

Southern Greyheaded Sparrows *Passer diffusus* range expansion in the Western Cape

Vincent L. Ward^{1, 2}, H. Dieter Oschadleus² & Leshia Upfold³

¹Western Cape Nature Conservation Board

²Avian Demography Unit, University of Cape Town Rondebosch, 7701, South Africa

³Marine and Coastal Management, Private Bag X2, Rogge Bay 8012

The Southern Greyheaded Sparrow, *Passer diffusus*, has undergone a rapid range expansion in South Africa over the past sixty years (Craig *et al.* 1987, Hockey 2003). In 1940, the Orange River in Namibia formed the southern limit of the species' range with birds occurring along the east coast as far south as Port St Johns (McLachlan & Liversidge 1957). The expansion progressed along the coast and adjacent interior and by the mid 1960's the species had reached the Kei River. During the mid to late 1970's Southern Greyheaded Sparrows were being reported at

Aberdeen and Cape St Francis in the Eastern Cape (Craig *et al.* 1987). By 1983 the species had been reported breeding as far west as Montagu in the Western Cape, and subsequently in the Nuy square 3319DA (Hockey *et al.* 1989). Craig (1997) reported the same western limit but with a near continuous distributional linkage to the rest of the South African population. Sightings in *Promerops* show further expansion westwards (Fig 1, Table 1). In October 2002 this species was ringed near Lamberts Bay, a locality well out of range based on all known records. Since



Fig 1. Map of ringing localities of Southern Greyheaded Sparrows in the Western Cape. The shaded part shows the range expansion up to 1987 (Craig *et al.* 1987, Craig 1977). Stars indicate ringing records, and open circles are sightings published in *Promerops*.

then more birds have been ringed in this area, indicating a range expansion continuing up the west coast of South Africa. Ten birds have been ringed at four localities in the Western Cape (SAFRING database).

Fernkloof N.R. (34°23'S 19°16'E)

One adult was ringed on 29 June 2003 by Mike Ford.

Durbanville (33°43'S 18°45'E)

Greyheaded Sparrows have been caught at Rocklands Farm, Durbanville on two occasions. One adult was ringed on 17 December 1997, another on 4 October 2003, by Lee Silks. The ringing site is farmland with sparse shrubby vegetation with small numbers of introduced *Acacia* spp.

Dassen Island Nature Reserve (33°25'S 18°06'E)

Two adult Greyheaded Sparrows were caught around the reserve buildings on the northern end of the island on 24 September 2003 by VW. An adult and an immature were colour-ringed on 4 March 2004, and another adult was ringed on 10 April 2004, all by LU.

At least three birds had been seen on

Dassen Island in June 2003 and were still present on the island in February 2004 (VW and Bruce Dyer).

Lambert's Bay (32°05'S 18°18'E)

Two Greyheaded Sparrows were ringed at Dassiepoort Farm, 5 km east of Lambert's Bay on 20 October 2002 (Ford 2003, SAFRING database), by HDO and Hennie de Klerk.

In the preceding five years, this species had not been observed around either Lambert's Bay or at Elands Bay (30 km to the south), where ringing had been conducted between 2000 and 2002.

Biometrics

Mass and wing length data of free-flying Greyheaded Sparrows, for the new west coast records are very similar to the earlier Western Cape records and the larger Eastern Cape data-set (Table 2).

Discussion

The Southern Greyheaded Sparrow is continuing its range expansion up the west coast of the SW Cape. Extracting all sightings published in *Promerops* over the last 10 years,

Table 1. Sightings of Southern Greyheaded Sparrows in the western Cape, reported in *Promerops* (since 1997)

Locality	Date	Birds	<i>Promerops</i> issue
Heidelberg	March 1991 onwards	1, later many	238:15
Bontebok NP	31/10/1995	2 seen	242:23
Inverdoom farm	5/01/1996	2 seen	242:23
Theewaterskloof Dam	15/02/1996	1 seen	242:23
Rooifontein farm	22/08/1997, 4/09/1997	2 seen	242:23
Swellendam	December 1993	seen	242:23
Steenbras Dam	1/11/2003	1 seen	253:20
Noordhoek	26/12/2002	Pair breeding	254:23
Near Caledon	January 2003	Pair breeding	254:23
Greyton	19/01/2003	2 seen	254:23
Fernkloof	29/06/2003	seen	256:20

Table 2. Mass (grams) and wing data (mm) of free-flying Greyheaded Sparrows, as recorded in the new west coast records, earlier Western Cape records and Eastern Cape records

		n	Min	Mean	se	Range
Mass	E Cape	219	15	25.3	0.14	39.5
	W Cape	15	23	26.4	0.49	30
	W coast	10	23	25.4	0.50	27.8
Wing	E Cape	201	63	80.7	0.24	93
	W Cape	13	77	81.4	0.82	88
	W coast	8	76	81.8	1.07	88

together with the ringing records (Fig. 1), shows that there are ringing records further west and north than sightings. At Rocklands the birds were seen in the nets for the first time. This shows that ringing can indicate range expansion records earlier than sighting records. This species will probably continue to expand its range northwards along the west coast.

References

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