



## Greater Doublecollared Sunbird Groot-rooibandsuikerbekkie

*Nectarinia afra*

The distribution of the Greater Doublecollared Sunbird, a southern African endemic largely restricted to South Africa and Swaziland, follows the pattern typical of species requiring moist woodland habitats. In the south it is restricted to the seaboard and adjacent mountain ranges. Further east its range broadens with the availability of moist habitats. From northern KwaZulu-Natal northward, it is absent from the tropical coastal plain and lowveld where it is replaced by similar species such as Neergaard's *N. neergaardi*, Purplebanded *N. bifasciata* and Marico *N. mariquensis* Sunbirds. In the northern interior, it is found mainly on the escarpment and on the Soutpansberg in far northern Transvaal, but occurs less commonly in central and western Transvaal where it is associated primarily with mountains, namely the Waterberg (2427B, 2428A), Strydpoort Mountains (2429A,B) and Magaliesberg (2527C,D). There is no distributional break in the eastern Cape Province indicating discontinuity in the ranges of the two subspecies (Clancey 1980b).

It can be confused with other similarly coloured sunbirds, particularly the Lesser Doublecollared Sunbird *N. chalybea*, but males of the Greater are distinguished by larger size, broad red breastband and robust bill.

**Habitat:** It is found in moist habitats with trees or tall scrub but it does not frequent the interior of forests, preferring the edges and the top of the canopy (Skead 1967b; Hockey *et al.* 1989). Coastal, montane and riverine scrub are used and also *Protea* savanna, parks and gardens (Maclean 1993b). It is usually associated with mountainous or hilly country. The vegetation analysis indicates a particular affinity with Afromontane Forest and Valley Bushveld (cf. Skead 1967b; Craig & Simon 1991). Associations with Fynbos and Grasslands are based on the interface between these and more densely wooded habitats.

**Movements:** The models are intriguing as they show little fluctuation in Zones 4, 6 and 7 but a marked summer drop in reporting rates in Zone 8, the eastern Cape Province. The species is not considered to be migratory (Maclean 1993b) but the phenomenon is not easily explained away in terms of variable conspicuousness. Ringing studies have revealed

lower summer densities of this and other sunbird species in Grahamstown (3326BC) (Craig & Simon 1991; Craig & Hulley 1994) and these have been linked to the seasonal availability of food, particularly flowering plants such as *Aloe* spp. The most likely explanation is local altitudinal migration in which birds move to higher altitudes in summer and are therefore less frequently observed. In the eastern Cape Province there may be a special incentive to move to lower altitudes in winter to exploit abundant flowering aloes in valley bushveld. This hypothesis requires confirmation.

**Breeding:** The atlas data show breeding in all months with a spring/summer peak in Zones 4, 7 and 8 but an extended season (mainly July–February) without a distinct peak in the Transvaal. These results confirm published data for this species, which has up to three broods per season (Skead 1967b; Maclean 1993b).

**Interspecific relationships:** It is found with other sunbirds at sources of nectar where it dominates both Black *N. amethystina* and Lesser Doublecollared Sunbirds (Skead 1967b).

The relationship between Greater and Lesser Doublecollared Sunbirds appears to be a complex one. Hockey *et al.* (1987) stated that the Greater excludes the Lesser in woodland habitats in areas where both species occur, but that the Lesser replaces the Greater and occupies a wider range of habitats further west where only the Lesser occurs. However, the Lesser is restricted to forest habitats from about Knysna (3423AA) eastward (Skead 1967b), with the Greater present on the forest margins and in valley bushveld. Although they are occasionally found feeding and even breeding together in the same habitat (Skead 1967b), on the whole they appear to avoid each other by means of different habitat specializations.

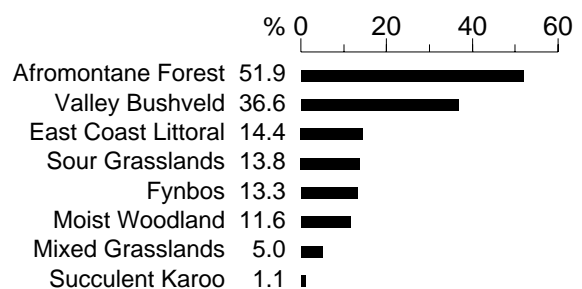
Klaas's Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx klaas* is a frequent brood parasite of this sunbird (Skead 1967b).

