

## Flappet Lark

### Laeveldklappertjie

*Mirafra rufocinnamomea*

The Flappet Lark is a fairly common resident in savanna woodlands at low altitudes in northern KwaZulu-Natal, eastern Swaziland, the lowveld and parts of the bushveld of the Transvaal, the lowveld and central plateau of Zimbabwe, and northern Botswana. The species also occurs in extreme northern Namibia and along the Caprivi Strip. In South Africa, the Flappet Lark appears to be commonest at low altitudes (c. 400 m), but is found locally in the central Transvaal at much higher altitudes and occurs up to 1700 m in Zimbabwe (Irwin 1981). Outside southern Africa it is widely distributed throughout Africa south of the Sahara (Keith *et al.* 1992). In Tanzania the density varies with habitat, with 4 birds/km<sup>2</sup> in open habitat and 12 birds/km<sup>2</sup> in partly wooded habitat (Folse 1975). In northern Botswana, wide differences in densities were also observed: a peak density of 1 bird/ha on the fringes of the Northern Plains (1825), but c. 1 bird/10 ha in northern Kalahari open woodland and Mopane scrub (M. Herremans pers. comm.). Payne (1978) estimated 4 birds/km<sup>2</sup> in open woodland at Lochinvar, Zambia. It appears to be sparse and local throughout its range.

This is a distinctive species in spring and summer when males are displaying, but it is less easy to find and identify at other times. However, it may display at any time of the year (Maclean 1993b). It occupies different habitat from that of the Clapper Lark *M. apiata* and overlaps only slightly with that species (see Clapper Lark text), so confusion between the two is unlikely, especially as their displays are clearly different. In display, the male Flappet Lark flies up gradually, giving short bursts of wing-claps or wing-rattles as it rises to a height of 50–100 m, where

it then circles repeatedly, giving a thin wispy call and wing-claps at regular intervals. Afterwards the bird drops abruptly to the ground (Keith *et al.* 1992).

**Habitat:** The Flappet Lark occurs in woodlands where there are clearings or drainage lines, particularly broadleaved miombo, *Baikiaea* and *Burkea* and, to a lesser extent, *Acacia* woodlands. In north-eastern KwaZulu-Natal it also occurs in coastal grasslands (Cyrus & Robson 1980). Reporting rates were three times higher in Miombo than elsewhere.

**Movements:** The models show a decrease in reporting rates during the autumn and winter months, but this is most likely because of reduced conspicuousness and not due to any seasonal movements.

**Breeding:** Atlas records fell in the period December–April. The breeding season is fairly long, October–November in northeastern KwaZulu-Natal, with egg-laying in Zimbabwe spanning October–April, mainly November–March with a November–December peak, and November–February in the Transvaal (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Maclean 1993b).

**Interspecific relationships:** It overlaps in habitat with other lark species, such as the Rufous-naped Lark *M. africana* and Sabota Lark *M. sabota*. Irwin (1981) noted that it occurs alongside the Monotonous

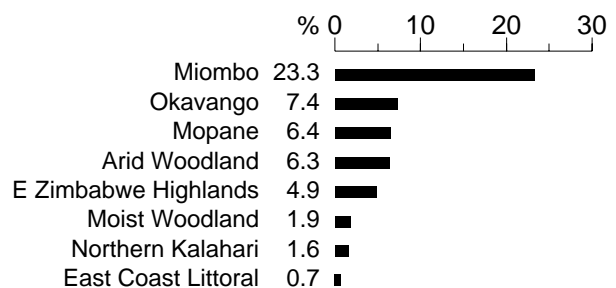
Lark *M. passerina* in dry savanna without any clear ecological separation.

