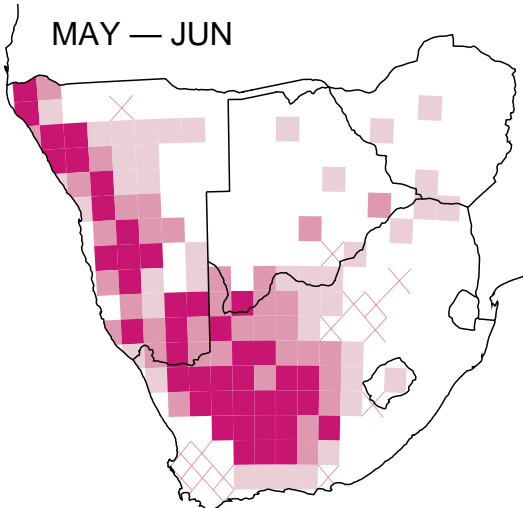
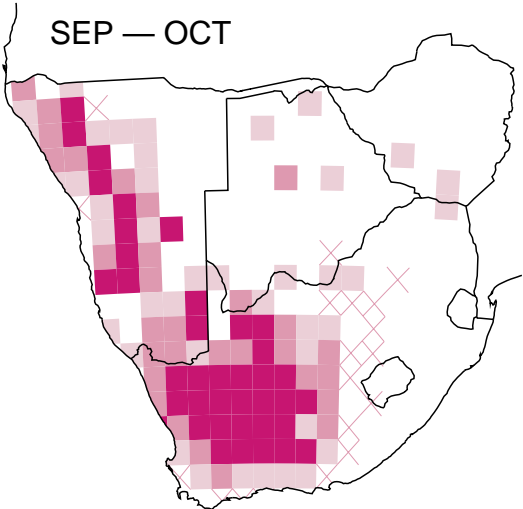
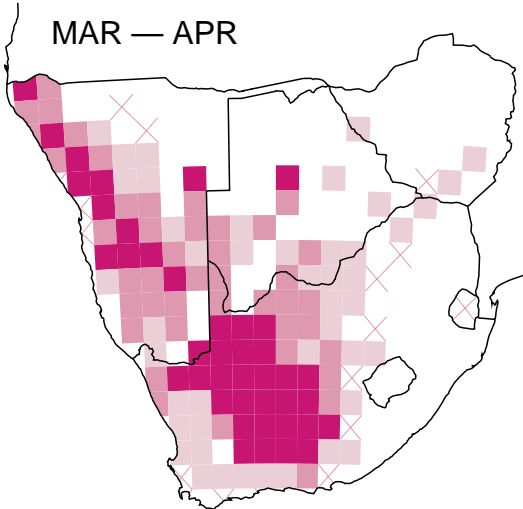
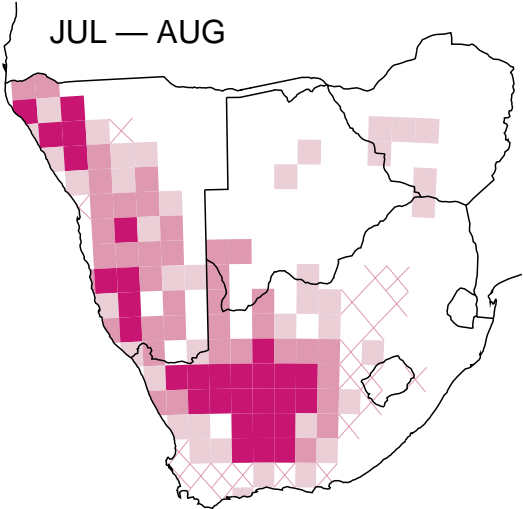
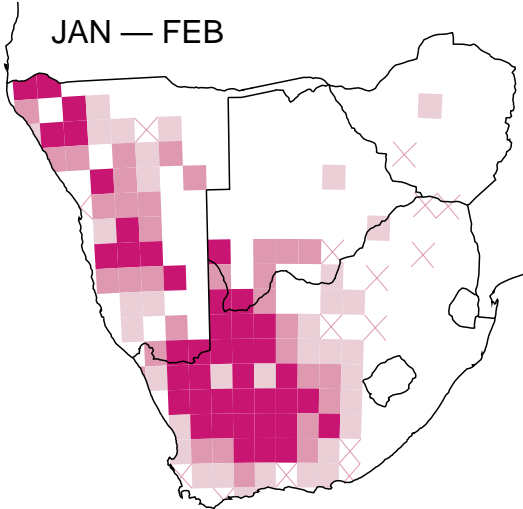
Mean reporting rate for range: 15.5%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





LARKLIKE BUNTING



Seasonal distribution maps; one-degree grid.