

Hobby Falcon

Europepe Boomvulk

Falco subbuteo

This is a fairly widely distributed nonbreeding migrant to southern Africa. Unlike most other wide-ranging Palearctic migrants, the Hobby Falcon is generally uncommon, with reporting rates below 2% in many grid cells. The atlas data show it to be most frequently reported from northern Namibia and Botswana, Zimbabwe, the northern and eastern Transvaal and Swaziland. It was recorded only sporadically in KwaZulu-Natal, the eastern and southern Cape Province and the central Transvaal (all regions where atlas coverage was good), and was largely absent from the rest of the subcontinent, although some vagrants were recorded far from the usual range.

It occurs in the Palearctic in a broad zone stretching from the British Isles in the west to eastern Asia. Most birds migrating into Africa spend the southern summer in southcentral Africa (Del Hoyo *et al.* 1994); the northern and northeastern parts of the atlas region are a major wintering area. Some go to West Africa. The origins of southern African birds are unknown, but most probably come from eastern Europe and central Asia. In addition to the widely distributed nominate race *F. s. subbuteo*, Clancey (1980b) recorded the presence of several specimens of the race *jugurtha* which breeds in the Maghreb, the eastern Mediterranean Basin and east to north-western India.

The low reporting rates may be partly the result of activity patterns, in which it is usually active only at dawn and dusk, when it hunts small birds, flying insects and bats (Pepler 1991). It frequently hunts around towns at these times. During the day it mostly perches in the foliage of large trees where it is difficult to see. It resembles the female Eastern Redfooted Kestrel *F. amurensis*, and some of the atlas records may result from confusion with that species, although records of Hobby

Falcons outside the usual range were carefully vetted for accuracy. It is usually encountered singly, but occasionally in small groups around good food sources (Pepler 1991).

Habitat: In keeping with its greater abundance in northern and eastern regions, it is most frequently encountered in woodland areas. The highest reporting rates were in the Eastern Zimbabwe Highlands, Miombo, the Okavango and Northern Kalahari.

Movements: It arrives in southern Africa from early October onwards. The first birds arrive in Zimbabwe (Zone 5) about 10 weeks before reaching the southernmost parts of the region. In the far southwestern Cape Province, however, arrival times apparently vary widely (late October to mid-February) between years (Pepler & Martin 1991). By contrast, the models show that departure is more uniform, the last birds leaving from all regions in late March or early April; this has been independently confirmed for the southwestern Cape Province, Botswana and Zimbabwe (Irwin 1981; Pepler & Martin 1991; Herremans 1994b). The highest reporting rates were December–February. Movements within southern Africa may be linked to rainfall; the species appears after good rains which stimulate the emergence of large swarms of alate termites, a favoured food item in Africa. Such movements are probably irregular and nomadic, depending on local and temporal variations in rainfall.

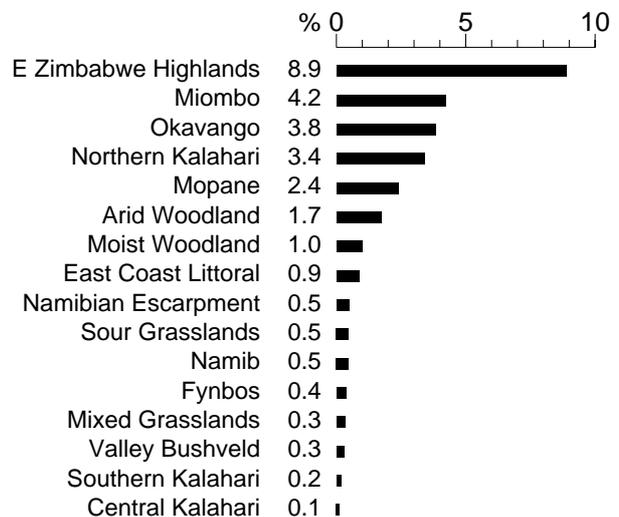
Interspecific relationships: It often associates with other raptors feeding on similar prey, especially emerging termites.

Historical distribution and conservation: There is no information available to suggest changes in its distribution in southern Africa. In the Palearctic, numbers have declined in some countries during the past 100 years (Cramp *et al.* 1980) but currently may be relatively stable (Del Hoyo *et al.* 1994). The Hobby Falcon may suffer from the spraying of insects in southern Africa, especially locust swarms (although the species is largely absent from the main locust regions), thus adding to the threats of increasing habitat degradation in Europe and Asia.