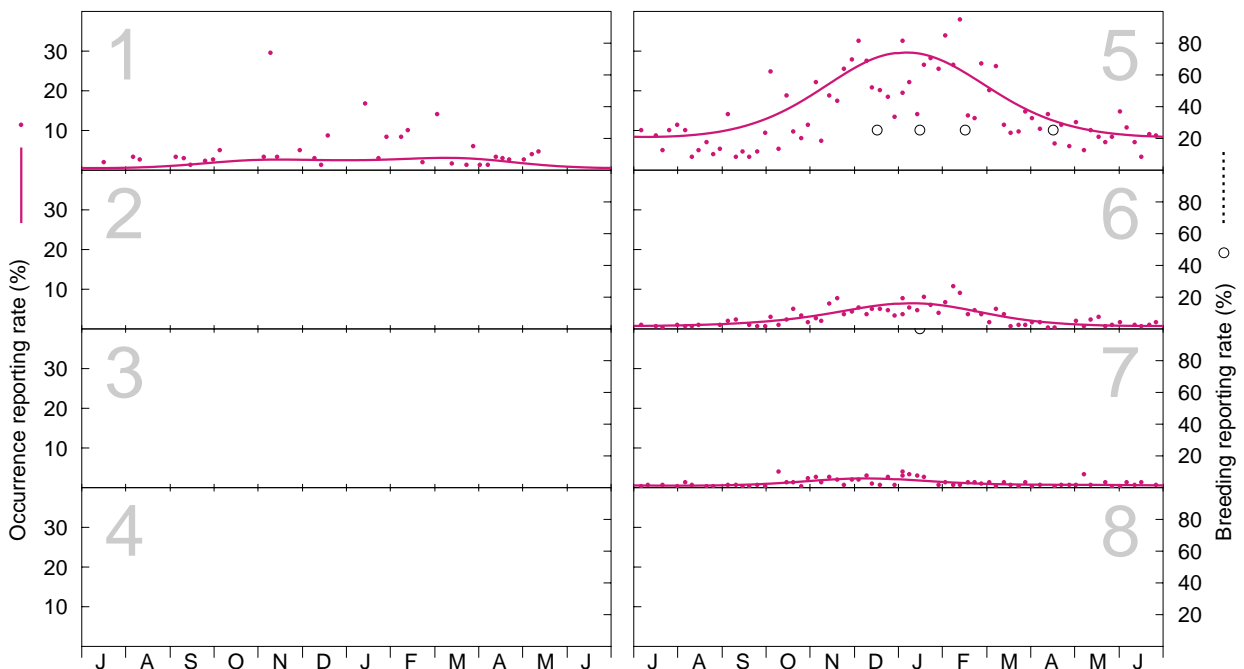
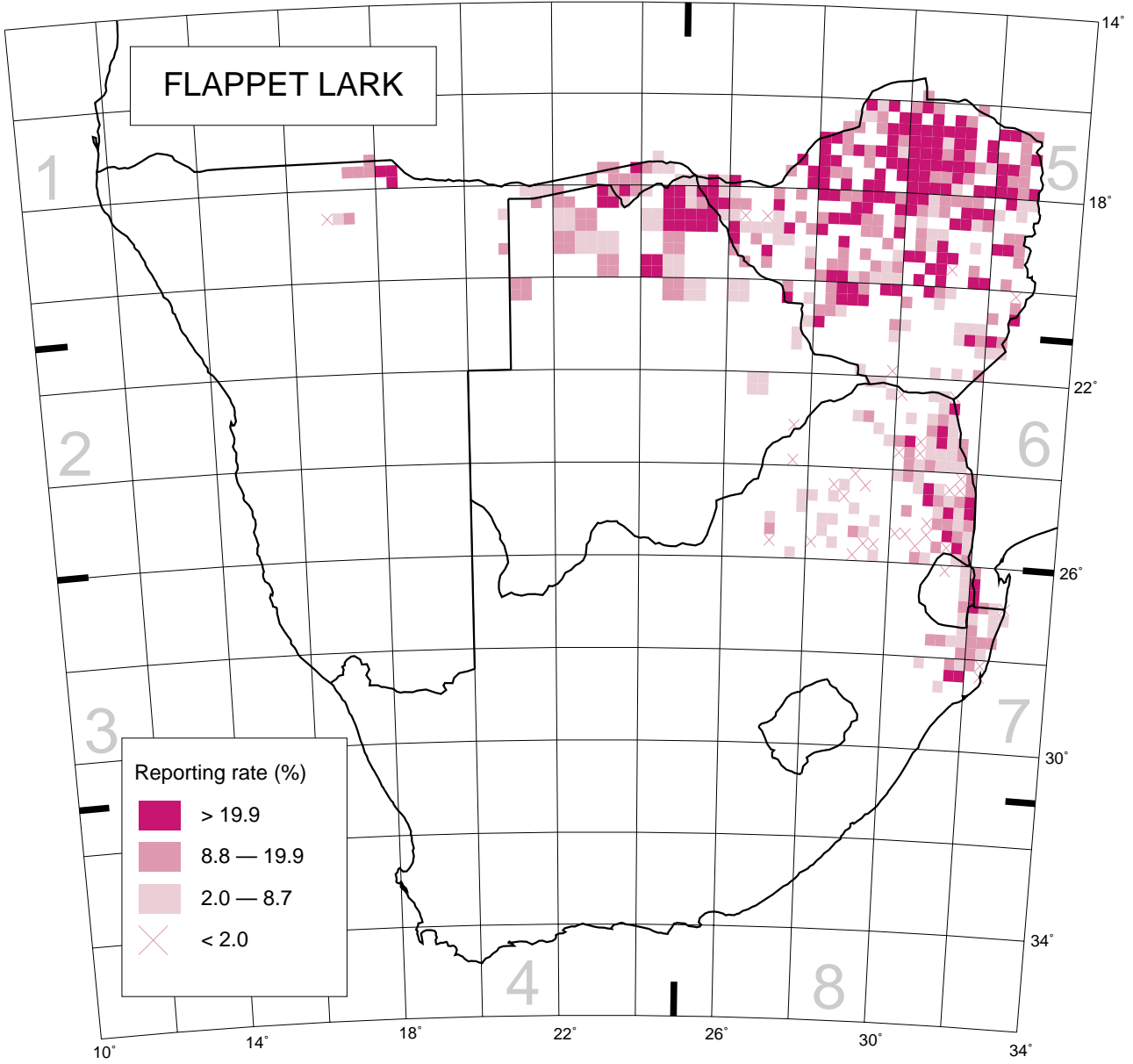
**Historical distribution and conservation:** There is no evidence of any changes in distribution of the Flappet Lark in southern Africa. It does not appear to be threatened and is present in numerous nature reserves and protected areas. Slash-and-burn agriculture and cattle ranching, both of which tend to open up woodlands and create clearings, may have favoured it to some extent.

W.R.J. Dean

Recorded in 550 grid cells, 12.1%  
Total number of records: 3483  
Mean reporting rate for range: 13.1%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 61, 0, 0, 0, 1397, 314, 219, 0; Breeding: 0, 0, 0, 0, 4, 0, 1, 0.