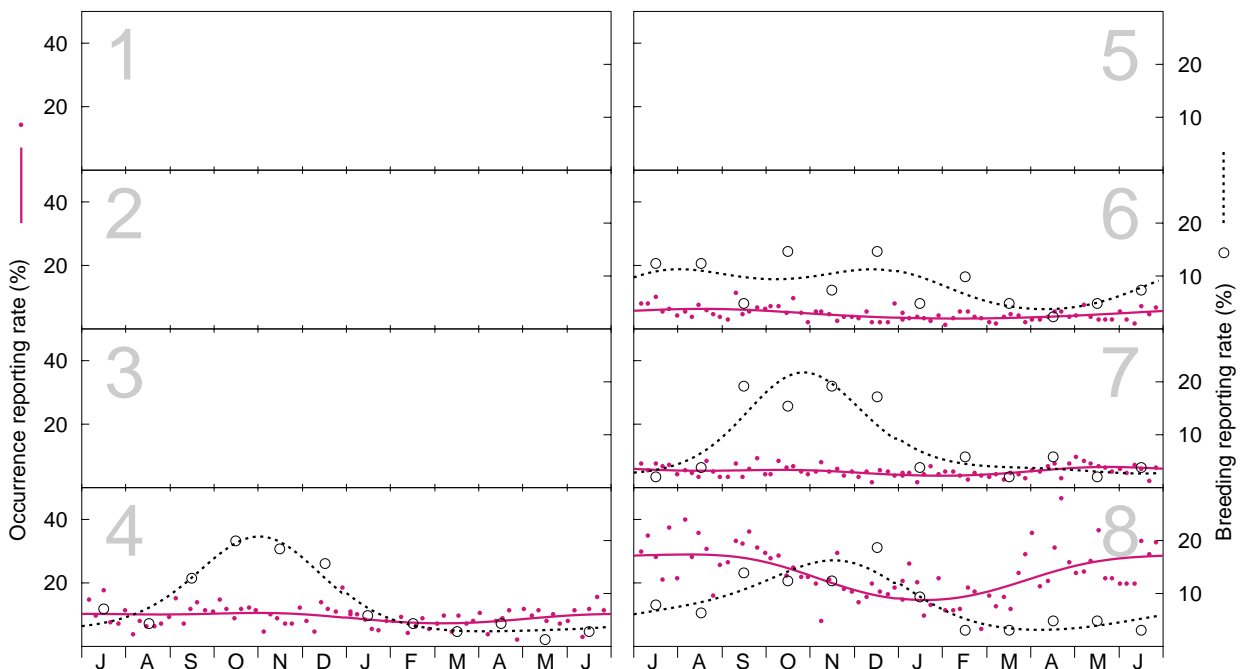
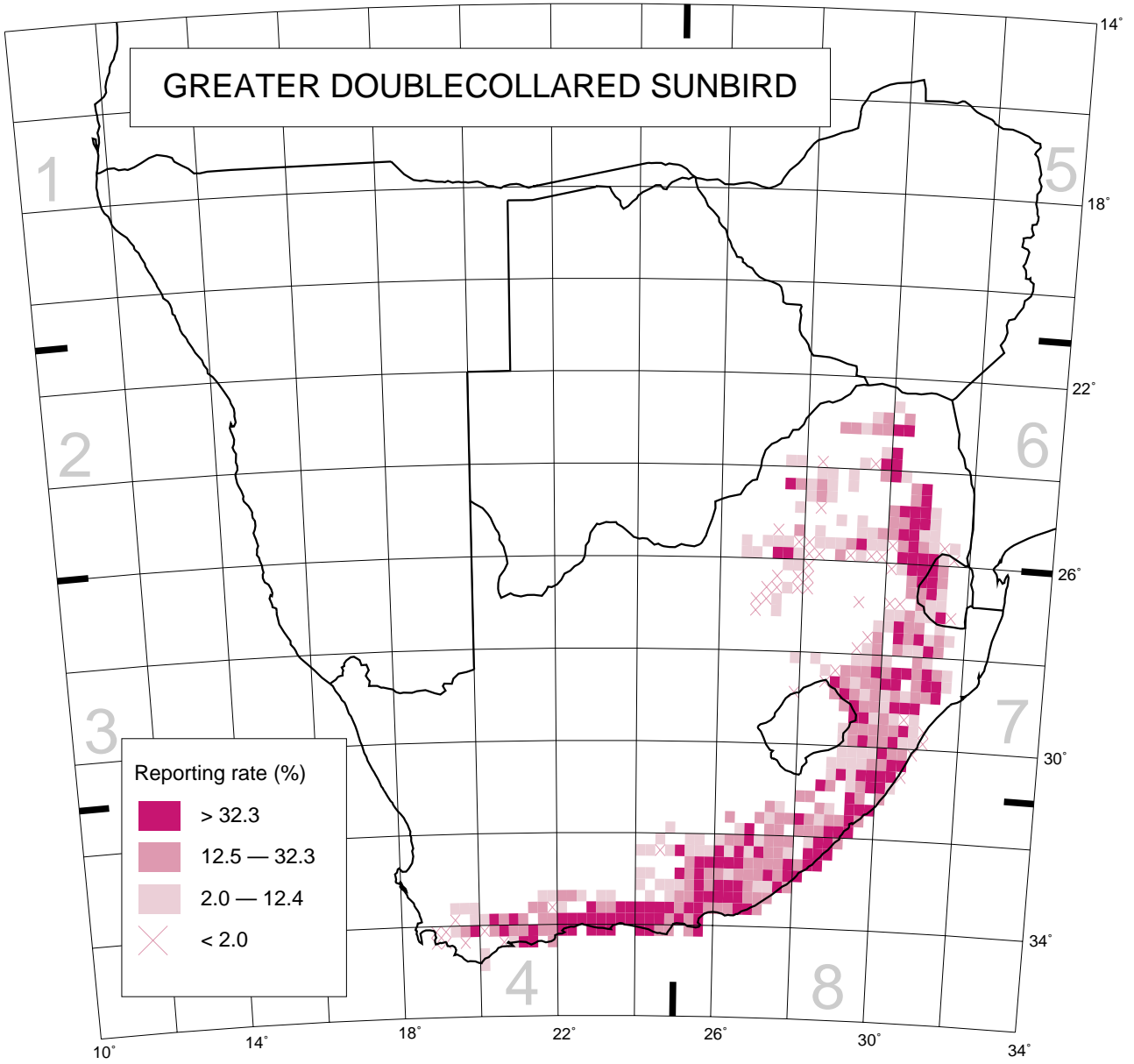
**Historical distribution and conservation:** Previously published distribution maps (Skead 1967b; Cyrus & Robson 1980; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Hockey *et al.* 1989) differ little from the present one. The Greater Doublecollared Sunbird has not been affected greatly by human activities and is not threatened.

J.A. Harrison

Recorded in 488 grid cells, 10.8%  
Total number of records: 12 115  
Mean reporting rate for range: 21.2%

### Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 0, 0, 0, 812, 0, 527, 1016, 1258; Breeding: 0, 0, 0, 70, 0, 41, 52, 64.