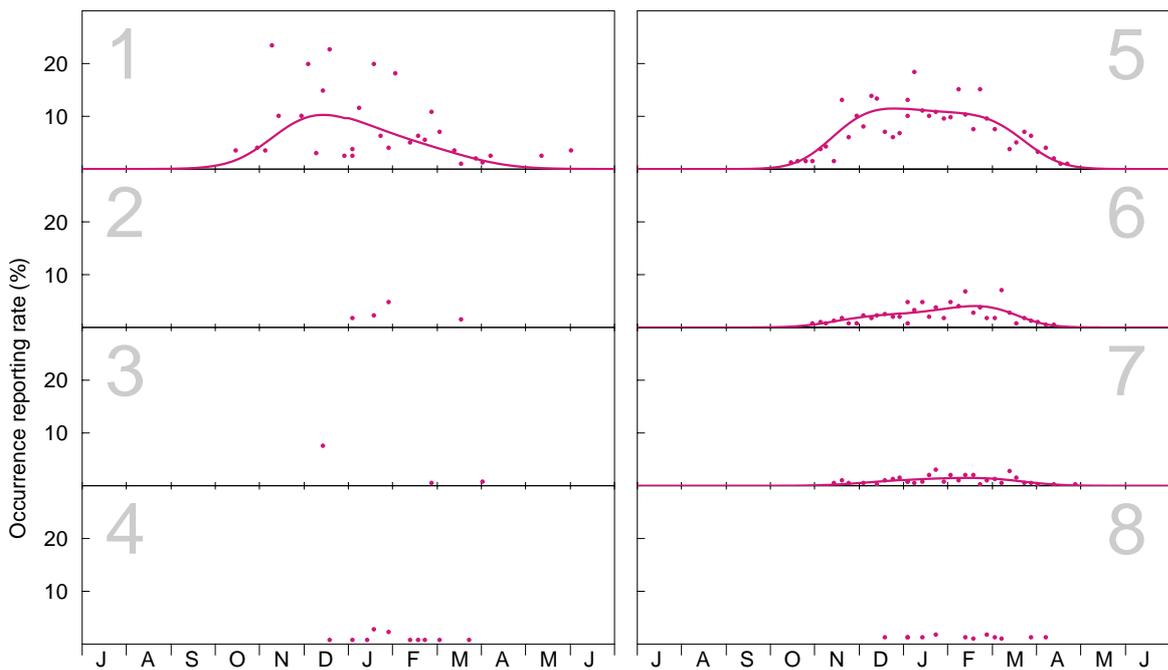
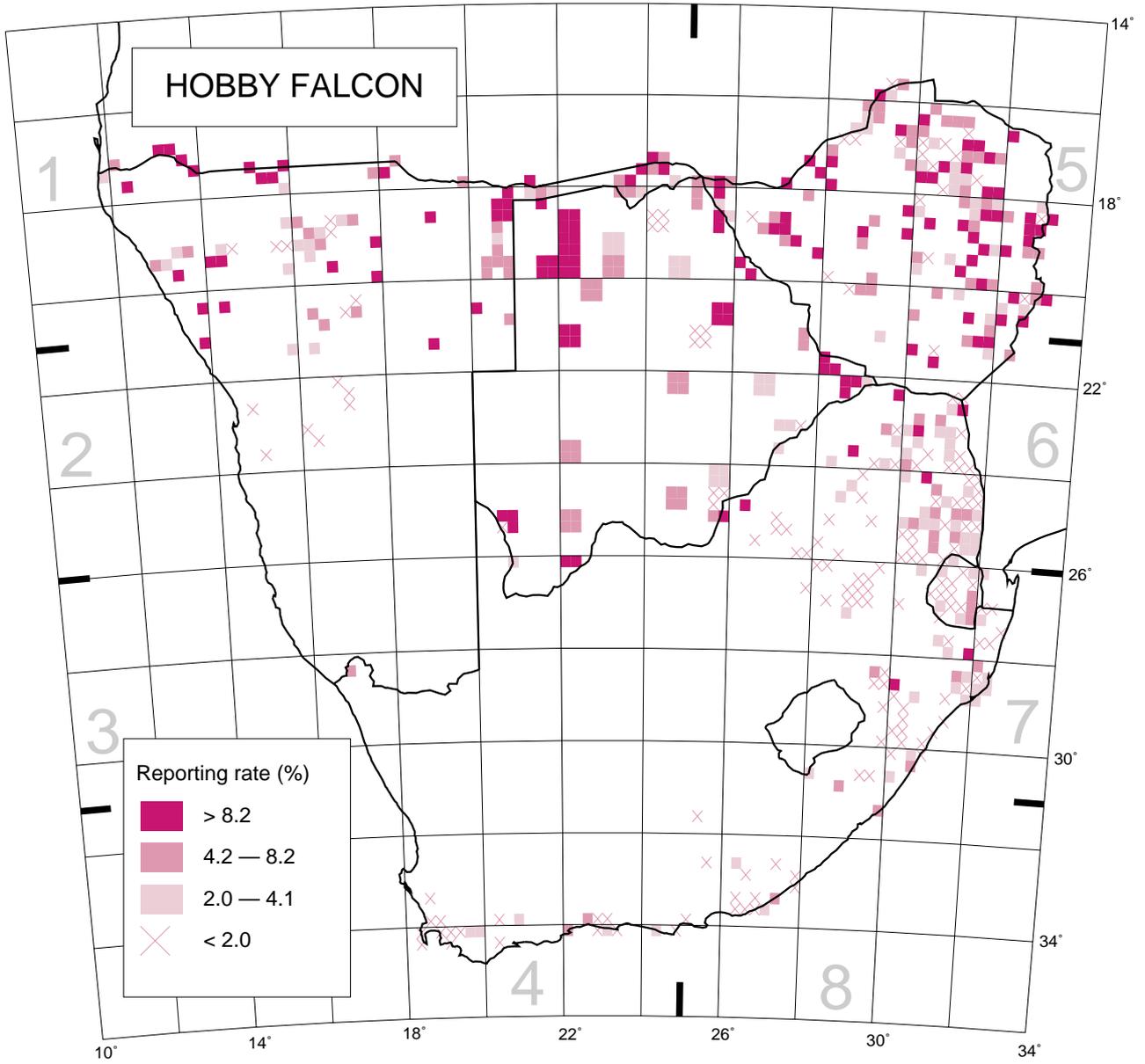
J.M. Mendelsohn

Recorded in 549 grid cells, 12.1%
Total number of records: 1384
Mean reporting rate for range: 2.6%

Reporting rates for vegetation types



Also marginally in Sweet Grasslands.



Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 75, 6, 3, 13, 328, 127, 82, 13.